CHAPTER TEN

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AND PAULI MURRAY ON AMERICA'S CIVIL WRONGS, GANDHI AND INDIA

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In her insightful biography of Richard Wright (2001), Hazel Rowley demonstrates empathic appreciation of Wright's concern for the discrimination against Blacks marginalized in a majoritarian white-America, and his growing disenchantment with the movement for Black liberation. It is a moving story. Likewise, in her last biography, that of Eleanor and Franklin Roosevelt (2010), in addition to the near-exhaustive excavation work on their extraordinary, yet sometimes troubled, relationship, Hazel also queries the received wisdom on their individual and joint public engagements with the Black cause, in an American landscape that was going through an immense transition leading up to and especially during the Roosevelt years. Hazel and I had several conversations about my own interest in and work on the African-American Resistance and Civil Rights struggles from the early 20th century to the present, with a focus on Gandhi's influence regarding the Black adoption of the nonviolent truth-force (*satyagraha*) that was used successfully against British colonial sovereignty in India, and in time came to be associated in popular history with the heroic measures adopted by Martin Luther King Jr (who acknowledged himself a disciple of the Gandhian method).

Hazel's project was, of course, much larger, or rather, more specific to the question of the stability (or alleged instability) of the marital relationship of the Roosevelt couple, as well as their "public faces". But Hazel does dwell, particularly, on Eleanor's connections with Blacks and her significant interventions in support of the fledgling Black civil rights movement. Eleanor, however, also had a deep interest in Gandhi and things Indian; indeed, she honoured the invitation made to her by the first Indian Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, to visit India a few years after the

country's independence. This latter story is not covered by Hazel, except for a passing reference to Nehru (as one of the important world leaders Eleanor entertained (2010: x)) and a mention of Eleanor's departure for travels across the Middle-East and Asia. That story remains to be told; and there is another significant detail in respect of the "Black Question" that Hazel, for reasons alluded to earlier, could not explore in this biography: namely, Eleanor's intercession for Pauli Murray, a very important woman activist, an aspiring student, a declared communist workers' organiser, and an eminent voice in the grass-roots challenge to the institutionalized segregation of schools.

To fill these gaps I shall first cite passages in Hazel's biography of the Roosevelts which emphasize the plight of the Blacks and Eleanor's sensitivity toward this blight on America's present history, together with any interventions she attempted at local and national levels to help redress the deplorable conditions of the Black community. I shall then move to the case of Pauli Murray. In the final part of this essay, I will travel with Eleanor to India and present her perspective on India's predicament, the shortcomings of a nation trying to rise from the colonial ashes, as well as the promising aspects of India's embracing the principles of democratic governance, its non-alignment stance, and what the US could do to help India and its people to regain their former, pre-colonial status of a powerful force in Asia if not in the world. I offer this essay as a tribute to our memory of Hazel, as it was she who inspired this particular aspect of my wider research by drawing my attention to Eleanor's splendid work as Chair of the Drafting Committee in articulating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the United Nations that her husband had helped found. So these reflections represent the conversation I would have continued to have—in some ways am having—with Hazel the thinker, researcher and writer.

Paint it Black

Let me begin by quoting three short but insightful paragraphs on the genesis of Eleanor's consciousness regarding the race question.

> There was racial tension throughout the country. Many thought that African American soldiers fighting in Europe had enjoyed far too much freedom, consorting with the local women, and needed to be put back in their place. At the end of the war there had been a wave of horrific lynchings in the South, with black war veterans strung up in their army uniforms. The nation's capital, which was 25% black, was still an intensely racist, segregated Southern city. The Roosevelts, coming from New York, had stood out among their Washington friends by employing white servants. When they got back from Europe, Eleanor decided to adopt the Washington custom and change

over to black servants. Mama was horrified. She considered black servants unreliable.

For Eleanor, it was her first real contact with black people, and she would look back on this as the beginnings of her race consciousness. At that time, however, she still harboured the standard prejudices of her class. When the butler developed pleurisy the evening before the buffet luncheon, she admitted to Mama: "With darkies one is always suspicious, even of a death in the family."

The race riots that broke out in Washington that summer were among the worst in the country. On July 19, a vicious white mob let loose randomly on blacks in the streets. Within hours, Washington's black community was fighting back… (Rowley 2010: 87).

