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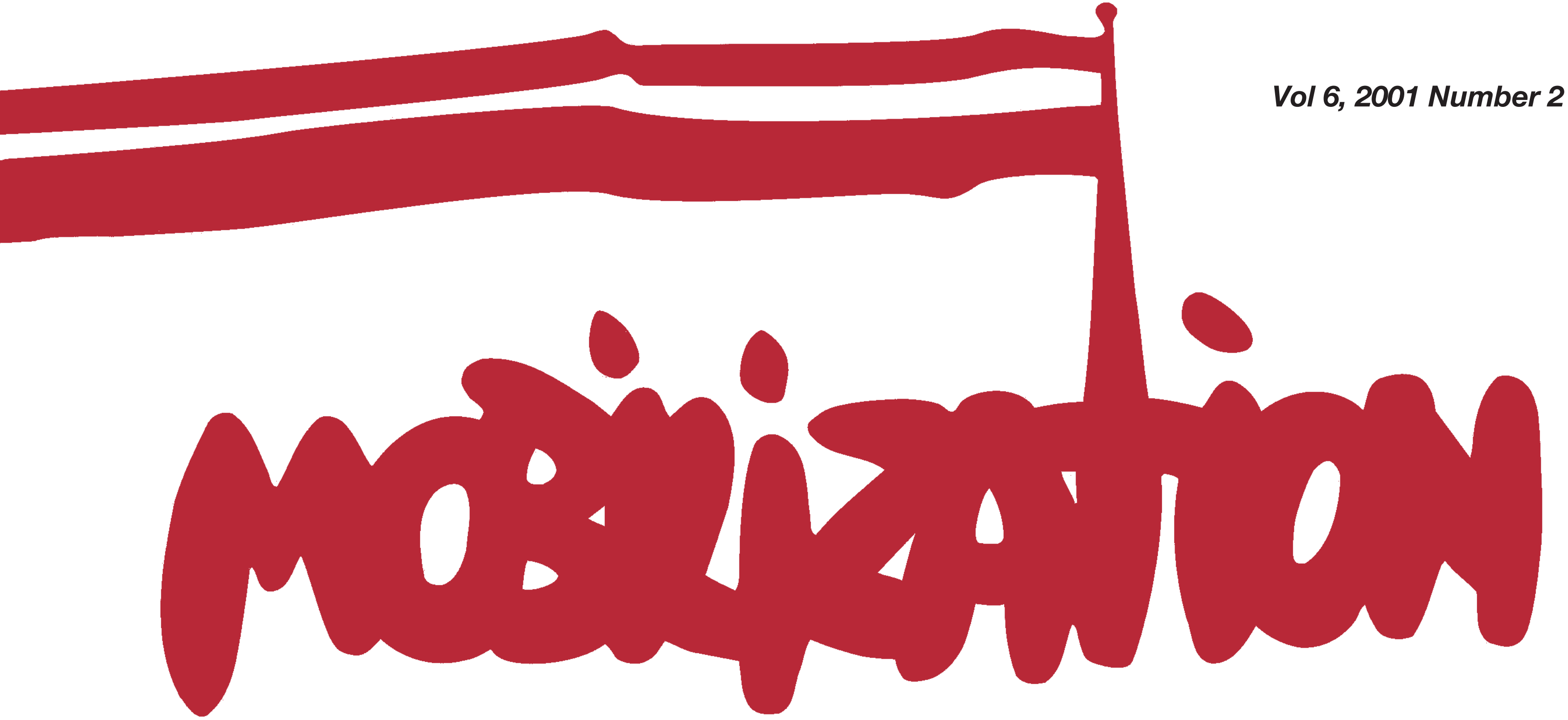

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MOBILIZATION

The International Journal of Research and Theory about Social Movements, Protest, and Contentious Politics

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GUERRILLAS IN THEIR MIDST: ARMED STRUGGLE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN ANTI-APARTHEID MOVEMENT*

Gay Seidman†

Echoing a general silence in social movement theory, discussions of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement tend to ignore the impact of armed struggle on mobilization. The anti-apartheid movement is usually described in terms of mass mobilization and civil rights struggle rather than as an anticolonial movement involving military attacks by guerrilla infiltrators and clandestine links between open popular groups and guerrilla networks. This article explores some of the reasons why researchers might avoid discussing armed struggle, including some discomfort around its morality. Then it considers how more systematic investigation of armed struggle might change our understanding of the anti-apartheid movement, including its legacies for post-apartheid politics. Finally, it suggests that these questions may be relevant for social movement theories.

An odd silence marks recent discussions of social movements. If writers in the past sometimes glorified armed struggle, treating it as the highest stage of resistance to colonial authority (Fanon 1968), in the last twenty years social movement theorists have generally avoided the subject entirely. Recent social movement analysts appear reluctant to engage directly with movements' use of violent tactics, remaining silent about the interplay between violent and nonviolent tactics, or about how the clandestine presence of armed activists might affect processes within a larger social movement. With rare exceptions, recent social movement analysts fail to ask a glaringly obvious question: what difference does the adoption of armed struggle make to the internal dynamics of above-ground social movements?

Nowhere is the silence around violence more deafening than in discussions of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement of the 1980s. All too frequently, the anti-apartheid movement is presented as a victory for peaceful protest, as if the movement directly paralleled the mainstream American civil rights movement of the late 1950s (e.g., Smuts and Westcott 1991; Zimmerman 2000; Zunes 1999). The truth, of course, is very different: South Africa's visible popular movement was deeply entwined with a clandestine guerrilla struggle. The anti-apartheid movement was as much an anti-colonial movement for national self-determination as a civil rights movement working within an existing legal framework. In South Africa, the armed struggle played a key role: it attracted popular support to the anti-apartheid movement, it demonstrated the persistence of resistance to white supremacy despite repression, and it served as a complicated badge of commitment for anti-apartheid activists.

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Yet academics rarely confront this clandestine layer of the anti-apartheid movement directly, to such an extent that younger scholars, reading the history of the anti-apartheid movement, may well be forgiven a failure to consider the armed struggle at all. In this article, I argue that until we overcome a general reluctance to deal with the real and symbolic experiences of armed struggle, we risk missing key dynamics in anti-apartheid mobilization. Perhaps the time has come when those of us who helped construct an image of the anti-apartheid movement as one marked primarily by open popular protest should ask what sustains this silence, and reconsider the role of armed struggle in South Africa. What were its dynamics from initial mobilization to variations in participation, to the provision of the resources, including weapons and ammunition, that it requires? Why do descriptions focus so exclusively on non-violent peaceful protest, leaving unexamined the not-so-hidden links between grassroots popular mobilization and guerrilla campaigns? And, most importantly, how would social movement theories have to change in order to help us confront more directly how violence shapes and defines social movement processes?

