

Voices from the Margins: Discursive Nonviolence

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Received Date: 12/09/2019 - Accepted Date: 28/11/2019

DOI: 10.22096/hr.2020.117070.1171

Abstract

Violence generally monopolizes the discourse of social change. An alternative voice is that of marginalized people who confront nonviolently the danger of forfeited basic rights and need to secure rights. This essay applies sociological theories on the causes of violence as well as peacebuilding/nonviolence literature to three case studies: 1) *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* through a Christian Liberation Theology perspective; 2) the Islamic revolution in Iran; and 3) the Gandhian/Buddhist Sarvodaya Movement in Sri Lanka. These case studies illustrate the role that religion plays in nonviolent efforts to attain human rights recognition and suggest that marginalized voices may be heard as peace building literature and nonviolent rights recognition helps us transcend the human rights dichotomy. This paper's main purpose is to break violence's monopoly on the discourse of social change and to allow room for nonviolent movements to contribute to the dialogue.

The main assumption underlying this paper is that violence cannot be the only option for bringing about social change and human rights recognition. Religion plays a crucial role in nonviolent rights recognition by providing marginalized voices with a forum in which their demands can be heard and acted upon. Other assumptions guiding this study include a belief that basic human rights go beyond security to include subsistence rights. Since the current state system seems to privilege security rights over subsistence rights, the existence of civil

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society institutions, such as religious organizations, is crucial in the struggle for the recognition of basic human rights. These rights must be held together and advanced in concert with one another for positive social change to be sustainable. Finally, the author believes that movements for human rights recognition and world peace can be an area of cooperation and concord among world religions as the efforts of different religions seem to illustrate.

After analysis of sociological theories and specific case studies regarding the role of nonviolent religious movements for basic human rights recognition, the author has reached the following conclusions: 1) Violence directed towards rights recognition is often the result of a sense of shame at not being able to meet basic needs; 2) Rights cannot be realized through violence because violence takes away the rights of the opposite party, thus there must be nonviolent avenues for rights recognition; and 3) Marginalized voices contribute to the dialogue of social change by providing examples of nonviolence's efficacy in bringing about rights recognition. In addition, religion's role in this process has become ever clearer and more apparent. Whether religion inspires people to nonviolently struggle for rights recognition or it actually struggles with the people, it is a very important element in the process. The most important conclusion drawn as a result of this research, however, is the importance of continued discourse. This paper does not claim to have provided any empirical answers regarding religion's role in human rights movements, however, I hope, contribute constructively to the ongoing dialogue among religions as well as states and civil society organizations.

Keywords: Violence; Peaceful; Deprived; Human Rights Movements.

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