The "Negro Problem" and the Jim Crow Southern pressures

Hazel returns much later in the book to two episodes concerning the Black community that rattle Eleanor, even as she takes decisive steps to pull her weight as the conscientious First Lady.

Franklin Roosevelt (FDR), as President of the US, had set up the Subsistence Homestead Program that built houses in Reedsville, West Virginia, for selected former miners and their families close to starvation. In her visit to Reedsville, Eleanor discovered to her dismay that no Blacks had been included, because that might ruffle the feathers of the local hillbillies (Rowley 2010: 195). That was one concrete instance where her sympathies went out to disenfranchised African Americans. Then she wanted to include a coloured reporter at the women's press conference she was holding, and later invite local inmates of the Negro reformatory school to a White House garden party; both these unprecedented initiatives provoked, in Hazel's words, "an avalanche of criticism" in the Presidential secretariat: "Had the first lady lost her mind?" (Rowley 2010: 209). At another time she enquired of the head of the Works Progressive Administration whether it was true that "wages for Negroes in regions #3 and #4 under the works relief act, are lower than those established for white people?" (Eleanor to Harry Hopkins, cited Rowley 2010: 220).

In an even more dramatic incident, which was widely reported during Eleanor's visit with African Americans in the South, a photograph of her with a Black person appeared, though taken elsewhere, in the *Alabama Sun*, carrying the caption: "Eleanor and Some More Niggers". The white reporter claimed:

> Every time Eleanor opens her big mouth, it's big news for the Negro newspapers, who boast of a circulation of over 2,000,000 in the South. The past week, Eleanor was journeying as usual but stopped at Newark, New

> Jersey, where a bunch of Negroes were having a jamboree, and naturally Eleanor had to stop there and have her picture taken with a nigger (Rowley 2010: 221).

This was grist to the mill for white Southerners in the House and Senate, who used this prejudiced profile of the First Lady to threaten to withhold their vote, votes that FDR very much relied on.

There was also a streak of innocence or naiveté we might say on Eleanor's part when it came to race consciousness, as she was still learning. In her autobiography, *This Is My Story*, Eleanor does use the term "darky" (Hazel says she does so twice), without realizing its derogatory nuance. No one questioned her use of the term before the manuscript went to press. An African-American woman who read the book complained to her in a letter, expressing shock, especially to find the term used by someone who was otherwise doing much for her people. Eleanor replied with these candid words: "'Darky' was used by my great aunt as a term of affection and I have always considered it in that light. I am sorry if it hurt you. What do you prefer?" (Rowley 2010: 221). And here is another passage on her unstinted commitment to remain engaged on the "Negro Problem" (it is so crisp that I have to cite it rather than paraphrase it):

> Eleanor regularly invited African American leaders to the White House for discussions, and sometimes arranged for them to meet FDR. She and Walter White, the executive secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP], tried hard to get FDR to promote passage of federal anti-lynching legislation. FDR was strongly in favour of it, but could not risk antagonizing white Southern Democrats (Rowley 2010: 221).

Then, in February 1939, she resigned from the Daughters of the American Revolution when the world-renowned contralto, Marian Anderson, was prohibited from performing in Washington's Constitution Hall because of the colour of her skin. The world got to know more about the "Negro Question" as a result of Eleanor's action. She organized an open-air concert in front of the Lincoln Memorial instead. It was quite a tribute.

Eleanor wanted to be out on the streets protesting against a brutal lynching incident in Florida, but FDR, the politician weary of losing strategic votes in Congress, dissuaded her, as he did on a number of other occasions when she wanted to "agitate" or question him on the merits of a prolonged war for which America was equipping itself with modern armaments and in which it was positioning itself to become embroiled, while everywhere people were suffering from a lack of social services, basic commodities,

employment, decent wages and so on, as the Communist youth leaders she had invited to the Oval and White House for cocktails and dinner convinced her (Rowley 2010: 235).

Eleanor's other decisive interventions

There are at least two instances of events in which Eleanor played a significant interventionist role and for which she is remembered by American historians and Black writers alike. Had Hazel more time and pages at her disposal she would have covered these stories, but I am confident she was aware of their existence and importance.

The first can be dealt with rather briefly; the second will require more detailed treatment.