Social movement theorists tend to treat armed struggle either as the unproblematic extension of ordinary social movement processes (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly 2001), or conversely, as a pathological effect of competition or decline within social movements (Braungart and Braungart, 1992; della Porta and Tarrow, 1986). Several recent studies of clandestine movements in industrialized countries see the shift to armed struggle as both cause and symptom of movement decline, as isolated small networks of activists move away from their communities and become distant from above-ground activists (della Porta 1992; della Porta, 1995; Moyano, 1992; Neidhardt, 1992). Even when social movement analysts consider the possibility that clandestine activists might sustain links to above-ground social movements, they generally suggest that the very fact of working underground prompts activists to privilege military concerns over popular mobilization, thereby undermining the possibility that clandestine activists could retain leadership positions in open social movements (della Porta 1992; Moyano 1992; Waldmann 1992; Zwerman, Steinhoff and della Porta, 2000: 99).[1]

Perhaps reflecting that theoretical vision, many scholars of South Africa try to fit the anti-apartheid movement into the framework of Western social movement theory—a framework that focuses on the mobilization of popular protest, ignoring questions of recruitment to clandestine networks, military supply and training, or how activists' involvement in armed struggle or underground networks affect their participation in public debate. Generally, descriptions of anti-apartheid activism stress the role of student groups, political activists, unions, and women's groups, rarely mentioning the way these groups interacted and cooperated with armed activists within the national liberation movement. Some descriptions virtually ignore the armed struggle (Marx 1991); others mention only its symbolic importance, relegating to footnotes any mention of concrete links between clandestine ANC strategies and open tactics (Seidman 1994; Murray 1994; Wood 2000). Even the rare description which acknowledges that armed struggle mattered (Sutherland and Meyer 1999; Younis 2000) generally mention it almost apologetically, neglecting questions about the impact of choices of military targets or sources of military supply and training on movement processes, or how armed struggle might have been consciously integrated with popular mobilization.

The failure to fully engage the clandestine side of the anti-apartheid movement involves a theoretical parallel: the silence around South Africa's armed struggle echoes a broader silence in contemporary social movement theory, whose recent focus on peaceful mass protest virtually excludes or dismisses all other forms of mobilization. Especially for anti-colonial movements, however, a broadly-supported armed struggle introduces a host of complex social processes: the construction of a "national" project across disparate ethnic groups or social classes; the decision to take up arms and the mobilization of popular support for an impossible undertaking; the problems of maintaining discipline and control in a guerrilla army; the logistics involved in providing supplies and infiltrating guerrillas; the relation between guerrillas and local populations. Social scientists who write specifically about social movements have generally avoided these issues since the early 1980s, as if they lay outside the boundaries of the social movement problematic.

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[1] Analysts of revolution have, of course, been more comfortable than social movement theorists in discussing violence, perhaps because they focus on movements aiming at replacement rather than protest. But in contrast to social-movement discussions, discussions of revolutions are likely to remain state-centered; as Goodwin notes, questions about armed movements' associational networks, material resources, and collective beliefs, assumptions, and emotions generally remain unasked (Goodwin, 2001: 55-58).

Yet especially when analyzing movements for self-determination or national liberation, that silence may create blinders: armed struggle can be a central component of movement participants' self-understanding, and shapes discussions of movement organization, strategy, and identity. In this article, I consider some reasons for the theoretical silence, and some of the issues that a serious engagement with questions about violence would raise for the South African case. After discussing some practical problems—including both ethical concerns towards subjects and practical problems created both by repression and Cold War perspectives—I describe the anti-apartheid movement's "turn to armed struggle," arguing that the analytic distinction between violent and non-violent tactics may be blurred in the South African case. Then, I discuss some ways in which a clearer picture of the link between above-ground and clandestine protest might change our understanding of the broad anti-apartheid movement, and consider what such a reinterpretation might suggest for broader social-movement discussions.

PRACTICAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Obviously, much of the deafening silence about the dynamics of armed struggle stems from immediate concerns about safety and practicality, both for researchers and their subjects. Above all, while an authoritarian regime is still in place, it is almost impossible to research the dynamics of armed struggle in any objective way. Access to clandestine activities is obviously difficult; researchers considered sympathetic enough to gain access to clandestine armed-struggle processes are unlikely to be able then to claim objectivity.

But even beyond the access problem, ethical concerns limit any researcher's ability to talk openly about armed struggle. In South Africa, for example, naming any links between popular collective mobilization and armed struggle during the 1980s would have seriously endangered participants in each, giving an authoritarian regime access to information it could use against its opponents, and an excuse to ban above-ground popular organizations because of their links to clandestine guerrilla activities.[2]

Specific problems confronted foreign researchers who wanted to explore the ANC's clandestine role within the above-ground popular movement, especially within the legal and open coalition called the United Democratic Front (UDF) during the 1980s. First, of course, the government denied visas to anyone who expressed an interest in underground ANC activity or clandestine links. In the mid-1980s, for example, Pretoria refused a research visa to an American researcher because he said he hoped to write a history of white activism within the non-racial movement—and then, the American Fulbright committee withdrew promised funding because he could not enter South Africa.

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[2] Ethical dilemmas go even further, perhaps, in cases where armed groups have created 'liberated zones': even when guerrillas are willing to allow access, the regime still controls research visas within its internationally recognized borders. In a well-known case from the early 1980s, an American anthropologist was invited by El Salvadorean guerrillas to visit a 'liberated' village; while he was there, the village was attacked by the government army. However, because the researcher had not applied for or received a research permit from the El Salvador government, his university objected to his publication of material describing the massacre.

