EMPIRE'S SOLDIER: GANDHI AND BRITAIN'S WARS, 1899-1918

Goolam Vahed[1] and Ashwin Desai[2]

Abstract

Towards the latter stages of World War I, Mohandas K Gandhi urged Indian peasants to take up arms on behalf of the British. This alienated his liberal pacifist supporters in Europe who were aghast that the apostle of non-violence had seemingly disavowed his own teachings. But Gandhi, during his South African sojourn from 1893-1914, had openly declared his enthusiasm to support the British Empire in its attempts to assume hegemony in the region. He participated on the side of the British in the brutal South African War of 1899-1902 and in their violent suppression of the Zulu uprising in 1906. Alongside this, he formulated his ideas of ***Satyagraha****. This article traces Gandhi's South African years from 1893 to 1914 and seeks to make sense of the apparent contradiction of his taking up arms on behalf of the Raj during the war. This is done in the context of his attachment to the Empire.*

Keywords: Gandhi; Satyagraha; passive resistance; Empire; India; Zulu; World War I.

Sleutelwoorde: Gandhi; Satyagraha; passiewe verset; Britse ryk; Indië; Zulu; Eerste Wêreldoorlog.

> "Though Empires have gone and fallen, this Empire may perhaps be an exception ... It is not founded on material but on spiritual foundations ... the British constitution."
>
> Mohandas K Gandhi[3]

1. INTRODUCTION

The 2014 commemoration of the centenary of the First World War provided new perspectives on a range of aspects of the war, including its origins and impact on black people. This article focuses on the attitude of one of the twentieth-century's iconic figures of non-violence towards the war. Mohandas K Gandhi's journey from English-trained lawyer to defender of the rights of South African Indians to leader of non-violent resistance to British colonial rule in India has been extensively chronicled, especially by Gandhi himself in the many volumes of his *Collected Works*. His story spans the first half of the 20th century, a period marked by two world wars and horrific violence. Gandhi's work is the stuff of legend because of its insistence on non-violent resistance and his sense of simplicity, discipline and

1 Associate Professor, Department of History, University of KwaZulu-Natal. E-mail: vahedg@ukzn.ac.za
2 Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Johannesburg. E-mail: ashdesai1@gmail.com
3 MB Green, *Gandhi: a voice of a new age revolution* (New York: Continuum, 1993), p. 208.

redemption. The manner of his death in January 1947 – at the hands of a right wing Hindu bullet – made his commitment to non-violence more profound.[4]

As intellectual pursuits go, countless works sought to explore the roots of the making of the Mahatma. These mostly see Gandhi evolve through deep self-reflection and on-going practice. His coming out as a Mahatma is best exemplified in his dropping of the suit and tie and the donning of the *dhoti* during the 1913 strike in South Africa.[5] Physicist Albert Einstein gushed in 1944, "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."[6] However, despite the hagiographies and Gandhi's own extensive (re)writing, works such as those of Maureen Swan and, more recently, Joseph Leylveld, have opened Gandhi's life and ideas to critical scrutiny.[7]

These critical works however have not sullied the overwhelming halo cast over the life of Gandhi. The central narrative in this journey is that Gandhi "experimented" with a series of truths on African soil and found the right ingredients to transform himself into a Mahatma. Truth is often more complex than received wisdom and this article critically interrogates Gandhi's South African journey, paying particular attention to his attitude towards war in the context of his commitment to non-violence.

2. GANDHI'S SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNEY

The narrative of Gandhi's years in South Africa is well known. He was born in Porbandar in 1869, qualified as a lawyer in England in 1891 and while struggling to establish a legal practice, a trader from his native Porbandar offered him a year's employment in South Africa to assist in a legal matter. Gandhi arrived in Durban in 1893. He purchased a first-class ticket to Pretoria, where the case was to be heard, but he was thrown off the train in Pietermaritzburg, where a statue now stands in his honour, when he refused to move to the third-class carriage reserved for blacks, or "coolies" as Indians were referred to. Gandhi's arrival coincided with self-government for Natal in 1893 and white politicians and settlers applied pressure for anti-Indian legislation to curb the so-called "Asiatic menace". A Franchise

4 "Gandhiji shot dead", *The Hindu*, 31 January 1948. According to the report, Gandhi was assasinated by 36 year old Vinayak Godse, editor of a local newspaper, *Hindu Rashtra*, published in Laxminet, Poona.

5 See Jonathan Hyslop, "Gandhi 1895-1915: the transnational emergence of a public figure", in JM Brown and A Parel (eds), *The Cambridge companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

6 From <http://www.quotes.net/quote/9238>, accessed 23 October 2014.

7 Joseph Lelyveld, *Great soul. Mahatma Gandhi and his struggle with India* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2011); Maureen Swann, *Gandhi. The South African experience* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985).