During the "Freedom Ride" movement, when students and sympathisers (Blacks and Whites) packed into buses to go across the Southern states in 1961 to test the laws against segregation and continue the civil rights movement, Diane Nash, a Black student from Fisk University in Nashville, emerged as a leader of the student sit-ins that were beginning to gain national attention. As the "Freedom Ride" movement spread across Southern towns, it drew the acrimony of white Southerners who stopped the riders from entering their towns, overturned or burnt the buses and violently lashed out at the students. The students, however, came prepared, skilled in the Gandhian methods of non-resistance for which they had been trained at a workshop by John Lawson (a Black educator who had studied the method for three years in Gandhian ashrams in India). When the police intervened and arrested a batch of protestors at sit-ins at local diners and Woolworths, another batch of polite young protestors filed into the paddy wagons, asking to be arrested as well. This baffled the police and the cheering crowd of Whites, some of whom tried to attack the protestors. How would a small-town jail accommodate 80 students, they wondered looking at each other?

The students remained undeterred by the beatings and arrests (Ackermann 2001: 322). The mayor of Nashville thought of buying out the students so they would leave the town in peace; he reduced their bail to just five dollars. But—like Gandhi back in colonial days—they refused to pay, and vowed not to leave until racial segregation was ended in Nashville, for as John Lewis, one of the students in the "Freedom Ride" campaign, put it: "we belonged *nowhere* else—but in the those lunch counter seats or behind bars" (Lewis 1999: 102). Next day the city judge imposed a fine of fifty dollars per person, which they also refused to pay, and so he punished them by imposing a sentence of 30 days in the county workhouse. At that moment, Diane Nash stood up and made this historic statement that reached all corners of America:

"We feel that if we pay these fines, we would be contributing to and supporting injustice and immoral practices that have been performed in the arrest and conviction of the defendants" (Lewis, 103). The dismal treatment of the protestors by the Nashville authorities, and their failure to protect the students against rowdy white violence that spilled into the stores, was condemned across the country. Among the protest telegrams that came in, one was from the First Lady and another from Harry Belafonte (whom, incidentally, Hazel and I went to hear in a trades' hall in New York City one bitterly cold evening (Bilimoria 2011)).

I now come to the intriguing story of Pauli Murray, known also as "North Carolina's Daughter". At 28, Murray, great-grand-daughter of a raped slave, was instrumental in launching a one-woman war against segregation at the University of North Carolina. It was late in 1938 and Murray wanted to gain an MA in social work, although the chair of the department told her that the "time was not right". A mandate for equal institutions enabling black graduate admissions had been provided by *Plessy vs Ferguson* since 1896, but this Supreme Court ruling had been so universally defied that its verdict had all but been forgotten. But not in the mind of Murray; so she chose an institution in her former hometown and one that exemplified a white liberal stronghold in the south. While the NAACP, constrained by its limited litigation experience and power, was unable to move quickly in this challenge, Murray was not to be deterred; as we say in the vernacular, she ploughed right into the system. She had already been scarred and hardened by her experiences with Durham's bus segregation practices, against which she had protested. She remonstrated against white America's repression of her body, and chose to be a homosexual against prevailing norms. She worked with the women's worker camp, which brought her in close contact with communist workers' movements, and became a member of an alternative Communist Party while growing up and working her way through Hunter College in New York. Drawn back to Durham where a group of Blacks were already contemplating testing UNC's desegregation policy, she was bolder and drew parallels between the unconstitutional American educational system—that segregated Blacks—and the persecution of Jews that was afoot in Nazi Germany.

Meanwhile, the Southern Conference for Human Welfare was held in Birmingham, Alabama, and two significant people were in attendance. One was Frank Porter Graham, President of UNC, with whom Murray had been in contact in the hope that he would support her application; the other was Eleanor. Graham made platitudinous speeches about free speech and racial injustices, but when it came to more concrete realities he turned his coat on issues; he could not bring himself to defend Murray's case, and failed his