But even more frequently, foreign researchers were kept in the dark by their South African informants. Of course, many South Africans were themselves unaware of the presence of people with clandestine ANC links in above-ground activist groups. White South African progressives, who often served as important social and political links for outside researchers because of their academic connections, were perhaps especially likely to be kept out of clandestine loops; South Africa's linguistic diversity and racial divisions made it relatively easy for those activists aware of clandestine links—activists who were generally though not invariably black—to restrict knowledge of underground activities. But even activists or South African academics who were "witting" were unlikely to tell outside researchers about any illegal connections they might know about. They simply lied, protecting the clandestine links between armed networks and open, legal groups. By the late 1980s, the hints were becoming ever broader, but even then, most above-ground activists continued to maintain a plausible facade, distancing their organizations from any activities that could jeopardize their group. One prominent activist who served as a key informant for an American social scientist writing about the "internal" struggle for freedom in the 1980s, for example, explicitly denied that the anti-apartheid UDF had any ANC links; but when the ANC was unbanned in 1990, that same informant was immediately named ANC treasurer, a trusted position that supports his claim that he had been working with clandestine networks for years (VK, interview, Harare 1989).

Nevertheless, the practical problems of studying armed struggle can be exaggerated. There are many ways that researchers might discuss armed struggle without endangering informants, and without going into any details about specific links between "internal" protests and guerrilla activity. In the South African case, two examples demonstrate that the ANC was not, in fact, completely off-limits. American political scientist Stephen Davis (1987) was able to research and write about the ANC's guerrilla structures, although he was unable to link them directly to "internal" activities in the 1980s. Even more impressively, South African sociologist Jacklyn Cock (1991) was able to complete the research for an excellent book on the gender dynamics of the ANC's guerrilla forces at a time when a conviction for "furthering the aims of a banned organization" could have landed her in jail.

The problem is not simply that researchers were worried about protecting sources, although those concerns were very real. The deeper difficulty lies in our inability to incorporate questions about the dynamics of armed struggle and clandestine networks into the theoretical prisms through which we view social movements. Some of that silence can be attributed to the Cold War: for decades, many theorists felt little need to ask how armed struggle worked, or how it mattered, because the Cold War seemed to explain everything. In the context of the great conflict between the communist East and the capitalist West, questions about the local dynamics of armed conflict were overshadowed and virtually irrelevant. In the South African case, the fact that the ANC received weapons and military training from the Soviet bloc often defined researchers' vision of the armed struggle. Western researchers who saw Africa as a Cold War battleground tended to support the South African government against the Communist threat, viewing apartheid's racial exclusion as a lesser evil (e.g., Crocker and Lewis 1979). Even western researchers who opposed apartheid frequently dismissed the ANC's guerrillas as irrelevant, or feared that Soviet-influenced agitators might subvert the anti-apartheid movement's noble goals (Murray 1987).

The Cold War apparently meant that researchers faced a dichotomous choice in their approach to armed struggle. Those who supported a guerrilla movement's aims frequently emphasized its indigenous character, naturalizing the participation of local racially-defined communities, ignoring divisions and conflicts within the "national" support base, and steadfastly ignoring evidence of external support for specific strategies or specific definitions of "national liberation." Those who were less sympathetic, on the other hand, tended to emphasize the role of outside support and guidance, and in the process, to overlook questions about why and local participants were drawn into the struggle, or what kind of support the "armed struggle" received internally.

In the South African case, at least, this dichotomous vision impoverished our description and understanding of the dynamics of popular protests as well as of the guerrilla struggle itself. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the link between armed struggle and township protests begged discussion, but researchers consistently avoided asking questions, refusing to consider obvious evidence that the popular resistance inside the country was directly aware of, and concerned with, guerrilla campaigns, or that the ANC's persistent popularity stemmed precisely from its engagement in an almost-suicidal armed struggle.

Throughout the 1980s, although street protests frequently included symbols and references to the armed struggle, journalists or researchers rarely mentioned them or explored the clandestine relationship between above-ground protest and clandestine activism. Symbols of the armed struggle pervaded anti-apartheid protests: songs and slogans celebrated guerrilla efforts, while signs welcoming "Comrade Joe" Slovo and his MK cadres were as common as cardboard cut-outs of bazookas at political events. Journalists in the 1980s consistently described the *toyi-toyi*—the high-stepping dance performed at township funerals and protests throughout the 1980s—as a traditional African dance; but whatever the truth of its origins, in the mid-1980s activists in several different locations claimed that they danced the *toyi-toyi* in explicit imitation of guerrilla military training exercises (interviews, Johannesburg and Durban 1987). When activists' coffins were draped in the ANC colors, everyone understood that the dead person had been part of what activists referred to as the ANC's "underground structures."

Similarly, researchers rarely acknowledged the importance of specific guerrilla attacks in mobilizing popular protests, or explored how township activists learned of these events despite newspaper censorship, or how township youths contacted underground ANC networks before they left the country to join the guerrilla struggle. We never asked what resources flowed from the external ANC leadership to the "grassroots" groups inside the country, and what other links existed between clandestine networks and above-ground popular protest—or if we did, we stayed silent about the answers in our academic work, hoping to protect activists or to preserve the cover of an appropriately dispassionate stance.

But surely now some of these questions can be reopened. In the aftermath of decolonization and the Cold War, it should be possible to go back to reexamine some of these processes as a basis for better understanding the legacies of armed struggle and their implications for post-colonial politics. How did popular movements decided to take up strategies involving armed struggle? How did activists mobilize support for that decision or quash opposition to it? What were the organizational links between guerrillas and their supporters? How do national liberation movements manage to garner resources from impoverished colonial populations and sustain popular support in the face of repeated defeats by superior forces? How were strategic choices made about targets and campaigns of armed struggle, and what were the implications of those choices for post-colonial politics?

BLURRING THE LINE

Aside from practical considerations, however, the fact that so many researchers have avoided discussing the recurrent evidence of popular South African support for, and involvement in, the "external" armed struggle—from the township songs and slogans calling on the ANC's guerrilla army to march across the border, to the heroic stature accorded leaders of the ANC's armed wing, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* or Spear of the Nation—begs further consideration. Some of the reluctance to deal with armed struggle, I suspect, comes from an unconscious moral distinction, between "good" popular grassroots mobilization and "bad"—or at least ambiguous—armed struggle: as researchers, do we perhaps fear tarnishing the moral righteousness of the anti-apartheid struggle if we admit that some of the heroic popular struggles of the townships might have been linked directly to clandestine networks involved in armed attacks? Throughout the 1980s, Amnesty International refused to adopt Nelson Mandela or any other South African convicted of belonging to the ANC as a prisoner of conscience, because of the ANC's persistent support for armed struggle;[3] has a similar distinction unconsciously shaded descriptions of the anti-apartheid movement? Most researchers in the late twentieth century feel far more ambivalent about armed struggle than they do about unarmed protestors in the street. In contrast to the way some western student protestors glorified anti-imperialist guerrilla struggles in the late 1960s, most social movement analysts writing after the early 1980s seem to be drawn, consciously or not, to idealize non-violent popular mobilization, linking it in some vague way to Gandhian non-violence or to the passive resistance of the American civil rights movement.

