

Detecting and Analyzing Small Social Movements in Repressive Countries: Contemporary Human Rights Activism in Liberia and Kenya

Robert Press¹

Field research in both Kenya and Liberia shows that the people who engaged in resistance to advance human rights and democracy came from different parts of civil society; their actions, tactics, goals, etc. were very much a social movement. But the usual signposts suggested by the social movement literature -- of organization, mass demonstrations, unity, numbers, and political opportunity -- were not there in the forms typically seen in democratic, developed countries. In-depth interviews with activists, however, detected an informal, dynamic resistance movement which quantitative studies would not discover. Detecting small social movements in repressive settings requires interpretive, qualitative research methods. The findings are based on a total of approximately six months of extensive interviews by the author in Kenya in 2002 and Liberia in 2006 with human rights and democracy activists, plus archival materials. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2008 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS: Social Movements, Africa, Human Rights, Peace, Conflict, Resistance, Qualitative Methods, Interpretive Methods, Democracy.

¹ **Robert M. Press**, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science, International Development, and International Affairs at the University of Southern Mississippi. His most recent book is *Peaceful Resistance: Advancing Human Rights and Democratic Freedoms* (Ashgate, U.K. 2006) about Kenya. He also wrote *The New Africa: Dispatches from a Changing Continent* (University Press of Florida, 1999), focusing on contemporary democratization and human rights struggles. He was awarded a Fulbright award to Sierra Leone (2008-2009). Prior to entering academia he was a foreign correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor*, including eight years based in Kenya. Address correspondence to: Robert Press, University of Southern Mississippi, Department of Political Science, 118 College Drive #5108, Hattiesburg, MS. 39401-0001; tel: (O) 601-266-4311; e-mail: bob.press@usm.edu.