own test (Gilmore 2008: 271). The white supremacists condemned Eleanor's powerful presence at the conference with 1200 white and black southerners, and accused her of being a race traitor beholden to African Americans—"the Jews of America". But nothing much came of or from the conference. Pauli Murray next wrote to FDR himself asking him to intervene on her behalf, pointing out that in the ceremonial speech he had delivered when he accepted an honorary doctorate the previous year from UNC, in a ceremony presided over by Graham, he did not indicate how the South was to bring about its own change on democratic principles. She did a smart thing: she sent a copy of her letter to Eleanor as well, with a touching personal note: "You do not remember me, but I was the girl who did not stand up when you passed through the Social Hall of Camp Tera […]. I thought you are the sort of person who prefers to be accepted as a human being and not a human paragon" (Gilmore 2008; 276). Her request to the First Lady was to be allowed to work with FDR to help desegregate UNC. Gilmore perspicaciously reports that, unlike FDR, who sent a form-letter response, Eleanor actually took the trouble to write her a personal reply, thus "beginning a friendship and collaboration on civil rights that spanned decades". And Eleanor assured Murray that changes were coming, even to the South, but it was better not to push too hard. The timing was immaculate: it was about the same time that Marian Anderson was prevented from singing in Constitution Hall in D.C.

With this show of support from the First Lady, Murray began publicizing her pending case at UNC; students' bodies and fraternities, the YMCA, the National American Student Union, city newspapers, church chronicles, lawyers, and locals entered the fray, contemplating the wider implications of Pauli Murray's application, and asking questions such as whether desegregation would mean the white girls would be lured away from white boys to have liaisons with black students, whether the town would be overrun with "Black Jews", and whose side would the town lawyers represent? In the end, the University's governing body thought it too early to make a unilateral change to its practices, unconstitutional as these practices might seem. The NAACP appeared to have become too weak-kneed to represent her and so her case was not likely to be taken up in the courts. An excuse was also made by the NAACP that, at the time of her application, Murray was not a resident of North Carolina. But there was a lesson to be learned for the reticent and over-cautious leaders of the NAACP (contrary to the wisdom planted into the backbone of the NAACP by its founder W. E. B. Du Bois). Murray continued her close association with the NAACP and especially with Thurgood Marshall who brought to her the disappointing news about the NAACP's failure to support her case. It was as much what they did not do in Murray's

case that eventually, upon some deep introspection, led them to realize that the Black leadership had to fight hard and risk any number of adverse responses and revocations from the authorities they challenged. One might think this a lesson already learned. Still, the NAACP improved its practices, and together with Marshall and Murray succeeded a decade later in challenging desegregation in the Supreme Court, a success that led to the land-mark historic decision, in the *Brown versus the Board of Education* (1954) judgment, that Justice Earl Warren delivered. Murray realized that her application to UNC in 1938, even though she was not successful and the NAACP did not take up her case, had contributed to the desegregation of public education.

Before that historic show-down, Murray had become involved in various organizations (such as the National Negro Congress and the Socialist Workers Defense League), and had worked with A. Philip Randolph (who chaired a major Labor Committee) and with Max Yergan (who was too far to the left for most African-Americans). She continued her letter-campaign to the Roosevelt Administration, challenging its inaction on domestic policies. Eleanor took her complaints rather more seriously than did the President-husband. In 1941 Murray began attending Howard University law school with hopes of becoming a civil rights lawyer. In 1942, while still in law school, she became one of the founders of the Congress of Racial Equality. Murray was the only woman in her law school class at Howard, and it was there that she first became aware of sexism. Although Murray was Howard's top student, she was rejected by Harvard University for the fellowship to complete a Master's degree in law that was traditionally granted to Howard's top student. The grounds given were that she was a woman. And that decision passed despite a letter of support from President Roosevelt, after Murray herself had written to Eleanor. Instead, she went and completed a Masters of Law degree at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1945, and was admitted to the California Bar. In 1952, Murray was denied a position at Cornell University because the referees who had written for her, including Eleanor, Marshall and Randolph, were considered far too radical (Gilmore 2008: 399; Murray 1989).