At least in the case of South Africa's anti-apartheid movement, the lines between different types of collective action may be more blurred than this distinction implies. As is well known, the turn to armed struggle in South Africa came after several decades in which anti-apartheid protests seemed to have had little impact. Passive resistance relies heavily on appeals to the oppressor's humanity; by 1960, many South African activists believed the apartheid regime would not listen. The South African government—elected in 1948 by less than half the electorate, in an election basically restricted to the 20 percent of South Africans legally classified as white—was firmly committed to maintaining white domination. The government viewed as subjects the eighty percent of South Africans who were not racially classified "white," refusing to recognize their claims to political rights or inclusion. From 1948, South Africa's government intensified segregationist policies, and enforced them through draconian security legislation. Individuals' racial classification legally determined where South Africans could live, what schools they could attend, what jobs they could hold, even who they could marry; South African society was redesigned to ensure, as a major architect of the system put it, that "natives will be taught from childhood that equality with Europeans is not for them." (H. F. Verwoerd, quoted in Christie, 1985: 12).

In the early 1950s, anti-apartheid activists sought to imitate Gandhi's recent successes in India. In 1952, thousands of volunteers joined the ANC's Defiance Campaign, refusing to obey segregationist rules at bus stops, train stations, post offices and so on, generally in an orderly and non-violent manner. In terms of mass mobilization, the campaign was a huge success. Eight thousand people were arrested between June and November, 1952; popular enthusiasm for the campaign swelled the ANC's membership, from about 7000 to about 100,000. In terms of political achievement, however, the campaign was a dismal failure: the government made no concessions, and took firm steps to crush the campaign. Thousands of volunteers were jailed, and when jails grew overcrowded, the government rushed through new laws allowing judges to sentence resisters to floggings as well as to three-year jail terms. Meetings were outlawed, leaders were placed under house arrest. Drawing on the language of the Cold War, the government redefined resistance to racial segregation as communism, and then charged the campaign's leaders with treason; repression disorganized resistance and immobilized the campaign (Kuper 1957; Lodge 1983: 33-66; Mandela 1994: 176-227).

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[3] In the mid-1980s, largely in response to inquiries from Amnesty International members around the world, the organization agreed to 'adopt' South Africans who were convicted of "pass" offenses—that is, people who were caught outside the areas designated for their racial category without the appropriate permits. However, AI never considered any prisoner convicted of belonging to the ANC to be a prisoner of conscience because of the organization's involvement in armed struggle—even when the prisoner's own activities had been limited to trade union activity, student organizing or other areas normally considered non-violent.

Over the next decade, repeated attempts to engage in non-violent tactics—bus boycotts, demonstrations, petitions, pass-burning campaigns—provoked violent reactions. The 1960 massacre outside the Sharpeville police station, where 69 people were killed and 178 wounded, shot in the back as they tried to run from a police attack, symbolized the government's refusal to permit any kind of peaceful protest. In an earlier era, South African prime minister Jan Smuts released Gandhi from jail when he led non-violent demonstrations. After 1948, however, South Africa's leaders explicitly rejected compassion; regretfully, a prominent South African proponent of non-violence concluded that it seemed unlikely that South Africa's rulers could "be converted by extreme suffering when they are so strongly confirmed in the ideologies of white domination" (Kuper 1957: 94).

Faced with an intransigent regime at home, South Africans looked beyond their borders for help. From the early 1960s, black South Africans repeatedly appealed to the international community to impose economic sanctions, arguing that South Africans would take up arms unless political and economic pressure from the outside offered a peaceful way to undermine the powerful and repressive apartheid state. But again, South Africans found no audience. In India and in the American South, London and Washington had each sought to avoid embarrassment on the international stage, intervening on the side of resisters to overcome the intransigence of local colonial officials, states' rights advocates and white elites. But by the mid-1960s, no Western power had direct colonial or federal links to Pretoria, and no Western power appeared to feel much moral responsibility for ending apartheid. From 1960 to 1990, Britain and the United States routinely vetoed efforts at the United Nations to impose sanctions on South Africa, allowing only a loophole-riddled arms embargo in 1976. In 1961, ANC president Albert Luthuli received the Nobel Peace Prize for his non-violent efforts at social change; but twenty-four years later, when his fellow South African Desmond Tutu won the same Peace Prize in 1985, Tutu was still repeating Luthuli's appeals for international help. In the mid-1980s, when the European community and America finally imposed mild economic sanctions and international banks refused to extend loans, the impact was indeed what sanctions advocates had long predicted: the threat of economic stagnation and isolation quickly undermined white support for strict apartheid, and helped create a climate in which negotiations became possible (Massie 1997; Price 1991).

In the intervening decades, however, anti-apartheid leaders argued they could no longer ask their followers to risk their lives in unarmed confrontation. In the aftermath of the Sharpeville massacre, when the government arrested 20,000 political activists and banned political parties that demanded political rights for all South Africans, anti-apartheid leaders concluded they had no choice but to establish armed wings. Despite the arrest in the early 1960s of most major anti-apartheid figures—including Nelson Mandela, a popular political organizer who served as the ANC's first military commander—the ANC managed over the next fifteen years to establish a network of cells and arms caches, linked to camps of guerrillas located farther north, in Angola, Tanzania and Uganda.

It is important to place the ANC's "turn to armed struggle" in its historical context. Discussions in South Africa were clearly influenced by prominent examples of contemporary nationalist struggles, including Algeria and Kenya; parallel discussions were going on in nationalist movements in Angola, the then-Congo, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. Obviously, the willingness of Eastern European countries and Libya to support armed nationalist movements with resources and training helped persuade ANC leaders that this turn was a logical one. Conversely, in the months immediately after the Sharpeville massacre, the decision by U.S. banks to extend a very large loan to shore up South Africa's capital reserves undermined those ANC activists who preferred appeals to the West. But again, these are questions that future researchers will have to ask: what were the internal dynamics of this discussion? How did activists understand the choices facing them? How did leaders evaluate their chances of success through armed struggle, and how were opponents of this strategy either persuaded or excluded? These questions have pragmatic correlates: how were decisions made about specific alliances and types of military training, or about sites for guerrilla camps? Who was recruited for armed struggle, and how, and through what networks were they spirited out of South Africa? What were their experiences in traveling north through different parts of the continent and in training camps and schools spread across Eastern Europe, and how did these experiences shape their vision of South Africa's future?

