

Sammelrez: Gewaltloser Widerstand im 20. Jahrhundert

Scalmer, Sean: *Gandhi in the West. The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2011. ISBN: 978-0-521-76091-1; 248 Seiten

Roberts, Adam; Ash, Timothy Garton (Hrsg.): *Civil Resistance and Power Politics. The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2011. ISBN: 978-0-199-69145-6; 407 Seiten

Rezensiert von: Andrew Oppenheimer, Effort, Pennsylvania, USA

The scholarly literature on the history and practice of non-violent protest from an international perspective continues to grow, and these two volumes make strong contributions to the field. Though strikingly different in their formats and methods, both books expertly explore the emergence of „organized, purposive non-violent action“ (Garton Ash, p. 371) during the twentieth century, as well as its transfer between and development within different political contexts. Read together, they offer a well-timed reminder of the possibilities and limitations of non-violent resistance.

Civil Resistance and Power Politics is a wide-ranging volume that explores the growth and political significance of non-violent action during the latter half of the twentieth century. Twenty distinguished scholars offer contributions on civil resistance, each guided by a series of questions about why protesters turn to civil resistance; whether (and under what conditions) civil resistance can effect political change; and on the influence of context-specific political factors on non-violent protest. Though none of the articles are themselves comparative, combined they provide rich material for comparative research into civil resistance, which Adam Roberts defines broadly as a type of political action that uses non-violent action and is „civil“ in being both non-violent and civic-minded (p. 2).

The editors make a series of general observations based on the volume's case studies, the most compelling of which highlights

the relationship of civil resistance to external, power-political actors. Indeed, if there is a red thread that unites the volume's disparate studies it is the relationship of civil resistance to „other factors of power, domestic or foreign, civil and military, which help to determine outcomes“ (p. 1). According to Roberts, „although civil resistance represents a significant break from the normal methods of power politics, that break is not complete“ (p. vi). There remains a complex interplay between civil resistance and both state and non-state forms of power, and, as these articles ably demonstrate, civil resistance cannot be fully understood in isolation from them.

While the volume's operative definition of power politics focuses on the authority and legitimacy of states, individual chapters expand beyond this narrow scope to explore how we might understand the impact of external forces on civil resistance. There is the idea that international events contribute to the creation of political opportunities for local activists, as was the case with U.S. human rights activism and the Helsinki agreements (Smolar on Poland, p. 134–5; Abrahamian on Iran, p. 177). Or, as Mark Kramer observes about the collapse of the Soviet empire, „incipient democratization“ within the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev created opportunities for non-violent protest movements in the states of Eastern Europe (p. 91). Of course, factors external to protest are not necessarily international. Kieran Williams and others (Smolar on Poland; Huneeus on Chile) note how even military dictatorships are limited in their abilities to repress non-violent opposition by national legal cultures and respect within the ranks of the military for the rule of law. Military forces play a key role in the story of civil resistance, and not merely as a foil to non-violent protesters. By enforcing civil order, military and police forces frequently enable non-violent protest (Roberts, p. 60). Finally, we should not think of power politics exclusively in terms of external forces over which civil resisters have no influence. In an engaging article on the U.S. civil rights movement, Doug McAdam argues that „the 'political opportunities' that helped set the movement in motion were at least as much a product of the concrete efforts of civil rights lead-

ers to exploit environmental shifts as they were the result of the changes themselves" (p. 67). In short, successful resistance movements not only respond to the political opportunities placed before them; they seek to bend political conditions to their will.

Gandhi in the West is an ambitious study, though not nearly as sweeping or comprehensive as its title would suggest. It deftly explores the history of Gandhism in Great Britain and the United States, attending largely to Gandhi reception and how westerners grappled with Gandhi's image and ideas during the middle decades of the twentieth century. On this basis, the book highlights the „complex labour of intercultural communication" (p. 104) involved in Gandhi's initial presentation via print media to western audiences; the efforts of non-violent activists to „correct" the initial (mis)representations of Gandhi and his ideas; and their efforts at presenting Gandhi's methods in terms to which western audiences could relate. At the book's core is an analysis of how political activists adapted Gandhi's teachings to local contexts, against nuclear weapons in the U.K. and for civil rights in the U.S., and made Gandhi's methods their own. On this basis, Scalmer makes the case for a history of Gandhism and claims a space for Gandhi in the pantheon of progenitors of 1960s protest culture.

Scalmer's story of Gandhism is a history of cultural translation, of knowledge networks, interpretation, emulation, and „symbolic displacement" (p. 34). He demonstrates how Gandhi's acts of resistance were initially filtered by western media through the complementary lenses of race, orientalism, and empire. Drawing upon existing categories and languages of racial hierarchy, western media portrayed Gandhi in infantilizing, sometimes feminizing, and largely dismissive terms. The image that emerged of him was attention-grabbing and emasculating. The challenge for the westerners who drew inspiration from Gandhi's teachings was to represent Gandhi's ideas on political action to westerners in a way that avoided both characterizations of „hyper-difference" and „over-likeness". Where the former's emphasis on cultural difference perpetuated an orientalist perspective and suggested that western-

ers had nothing to learn from Gandhi, the latter's claim to the Mahatma's universal appeal „bleached" him of cultural and historical specificity (p. 91). Gandhi's western interpreters struggled to find an appropriate language for characterizing the man and his ideas. Of those who tried, one of the most influential would be Richard Gregg, whose universalizing, psychological interpretation of Gandhian non-violence struck a chord with western readers and left a decisive mark on western experiments with Satyagraha.