There are two observations about Murray with which I will conclude this discussion on the African-American question. Murray had a keen interest in the Gandhian technique of nonviolence which she had been studying, and she took with her to a protest a hand-drawn chart that said: "India. . . Am. Negro". Gilmore succinctly explains what Murray meant by this rather cryptic phrase, and I wish to cite her, as Gilmore also brings out, in my second quotation, the growing relationship between Murray and Eleanor on the issue that broke out over farm security and night-cropping:

> (a) [Murray] noted that Indians constituted a majority in their own country, while the "Am. Negro" constituted a minority "living side by side" with white people. She admired the Indians for a "willingness to sacrifice [...] to change the heart of the enemy" and contrasted their activism with white people's criticism that African Americans "move too fast, upset friendly relations between the races". While the Indians made up a "well-disciplined movement", Murray lamented that African Americans suffered from the lack of a grassroots movement. They counted instead on a "legalistic movement headed by the NAACP—through court tests." In the weeks before Easter, Murray had met Gandhi-follower Krishnalal Sridharani and read his *War Without Violence*. She set out for home armed with nonviolent ideas, but they took her only as far as Virginia (Gilmore 2008: 317- 327).
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> (b) She explained to Eleanor Roosevelt, "When people overwork themselves, even for the best of causes, they must pay for it." The problem had been sleeplessness, overwork, poor diet, money worries, anxiety over the sharecroppers' event, and the "inability to integrate homosexual tendencies into a 'socially acceptable' pattern of living". Roosevelt responded at once by sending flowers, which Murray promptly handed out one by one to "patients, doctors, nurses, neighbors, and friends". That way, she told Roosevelt, "a great personality touches the lives and hearts of many people unknowingly" (Gilmore 2008: 316).

Over the next few years Murray and Eleanor cultivated a friendship based on their differences—"race", age, and temperament—rather than on their similarities. ER used Murray to hear what "Negroes" were thinking and Murray used ER to tell the administration what "Negroes" were thinking. ER used Murray to divine the future, but Murray used ER to realize her future. ER warned Murray to slow down and criticized her methods. Murray wrote the longer letters, but ER always responded and sometimes invited her to the White House.

Pauli Murray adored Eleanor Roosevelt. Recalling her 1939 meeting with her, Murray wrote that "she was positively beautiful in our interview—a glow such as I've never seen before". Eleanor Roosevelt found in Murray a kindred spirit. Each woman recognized and treasured the other's "pilgrim soul" (Gilmore 2008: 316).

Many events and situations occurred in which Eleanor's support was sought and was forthcoming, though not always successfully, because the President did not consistently heed her pleadings. Still, these attempted interventions solidified Eleanor's ties with civil rights leaders and endeared her to the emerging movement across the nation, to such an extent, indeed, that Martin Luther King Jr, around the time of her death in 1962, could pronounce: "The courage she displayed in taking sides on matters considered

controversial, gave strength to those who risked only pedestrian loyalty and commitment to the great issues of our times" (Allida Black 1996: 86).

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion why Hazel was drawn to the character of Eleanor and held her in such esteem that she would undertake a biography on her and her beloved Franklin (despite my attempt to talk her, as I almost did, into embarking on a life of Arthur Miller after she completed her biography on Beauvoir and Sartre, and was searching for a subject for her next project); had Hazel lived, however, I may, in one of numerous walks along Riverside or picnics across the Hudson, or rides on NJ-Transit to see friends whose homes were along the gas-lit streets of Orange, just have persuaded her to consider for her next project the politics and fascinating life of Pauli Murray.

Eleanor in India and on Gandhi

It was Prime Minister Pandit Nehru who brought Eleanor an invitation from India to visit the country she so admired. She particularly revered its recently assassinated prophet-like leader of the freedom movement, Mahatma (M. K.) Gandhi—a veneration she shared with the declared "Black Gandhi", coupling up as "social Jesus" of America—Martin Luther King Jr. Indeed, in the second volume of her memoir, *My Day,* on the post-war years (1945-1952), when she received the news of Gandhi's assassination on 31 January 1948, she wrote a short eulogy dated 2 February:

> It was with horror that I heard the news on Friday that Gandhi had been shot. Somehow, for this man of peace, who never hurt anyone, to come to a violent death at the hand of one of his countrymen seems almost impossible to believe […] It is a hard blow to India, especially at the present time when she is beset by difficulties and trying to build an independent nation after so many years of subjection—years in which Gandhi played a great part to bring about her freedom in peaceful fashion.
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> There is no doubt that Gandhi had spiritual qualities, and one can only hope that, even though he is no longer with his people, his influence will grow and help them through the years. This same influence had much of value to give to the rest of the world, and one hopes that the very violence of his death will turn people away from violence—which certainly brings none of us any good at the present time (Roosevelt 1990: 130-1).