In terms of social movement theory, perhaps the most important question revolves around how the existence of an exiled guerrilla army affected popular protests inside the country. Especially as decolonization proceeded down the continent, politically aware South Africans recognized both the difficulties confronting a struggling guerrilla army, and the possibility that some day, guerrilla campaigns might intensify. For example, although the 1976 Soweto uprising was of course primarily a protest against Afrikaans as medium of instruction, student protestors at the time also celebrated the recent collapse of Portuguese control in Angola and Mozambique, a collapse which removed colonial buffer zones which had protected South Africa's borders from guerrilla incursion. Thousands of black South Africans had left the country after 1960, living for years in guerrilla camps in the forests of independent African countries, or traveling to Eastern Europe for military training. From the late 1960s on, small groups of ANC soldiers tried to infiltrate through Angola, Mozambique or Rhodesia, but they were usually imprisoned or killed by colonial police before they even reached South Africa. In 1976, student protestors recognized new possibilities for guerrilla infiltration—possibilities that were given substance when thousands of young South Africans left the country to join the ANC's "external" army.

By the early 1980s, the ANC's armed wing could claim to have attained some real visibility[4] (Davis 1987), especially after some of its most dramatic attacks: the 1977 downtown shoot-out between South African police and Solomon Mahlangu, a student protestor who had left the country for military training after 1976, returning with a highly-symbolic AK-47; the 1980 attack on a coal-into-oil refinery, Sasol, which created a three-day smoke-plume that could be seen from Johannesburg; a 1983 explosion that destroyed the South African Air Force intelligence headquarters; or the 1984 rocket attack on an army camp near Pretoria. None of these attacks came close to bringing down the state, but they provided physical evidence of a tangible *potential* threat to the regime—reinforcing the sense, as Nadime Gordimer (1984) put it, that "something out there" represented a shadowy threat to the long-term future of white supremacy.

It did not hurt the ANC's popularity, either within the country or internationally, that the ANC's armed wing was believed to follow unusually principled rules. Where guerrillas linked to the PLO, for example, chose to attack civilians in Israel/Palestine, and to attack Israeli targets outside of the Middle East, the ANC leadership claimed it pursued a more restrained approach. From the early 1960s, South African guerrillas were supposed to concentrate on sabotage and military attacks, avoiding civilian targets. In a deeply segregated society, it would have been easy to kill random whites. Segregated white schools, segregated movie theaters, segregated shopping centers meant that if white deaths were the only goal, potential targets could be found everywhere. But Oliver Tambo, the ANC's leader in exile, insisted that a Christian like himself could not condone a single unnecessary death. Only a handful of ANC attacks caused civilian deaths, white or black. For the most part, ANC guerrillas limited their targets to military installations and economic sabotage, to electric pylons, military installations, power plants—and when they did not, the ANC leadership could always deny responsibility, since guerrillas cut off from their base might be described as acting outside instructions.

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[4] The smaller Pan-Africanist Congress, which decided at the same time to take up armed struggle, was far less successful, and its armed wing remained relatively invisible until it carried out some highly publicized—and widely denounced—attacks on civilians in the early 1990s.

While highly principled, this strategy was not particularly successful militarily: despite the rhetoric, most anti-apartheid activists concluded by the mid-1970s that in a highly urbanized, industrialized society, facing a well-equipped and sophisticated enemy army, a guerrilla insurrection could not succeed. Instead, anti-apartheid activists put their energy into political organizing, bringing people together around local issues, and looking for ways to protest which would not provoke immediate repression. In the 1960s, public protest had been effectively silenced; with leaders in jail and organizations outlawed, there was little open political discussion beyond university campuses, where students could at least discuss political issues in relative safety, and aside from protests by white moderates. In the 1970s, black South Africans began to develop alternative tactics. By 1976, more than half of black South Africans lived in urban areas and worked in industrial settings—sites which offered new possibilities for organization. Especially as more experienced activists began to be released from the jail terms which began in the early 1960s, they began to look at how black students could paralyze urban school systems, black workers could paralyze production, black communities could demand better urban services. Like poor people elsewhere, anti-apartheid activists discovered the power of disruption: black South Africans learned that by mobilizing collective protests at school, at work, or in segregated black townships, they could disrupt the smooth functioning of apartheid, through boycotts, strikes and demonstrations—without exposing individual leaders to arrest, or provoking immediate police attacks.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, South Africa moved into a period of rolling insurgency. In 1973, a scattering of illegal wildcat strikes among black factory workers showed that some employers would rather negotiate than fire and replace striking workers; by 1985, South Africa had one of the world's most militant labor movements, and employers often begged police to release trade unionists so they could have someone with whom to negotiate. Similarly, the 1976 Soweto uprising revealed the capacity of high school students to disrupt township life; by the late 1980s, black high schools and universities were regularly disrupted by boycotts, to such an extent that employers and even white government officials expressed concerns about future shortages of skilled workers. From the early 1980s, township activists began to organize community groups around local issues, ranging from bus fares to high rents; by the mid-1980s, these township "civic associations" organized rent and consumer boycotts, funerals for activists killed by police, and other forms of protest. In all these cases, activists focused on local issues; but beneath all the various demands and tactics was a common demand for political rights, democracy and human dignity (Cobbett 1988; Marx 1991; Price 1991; Seidman 1994). As these community protests escalated, most ANC activists came to believe any real prospect of bringing down the South African government by force had been postponed indefinitely. By the early 1980s, the ANC was putting most of its resources and energy into supporting popular mobilization in townships, with clandestine networks linking activists across the country with the ANC leadership-in-exile.

Yet although most published accounts continue to treat these unions, community organizations, and student groups as strictly separate from the ANC's military efforts, the links between above-ground protests and clandestine guerrilla campaigns were far stronger than activists or researchers generally acknowledged at the time. Through the mid-1980s, the ANC leadership called its attacks "armed propaganda," describing their aim in terms of raising black South Africans' morale, rather than a full-scale war. Public accounts regularly understated the symbolic importance of even small guerrilla actions—or even the way the well-publicized capture and trial of yet another ANC guerrilla often seemed to reinforce activists' determination. Archie Gumede, co-chair of the UDF who was also a veteran of the days when the ANC had been legal, said years later, "As far as effective attacks on the South African economy, [*Umkhonto we Sizwe]* achieved what could only be called flea bites … [But] in my opinion, the armed struggle did have some effect in showing that people could resist oppression. It boosted morale. People have felt that the ANC has fought for them" (quoted in Sutherland and Meyer 2000: 163).