As portrayed by Scalmer, the history of western experiments with Gandhi's teachings is entangled with the histories of disparate political causes. Both U.S.-American and British activists sought to „rethink and reshape" Gandhi's techniques for their respective movements, pursued under dissimilar circumstances. In the U.S., civil rights leaders accentuated those elements of Gandhi's teachings that resonated with Christian doctrine and the American democratic tradition. In a fascinating appeal to cultural identity, British members of Operation Gandhi tweaked the Mahatma's concern for conversion by seeking to shame – and thus appeal to the conscience of – the wider British public. These examples testify to what Scalmer calls the „domestication" of Gandhian ideas and techniques, a process that involved selection, renaming, and a distancing from Gandhi himself (p. 166). Experiments with non-violent protest would continue in both states and leave their mark on the political and cultural rebellions of the 1960s, even as the source of the specific techniques being borrowed faded from consciousness.

Read together, these two books share an interest in the spread and elaboration of non-violent protest forms, whose modern origins they associate with Gandhi. A number of common themes emerge. Scalmer's attention to a media-savvy Gandhi is echoed and expanded upon by Roberts et al., who in various ways explore the dramaturgical elements of civil resistance. The struggle within movements for organizational and personal discipline pervades both volumes. Too, both speak to the 'Americanization' of civil resistance during the twentieth century. Scalmer introduces the concept but leaves it frustrat-

ingly underdeveloped (p. 173). Roberts et al. do not actually refer to the Americanization of civil resistance; however, the concept underwrites the editors' assertion of a correlation between civil resistance and liberal democratic objectives. The fact that certain authors in Roberts et al. resist the correlation (cf. chapter by Brown, p. 55) indicates a need to think historically about protesters' demands for democracy during the latter half of the twentieth century. Here, explicit attention to a concept like Americanization would prove useful.

The relationship between civil resistance and democratic ambitions is one of the weaker claims of Roberts et al., largely because it seems to have been pre-determined by the editors' case selection and agenda. Contributors were asked to address a series of questions that highlight and privilege democratic outcomes. The result is a narrow representation of civil resistance as a call for democratic state legitimacy. The volume might have been helped by a chapter on the Occupy Movement, for example, which meets the textbook definition of a civil resistance movement but set itself against entrenched interests, predominantly non-state actors, in the institutional exercise of economic power. This might have pushed the editors to elaborate a more nuanced definition of power politics and broaden their characterization of civil resistance, its potential adversaries and objectives.

Gandhi in the West, too, makes claims that should have been more thoroughly developed. The way in which Scalmer argues for Gandhi's significance to the history of protest during the 1960s is particularly irksome, because the author makes a good point while completely misrepresenting the New Left and its relationship to non-violent action. Thus, Scalmer suggests a concern among New Left activists for the „conscience of the evildoer“ (p. 206). A more apt representation of the New Left and its agenda would focus on its critique of socio-political structures of inequality and oppression. The criticisms and objectives of New Left activists were systemic even as individuals sought personally to embody alternative social norms. Furthermore, Scalmer's claim that non-violent action ex-

hausted itself as an option for protest only makes sense if one ignores organizations like the War Resisters International, which debated the meaning of Gandhi's legacy for the politics of liberation and revolution throughout the 1960s; disregards the fact that violence in protest remained both controversial and debated among activists of the New Left; and fails to acknowledge that the choice for violence is often performative and thus deceptive as an indicator of a turn away from non-violent means. Non-violence remained central to the political discourse and action repertoire of protest during the long 1960s. Gandhism's mark on protest practices was far more complex than Scalmer's evidence can demonstrate.

Finally, important to both volumes is the choice for non-violent action, or why protesters turn to civil resistance in the first place. Scalmer's history of Gandhism explains the introduction and dispersion of non-violent methods among U.S. and U.K. activists, describing how purposive non-violence became part of the repertoire of political resistance in the English-speaking West. He also addresses the tension between principle-driven and tactically-deployed non-violent action, though it is not a central concern for him as it is for Roberts et al. The initial question posed by the latter's editors asks why political actors opt for non-violent methods, framing it as an „either/or“ choice between a principled stand and a strategic option. It is an odd formulation, for two reasons. Firstly, it does not address the preference for non-violent over violent methods, which is in no way self-evident. Secondly, as many of the contributors to this volume demonstrate, choices based on pragmatic rather than principled grounds are hardly straightforward. When facing a state apparatus that holds a monopoly over armed force, civil resistance can be a potent means to demonstrate the power and authority that a movement holds and exercises. The choice for non-violence may also be the only reasonable option available to protesters. Still, a tactical decision for non-violence may reflect deeply-engrained cultural values, religious precepts, and ideological commitments. Timothy Garton Ash is probably correct when he states that „[t]he

choice of non-violence [is frequently] more pragmatic than principled," (p. 372) but this only tells us that most protesters are not dogmatic. It does not tell us anything about protesters' attitudes towards (or willingness to commit acts of) violence. Fortunately, the vast majority of contributors to Roberts et al. avoid the trap posed by such either/or questions, and provide stimulating accounts of the complex motives behind the choice for non-violent action.

HistLit 2013-3-159 / Andrew Oppenheimer über Scalmer, Sean: *Gandhi in the West. The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest*. Cambridge 2011, in: H-Soz-Kult 17.09.2013.

HistLit 2013-3-159 / Andrew Oppenheimer über Roberts, Adam; Ash, Timothy Garton (Hrsg.): *Civil Resistance and Power Politics. The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*. Oxford 2011, in: H-Soz-Kult 17.09.2013.