In 1953, in her daily column, Eleanor continued her ruminations on the importance of Gandhi's life-teachings:

> What Gandhi said about India is something for every one of us to ponder. Most of us are constantly concerned about material things and yet the people

> whom we like best to have with us and who make the best impression on those with whom they come in contact are the people who rarely give much thought to material things. Their minds dwell on the deeper questions of life […]. Mahatma Gandhi often urged we "turn the searchlight inward." By this, of course, he meant that we must understand our own weaknesses, our own faults, before we can conquer them. All these teachings of Gandhi are applicable to our modern way of life just as they were in the kind of life he was urging on his people. His inspirational leadership finally won freedom for his people—and it was achieved without war [...] the spirit is as valid as it ever was.[1]

The United States, and of course the whole world, is poorer in many ways for not having heeded Gandhi's powerful message as it is conveyed by Eleanor. There was to be more engagement with Gandhi's legacy for our modern world, for cultivated upper-class Americans aspiring to democratic leadership, and, of course, some musing on India's own challenges, as well as her shortcomings, during and after Eleanor's sojourn in India. After her journey through the Middle East and Pakistan, Eleanor arrived in India to be greeted by Prime Minister Nehru and a group of welcoming dignitaries, including the US Ambassador Chester Bowles and his wife. She recalls the graciousness, affection and hospitality of Nehru, his sister Vijaya Lakshmi, Amrit Kaur (a Christian Gandhian disciple), and a few others assigned to take care of her during her memorable stay. In several meetings with her ever-charming hosts, Eleanor discussed India's beleaguered caste system (from which, in their own ways, Gandhi and Ambedkar, leader of the so-called "Untouchables" or Dalits, had tried to free India), the high birth-rate and hence population expansion, food, agriculture and production needs, inequities and lack of adequate resources or vision in distributing education at all levels of the society, and the devaluing of the Hindu ideal of renunciation. At the same time she acknowledged feeling the impact that Gandhi's presence and approach had left behind on our attachments to the material world: his frugal simplicity and humble disposition; his way of urging people to be self-reliant on green technology; his way of working through village cooperatives, etc., rather than being dependent on mass industrial productions and the urban lure (Roosevelt 1953: My Day 27 Jan.). She was also moved by Gandhi's personalized spirituality which resonated with her own more ecumenical attitude, albeit within her adopted Episcopalian leanings. She seemed most attracted by Gandhi's teaching of being prepared to open one's

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[1] See the entry for "My Day", 27 January 1953: http://www.gwu.edu/~erpapers/myday/displaydoc.cfm?_y=1953&_f=md002442

heart to loving one another, even in the face of the greatest opposition, unleashing chivalry and enmity, and other adversities in the process.

It is little known, and not even Hazel's biography makes any reference to it, that Eleanor wrote a book after her return from India and the East, giving it the title *India and the Awakening East* (1953). It is instructive that in this title she chose to refer specifically to India alone, among the countries she visited in this venture, the others being Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Israel, Pakistan, Nepal, Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The chapter on India is the most detailed segment in this book, providing her impressions of the many historic and cultural sites she visited in the "crowded" north and "cleaner" south, as well as humorous personal anecdotes, for example about an elusive mouse brushing past her forehead in the middle of the dark night, the boat journey through the lush yet frighteningly dense waterways of Kerala, and so forth, together with a few representative photographs.

One of her first acts was to pay tribute to Gandhi on behalf of the US at his S*amadhi* (the memorial site of his funeral pyre) in Rajghat by the Yamuna River in New Delhi. She found this a moving experience, and planted a tree indigenous to North America.

She became intensely aware of India's poverty compared with its immense potential, workforce and natural resources, but most importantly the potential for people to live in freedom in an indigenously crafted democracy (that may never be like that of the US), where peaceful and reconciliatory means are used to confront any difficult hurdle or confrontational challenge. While US foreign policy extended aid to India, Indian intellectuals, from those at the top to the subalterns, were starkly aware, given how the British East Company had tricked them in the 1800s into submission to British sovereignty, that "American imperialism and the Almighty Dollar" constitute the "fearsome shibboleth" that hides political traps. The US, then as now, was held in some suspicion by countries in the East, and India had opted for a non-alignment strategy instead of becoming embroiled in the tensions of the Cold War tussle for the status of World Power between the US and the Soviet Union. Eleanor worked with Ambassador Bowles to dissuade the Indians from fearing the US, and persuade them to accept aid for the expansive agricultural, irrigation, fertilizer and food production plans, alongside dams, power stations and hydroelectric plants. She advised on how India's educational system could be overhauled using Deweyan principles (which Gandhi had already been implementing but at the level of local villages), so that technical experts of all kinds, from mechanics to molecular scientists, could be trained.