Guerrilla attacks held a prominent place in the culture of the anti-apartheid movement. In the 1980s, although most ANC activists had abandoned the idea that a guerrilla movement would ever manage a military overthrow of the highly organized South African state, many township activists' commitment to armed struggle—and respect for those who participated actively in it—was almost visceral. Almost certainly, at least some part of Nelson Mandela's extraordinary popularity stems from his role as first commander of 'MK'—as *Umkhonto*, the ANC's armed wing, was popularly nicknamed. Twenty-seven years later, Mandela garnered even more admiration in the townships when the government revealed that Mandela had repeatedly rejected government offers to release him from prison if only he would renounce armed struggle (Sparks 1994: 49). Even when ANC resources had shifted to emphasize popular organization and protests over military attack, it retained its rhetorical commitment to armed struggle, describing its strategy as one that used "the hammer of armed struggle on the anvil of mass action." Indeed, as the anti-apartheid movement moved into a phase marked by popular unrest in 1985, the exiled ANC leadership announced intensification of its guerrilla efforts—a shift from what it called "armed propaganda" to "people's war." Even government data suggest that this announcement was in fact followed by a marked increase in attacks involving land-mines, hand-grenades, or AK-47s (SAIRR, 1985: 542).

Of course, few South Africans ever participated actively in the armed struggle, or were even touched by it directly. Moreover, it will be difficult to tease out retroactively how many people really participated, or who knew even sketchy details of underground activity. The government routinely rejected any distinction between peaceful support for the ANC and clandestine involvement, construing even so mild an act as scraping "Free Nelson Mandela" on the side of an enamel mug as support for armed struggle. Student activists, trade unionists, community organizers were all detained without charges, tortured, and convicted under security legislation that treated them as "terrorists." Throughout the 1980s, "above-ground" activists routinely denied any connection to illegal organizations in hopes of finding some legal space in which to mobilize anti-apartheid resistance.

Ironically, however, just as security police insisted on blurring the line between different kinds of anti-apartheid resistance, many black South Africans also considered these categories intertwined: the struggle against apartheid, as activists often repeated, continued on many fronts. And the symbolic importance of the armed struggle even for those anti-apartheid activists who retained a strong moral commitment to non-violence should not be underestimated. Even someone as explicitly pacifist as Archbishop Desmond Tutu avoided condemnation of those who had chosen armed struggle.[5] Throughout the 1980s, the ANC was regularly named by over half of black South Africans as the party they would vote for if allowed to vote, partly because of its history as the oldest anti-apartheid organization, but also, almost certainly, because of a popular perception in black townships that the ANC embodied armed resistance to an oppressive regime.

But aside from the symbolic importance of the armed struggle, we do not yet have a clear picture of how far clandestine guerrilla networks extended, nor of the role played by activists linked to clandestine ANC networks in coordinating mass mobilization. Many of the "non-violent" protests of the 1980s were coordinated by activists who were secretly linked to the ANC, and whose understanding of the anti-apartheid strategy embraced the armed struggle—even if they personally chose to focus on work in unions, community groups, or other forms of collective action. Many anti-apartheid activists avoided learning anything about guerrilla activities, hoping to protect mass protest and themselves from the kind of repression invited by participation in guerrilla activities, and to protect clandestine guerrilla networks by reducing their visibility to the police. But some seepage was inevitable: a guerrilla needing help, including shelter or money, would frequently turn first to township activists whose statements suggested they might have ANC loyalties, even if they had no direct involvement in the armed wing, and frequently, those activists responded with support and aid.[6]

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[5] The most obvious exception here proves the rule: Gatsha Buthelezi, who accepted an appointment from Pretoria to serve as head of the bantustan assigned to Zulu-speaking Africans, was essentially isolated from the anti-apartheid movement precisely because he denounced armed struggle and opposed international sanctions.

Perhaps more importantly, through the 1980 ANC military strategists frequently planned attacks that would be popularly understood in terms of links to on-going mass mobilization. "Armed propaganda" boosted activists' morale, and reminded them that an army of clandestine guerrillas might already have infiltrated the country from their bases farther north on the African continent. As the popular uprising intensified after 1984, even smaller, less-dramatic attacks had an immediate impact on the conversations in union meetings, church groups, and student groups the following day, raising morale among activists and providing proof that resistance would continue despite repression. Small attacks made large impressions when they were linked to popular struggles: where police had cordoned off a township, a post-office might be hit by a handgrenade; in the middle of a bus boycott, an empty bus might be bombed. Press censorship meant that these attacks were rarely reported in the national press, but activists' networks spread the news rapidly, often adding exaggerated details for good measure. As white UDF activist Adele Kirsten put it,

> I think it's basically accepted that the MK was basically a propaganda arm of the ANC. But it worked. It was effective in the sense that people did fear attacks by the ANC. Internally, people had the sense that the ANC's armed wing was much bigger and more effective than it was—even though they didn't see anything more than the SASOL bombing or blowing up of a few police stations. It was an effective strategy, it definitely did contribute. (quoted in Sutherland and Meyer 2000: 182).

As future historians re-examine the relationship between the "internal" opposition, the ANC's political leadership, and the ANC's military wing, they will also have to explore links between ANC underground networks and the violence that often accompanied township protests during the 1980s—episodes which should not be seen as somehow tarnishing the moral claims of the anti-apartheid movement, but rather as underscoring how problematic it can be to grade political protest against an absolutist moral score card. The strategy of disrupting apartheid from below required that nearly all black South Africans participate in campaigns entailing personal risk and daily difficulties; strikes, consumer boycotts, bus and rent boycotts, were generally called by groups affiliated to the UDF, but were often enforced by groups of young militants who identified explicitly with the ANC. Efforts to initiate and extend such campaigns often provoked violent conflict between black South Africans who thought ending apartheid was worth any sacrifice, and those who felt that in the short term at least, they had more to lose than to gain. While nationally visible leaders often dismissed acts like "necklacing"—placing a burning tire on a suspected informer—as the work of police provocateurs, such behavior was often widely condoned in townships. This kind of violent enforcement of mass mobilization was probably not centrally planned, but it reflected and reinforced the ANC's strategy of making the townships ungovernable—a coordinated strategy that underscores the importance of reexamining the role of a clandestine network of activists linked across the country to each other and to the ANC leadership-in-exile.