Eleanor was acutely aware that despite India's official policy of non-alignment (which Nehru had forged with Nasr of Egypt, Sukarno of

Indonesia, and Richard Wright from Black America, in Bandung, Indonesia), when under pressure India was more disposed, economically and politically, to the Soviet Union than to the United States. In a telling open letter to Eleanor, written by students in Allahabad University, which she had just visited and addressed, it was pointed out that her suggestion that Communism be fought with bread instead of guns reveals the US imperialist scheme of using "bread" as a weapon of interference in the internal politics of other countries. The letter also included a list of sixteen questions the students had prepared. It is as though the radical elements in subaltern Indian politics were hauling Eleanor over the coals about her seemingly elitist hobnobbing with well-rehearsed government officials and their lackeys who did not show her the true face of India: its slums, its remote villages, the extent of poverty, the curse of the benighted caste system, and not least whether US capital was trying to buy India out of its malaise purely for humanitarian concerns or for imperialist interests. The more direct questions pertained to the US's domestic and foreign policy debacles, in particular, the insistent checking on communism in Asia, instead of encouraging the "third force" of non-alignment politics, and the dismal record of the US in respect to "discrimination, color prejudice and Negro lynching", as well as the hounding of "reds-under-the bed" (i.e., heading towards McCarthyism) (Roosevelt 1953: 189). This letter made Eleanor realize why Indians, especially those who were students and workers, are attracted to communism, despite Stalin and the repressive regime under Mao Zedong in China, and why West Bengal and the southern state of Kerala were "trophy" states for the Indian communist parties. Nehru tried to assure Eleanor that Hindu religion with its emphasis on nonviolence and truth was incompatible with communism, "and that there was no danger that communism would ever gain a real foothold in India" (Roosevelt 1953: 190).

She also witnessed the exemplary legacy of Rabindranath Tagore, an intimate friend of Gandhi and great poet and educator (who was a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature for his Yeats-like poetical writing, *Gitanjali*), and saw, in his pedagogical experiment at Shantiniketan, outside Calcutta, how a communal living-cum-university system could constructively address numerous issues in post-colonial Indian. How could India, she wondered, have been blessed with two such giant intellects and socio-cultural leaders in the same half-century, while the US was struggling to claim even one? Perhaps she was forgetting her own husband, with a fair amount of prodding from behind the scenes by her own determined intellect, and Martin Luther King Jr, while John F. Kennedy was waiting to burst forth over the US horizon; they would not be regarded as mean achievers when it comes to comparisons.

Eleanor was never to forget her experience and the lessons the Indians, wearied by a dreadful colonial past, had imparted to her by their own forthrightness. After her Indian exposure, her sympathy grew for Pauli Murray's more engaged and activist approach that was as much informed by her communist predilections as by the Gandhian nonviolent method, and she could fully embrace the saint-like persona of Martin Luther King Jr, not only because he symbolized the century-long struggle for Black liberation after the end of slavery, but also because he bore all the hallmarks of a Gandhian prophet being raised on US soil.

This story must end here, and return to a conversation with Hazel one bright sunny New York morning as we strolled along Avenue of The Americas. I suggested she could do her next biography on Gandhi's wife, Kasturba Bai, a towering figure and liberationist in her own right. I added that Kasturba Bai helped mobilize women in the freedom struggle movement and opened the doors for women's involvement in political action. Hazel was intrigued, excited by this idea for a moment, flinging her tawny arms up and down as if she were leading a segment of the Salt March herself, but then decided against it for a number of reasons, not least that she did not know the languages and wasn't yet ready to whisk herself across to India (although one or two of her best friends at Columbia University were Indians). Perhaps she could have combined two studies in a two-act biographical novella, bringing together Pauli Murray and Kasturba Gandhi, with the powerful apparition of Eleanor Roosevelt looming in the background, behind the curtains. All may be revealed in Hazel's "New York Diaries", which I hope someday will be edited and archived.

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