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[6] A parallel process occurred in white South African society, blurring the categories of civilian and military. Faced with a constant threat of instability and overthrow, the government promoted a radical militarization of white society. White males were required to perform years of military service; white women and men were encouraged to join voluntary militias and to get weapons training; white teenagers were encouraged to spend their vacations in paramilitary training camps. The government subsidized arms production to the point that South Africa became the world's fifth largest arms producer. The government stockpiled strategic fuels and minerals. From 1979, when it announced its plan to meet a "total onslaught" with a "total strategy," until the early 1990s, South Africa engaged in brutal wars in neighboring states to prevent them from offering safe havens for guerrillas (Cock and Nathan 1989).

THE IMPACT OF ARMED STRUGGLE

Almost certainly, South Africa's armed struggle was more important in shaping the 'above-ground' anti-apartheid movement than is generally acknowledged in contemporary scholarly analysis, and its legacies continue to play out in post-apartheid politics. In this section, I briefly suggest some ways in which a more integrated understanding of the anti-apartheid movement would alter our vision of the movement's internal dynamics. I then suggest that our silence about armed struggles in the past may undermine our ability to understand South African contention in the present.

A more integrated vision of the anti-apartheid movement would rearrange any description of the internal dynamics of above-ground protest. Evidence, of course, remains sketchy; if, on the one hand, the legacy of repression and danger makes most activists—and even more, most scholars—nervous about admitting knowledge of clandestine activities even twenty years later, there remains the converse danger that respondents will exaggerate their past links to underground activities. But there is significant evidence suggesting that clarifying the role of armed campaigns will require that we reexamine the anti-apartheid movement as a whole—specifically, reexamining the networks on which the anti-apartheid movement was built, the resources on which anti-apartheid groups relied, and the culture, identity, and emotions involved in mobilizing resistance to the apartheid regime.

There is a great deal of evidence suggesting that activists' persistent support for the armed struggle played an important role in the associational networks of the anti-apartheid movement more broadly—not only in terms of recruiting young activists to leave the country for military training and supporting guerrillas when they returned, but also in terms of linking activists' strategies in different parts of the country to overall ANC strategy. Often built around veteran ANC activists or prominent activist families, these clandestine networks were frequently involved in coordinating campaigns in different parts of the country, and perhaps even more importantly, in coordinating guerrilla attacks with above-ground campaigns. Written descriptions of open protest meetings rarely mention the frequency with which speakers would allude to their participation in clandestine networks: by the late 1980s it was not unusual for activists to indirectly acknowledge links to illegal cells by opening their remarks with references to "the line," indicating special knowledge and implying direct communication with the exiled ANC leadership.[7]

Needless to say, many of these activists probably exaggerated reality, since the very fact of clandestinity meant that most listeners could not check the claimants' true status; moreover, activists claiming access to "the line" often contradicted each other, since there were many different voices and opinions even within the networks. Nevertheless, especially in UDF groups or in a few specifically ANC-linked unions, individuals' links to clandestine networks often gave a special status to their knowledge or suggestions.

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[7] In 1987, at the height of the State of Emergency, I heard one UDF activist in Johannesburg threaten another with an explicit reference to underground ties. "We in the underground structures of the movement," he said firmly, and ominously, "know how to deal with arguments like those!" The statement shocked the room, but the scandal seemed to stem less from the statement's content than from the fact that it was made, in English, in the presence of a complete (white, American) outsider.

That status was probably invisible to most outside researchers, revealed only if the activist was arrested for involvement in military activities; but it may well have been known or guessed by many listeners in township groups. Glenn Adler, an American researcher in the 1980s, has written movingly of his realization that a key informant, Themba Dyassi, was widely known to fellow unionists as a footsoldier in a clandestine MK cell. Apparently, the union shopstewards asked Dyassi to be Adler's first interviewee, to investigate Adler while Adler interviewed him. Although Dyassi and other MK members in the factory held no formal role in the union leadership—in a conscious effort to insulate the union from the legal repression that would have accompanied any discovery of union ties to MK—their status among politically aware activists in the factory was linked to their status in clandestine networks (Adler 1992; Adler 1994).

I do not mean to suggest that the links between underground networks and above-ground groups were entirely clear or straightforward: tensions plagued above-ground groups, revolving around their relation to clandestine networks, their relationship to activists known to be involved in illegal activities, and the extent to which their organizational strategies should reflect specifically local issues as well as national ones (Seekings 2000). Similarly, MK activists were constantly engaged in discussion about whether or not specific targets were appropriate, or would alienate popular sentiment (interview, TM, Botswana 1987). Perhaps now that activists can discuss their clandestine roles more openly, more researchers can re-examine the way the concerns of secret networks played out in above-ground discussions, and give a fuller picture of the interaction between clandestine and above-ground debates.

If we know little about networks, we know even less about how material resources coming from clandestine networks may have affected the anti-apartheid movement as a whole. Obviously, the military resources provided by Eastern Europe to the exiled ANC played an important role in ideological discussions within the ANC; countries that provided military support and training became special allies for the ANC, strengthening the weight of the South African Communist Party within the ANC alliance. But we have very little understanding of how clandestine resources funneled to internal, above-ground groups may have shaped strategic choices and ideological debates within the open anti-apartheid movement. In impoverished black communities, the anti-apartheid movement struggled to find money to sustain protests. Organizing in the townships required money not only for leaflets, gasoline and cars, and meeting spaces, but, especially in the repressive 1980s, for housing and feeding activists who were hiding from the police, for lawyers' fees to support detainees, for sustaining families during consumer boycotts, strikes, and stay-aways. Through the early 1980s, the UDF received much of its funding from church groups and other international supporters. Some of these, like the prominent British anti-apartheid organization International Defense and Aid or the Dutch anti-apartheid movement, took advice directly from the exiled ANC about which South African groups to fund. But the UDF also received clandestine funding from the exiled ANC, sometimes smuggled into the country by the same methods used to smuggle guns and explosives (interview, FS, Botswana, 1984).

How did access to donor funds and to smuggled cash alter the dynamics of debates within above-ground groups? What difference did it make to the strategies of above-ground groups that activists linked to clandestine networks could sometimes draw on additional resources, providing support for one kind of protest organization rather than another? In the early 1980s, for example, debates over whether activists should pursue "non-racialism" compared to a separatist black consciousness approach were frequently described in purely ideological terms; but clandestine resources gave greater visibility to "Charterist," or non-racial, approaches—and probably attracted new recruits more easily to non-racial organizations than might have otherwise been the case.

Neither networks nor resources alone would have sustained township support, however, if the idea of armed struggle had not retained a place at the symbolic core of the national liberation struggle. This strong symbolic role was neither natural nor accidental: ANC-affiliated activists worked hard through the 1980s to construct a culture of support for MK's guerrillas, in which those who chose to join the armed struggle—a choice that obviously involved enormous risks and sacrifice—were often considered heroes, even by activists who explicitly avoided clandestine work. Broad public campaigns like the 1981 campaign to "Unban the Freedom Charter," which used a loophole in South Africa's press censorship to discuss the ANC's goals and strategies, were conscious efforts to promote the ANC's visibility above ground. At the same time, however, more secretive efforts built community support for the ANC's armed struggle. Above-ground activists frequently traveled, legally and illegally, to neighboring states, where they met exiled ANC activists, sharing ideas and information, and discussing strategy. Some of these meetings are described in trial transcripts, when in-country activists were charged with "furthering the aims"; but many more went unnoticed, and undiscussed in public forums. In some of these discussions—including the very visible 1982 "Culture and Resistance" conference held in Botswana, where several hundred in-country, above-ground activists met ANC exiles and each other—ANC supporters worked hard to reinforce a township discourse that treated the armed struggle as a legitimate, perhaps essential, part of the anti-apartheid movement.

At the beginning of the 1980s, the ANC was only one of several parties within the anti-apartheid movement; by 1990, it had emerged as the government's primary negotiating partner. In those rare social movement discussions that mention armed struggle, some ethnic support for armed struggle tends to be portrayed as natural (e.g., Waldmann 1992); but in the case of South Africa, the construction of community support for the ANC's guerrilla efforts was slow and painstaking. The growth of support did not reflect an innate black South African community consensus, but required movement resources and energy, and careful efforts to create a culture affirming the armed struggle.

As social movement analysts reexamine the 1980s anti-apartheid movement, perhaps we should explore more carefully how the actual armed struggle intersected with the construction of a culture of support for that struggle. In the definition of a militant national project, how and to what extent did support for the armed struggle express an oppositional national identity, challenging settler domination and racial supremacism and symbolically linking the anti-apartheid struggle to other anti-colonial struggles for self-determination?

Finally, it is worth noting that the armed struggle within the anti-apartheid movement is not important only for its historical symbolism: its legacy remains deeply embedded in Southern African politics, shaping collective memories and national aspirations as well as individual careers. Collective memories of nationalist struggles often give special place to guerrillas, as heroes and martyrs whose commitment went beyond the ordinary. Such glorification of armed struggle lends legitimacy to particular political claims in the present. It could be argued, for example, that the ANC's popular commitment to a "non-racial" ideology, which welcomes white participation, was greatly shored up by the visible participation of several key whites in the guerrilla command structure, some of whom still serve in the ANC cabinet. Similarly, backgrounds in the ANC's armed wing bestow a unique credibility on individuals: histories of participation in guerrilla activities give activists a very different profile than even very visible leadership in "internal" groups, to such an extent that those histories and the links and loyalties built up in the armed wing help explain otherwise-opaque internal ANC power struggles.

Some of the legacies of armed struggle are more problematic for the new government. Questions of how to deal with existing guerrilla armies—how to disarm them, demobilize them, and reintegrate them into peacetime society—have been as difficult in South Africa as elsewhere. And in the longer term, there is the increased availability of guns, which poses a persistent threat to regional stability. Political schisms that emerged during armed struggle—often conflicts over leadership magnified by leaders' choices about alliances and sources of weapons—have repeatedly served as the fault-lines of Southern Africa's post-colonial civil wars, or provided an excuse for the repression of civil liberties as new governments try to extend their writ. Networks of people who were mobilized, armed, and trained during the national liberation struggle are all too easily remobilized after independence. Throughout the region, armed campaigns left behind widely dispersed caches of hidden weapons, as well as thousands of people with military training who may feel displaced in the new order. In South Africa as well as in neighboring states, post-independence periods have been marked by new flows of small arms and weaponry as former guerrillas sell off hidden caches; and by sharp increases in armed robberies and banditry, sometimes carried out by former guerrillas who draw on their military training to rob banks or armored vehicles, and who use the slogans of armed struggle to explain their actions when they are caught.

CONCLUSION

South Africa is of course unusual because links between popular mobilization and clandestine guerrilla networks are relatively apparent. But many of the questions that South Africa raises are generalizable. What difference does it make to social movements if there is an armed faction, waiting in the wings? How does it affect the dynamics of mobilization, framing, and protest? To what extent do issues of recruitment and control within the guerrilla army play out in debates within above-ground groups, and how do different movements deal with those issues? When clandestine networks, resources, and symbolic campaigns are involved, how do the dynamics of above-ground movements change?

At least in the case of the anti-apartheid movement, these questions are clearly important for understanding both the movement's trajectory and its aftermath. Instead of avoiding the topic, perhaps we should confront head-on the dynamics armed struggle introduces. Who makes decisions to take up violent strategies, and where do they look for or find supplies? How do those decisions constrain movement discussions in the future—both in terms of prestige granted to activists involved in militant tactics, and in terms of alliances made to protect clandestine military activities? How do coalitions change when violent tactics appear, and how does the introduction of these tactics affect the symbolic framing of salient issues? What happens to open discussion within social movement organizations when some members are linked to armed actions, and others are not? What are the dynamics of discussions at open meetings if some activists have more-or-less clandestine links to armed actions, and how does it change the power and prestige of those activists within the larger group? To what extent does engagement in armed actions strengthen an organization's appeal within some segments of a social movement, even if it erodes support more broadly, and what does that do to the character of support and mobilization? Even in movements where violence is not widespread, these questions may be salient if violent tactics persist on the fringes: what difference does it make to the dynamics of mobilization and framing in the anti-abortion movement, for example, when a militant fraction persists in violent attacks on abortion clinics?

These questions are complicated. No doubt the dynamics vary enormously from situation to situation, and they almost invariably involve personalities and problems that are hardly heroic. But just as our vision of the South African anti-apartheid movement is incomplete when it fails to recognize the importance of armed struggle in shaping the internal dynamics of the movement and its aftermath, our understanding of social movements more broadly remains incomplete if we fail to ask about the dynamics introduced when movements undertake strategic violence.

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