Amendment Bill, introduced in 1894, was designed to limit Indian franchise. Indian traders asked Gandhi to assist in the campaign against the Bill and they formed the Natal Indian Congress (NIC) on 22 August 1894 to provide organisational impetus to the struggle to maintain and protect the rights of Indians in South Africa.[8]

This did not prevent the Natal government from passing a slew of anti-Indian legislation which aimed to force Indians to re-indenture or return to India upon completing their indenture. This was meant to legally subordinate non-indentured Indians and ease white fears about the so-called "Asiatic menace". The law was used as a blunt instrument to ensure that Indians did not threaten white supremacy. Each year brought more laws, restrictions and penalties.[9]

During these years Gandhi established himself as a political leader. The strategy of Gandhi and the NIC in the face of growing anti-Indian sentiment in the 1890s, was primarily constitutional. He visited India in 1896 to publicise the plight of Indians in South Africa. In India he published *The green pamphlet,* formally titled, *The grievances of the British Indians in South Africa: an appeal to the Indian public*, which made him into a public figure. This protest failed to stem the tide of anti-Indianism and Gandhi returned to India in October 1901. When it seemed that he might have to make a go of becoming a lawyer in India, he received an urgent request from Indians in the Transvaal for assistance against post-war anti-Asiatic legislation.[10]

Gandhi set sail for South Africa at the end of November 1902 and reached Natal towards the end of December and headed straight to the Transvaal where he enrolled as an attorney of the Supreme Court and founded the Transvaal British Indian Association (TBIA). The Transvaal government passed a law in 1906 making it compulsory for Indians to carry a pass bearing their thumbprint. This created fear and anger among Indians who voted at a mass meeting, attended by 3 000 people, that they would undertake passive resistance rather than apply for registration. Gandhi travelled to England to put the case before Lord Elgin, the Colonial Secretary, but the Pass Law (Act 2 of 1907) was implemented in 1907.[11]

Passive resistance began in December 1907 and by January 1908, 2 000 Asians (some Chinese joined the protest) were jailed.[12] Gandhi himself was jailed several times. He eventually reached a compromise with General Smuts, the

8 Surendra Bhana and Goolam Vahed, *The making of a social reformer. Mahatma Gandhi in South Africa, 1893-1914* (Delhi: Manohar Books, 2005), pp. 11-25.

9 MW Swanson, "The Asiatic menace: creating segregation in Durban, 1870-1900", *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 16(3), 1983, pp. 401-421.

10 For details, see Goolam Vahed, *The making of Indian identities in South Africa* (PhD, Indiana University, Bloomington, 1995), pp. 20-38.

11 Bala Pillay, *British Indians in the Transvaal: trade, politics and imperial relations, 1885-1906* (London: Longman, 1976), pp. 50-74.

12 See Karen L Harris, "Gandhi, the Chinese and passive resistance", in Judith Brown and M Prozesky, *Gandhi in South Africa: principles and politics* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996), pp. 69-94.

Transvaal Colonial Secretary, that the Act would be repealed if Indians registered voluntarily. Gandhi was criticised by some Indians for this compromise, while Smuts denied making such a promise, leading to a political impasse. Gandhi sought the support of the British government throughout this campaign, making the long journey by ship to London in 1906 and 1909, falsely believing that the British would act to safeguard Indian rights. Instead, with Afrikaners rapidly gaining political power, the Union of South Africa was born in 1910 as British capital and Afrikaner nationalism entered into what David Yudelman (1984) called a "symbiotic" relationship. "Non-whites" were excluded from political and economic power and subject to repressive white minority rule.[13]

Gandhi founded the *Indian Opinion* newspaper in 1903, using it to spread news about the plight of Indians and their various campaigns. In seeking to defend the rights of Indians, Gandhi was also thinking about the ways in which such a struggle should be conducted and he was also experimenting with his personal life. This journey would lead him to establish the Phoenix Settlement. At the core of his evolving world views was non-violent and non-constitutional direct action.[14] Gandhi believed that people have a moral obligation to resist injustice, arguing that "civil disobedience becomes a sacred duty when the State has become lawless".[15]

When Gandhi returned from London at the end of 1909, he established the Tolstoy Farm in 1910, to which he and the families of jailed resisters retreated. Gandhi next came to the fore in late 1912 when Indian nationalist statesman, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, toured the country. Gokhale met with Smuts and Indians with the impression that the government would repeal the £3 tax. When the government denied this, Gandhi launched another passive resistance campaign in October 1913 for the repeal of the tax and several other grievances. Thousands of Indian coal miners and workers on sugar plantations, who were directly affected by the tax, joined the strike. The violence associated with the strike and the resulting international publicity led to the British government applying pressure on the South African government to reach agreement. The Smuts-Gandhi Agreement of 1914 led to the repeal of the tax. However, Gandhi conceded the right of further Indian immigration to South Africa.[16]

13 David Yudelman, *The emergence of modern South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1984).

14 Bidyut Chakrabart, *Social and political thought of Mahatma Gandhi* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 9.

15 *Young India*, 5 January 1922, in Ronald J Terchek, "Conflict and nonviolence", in Judith M Brown and Anthony Parel (eds), *The Cambridge companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 117-134.

16 See Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed. *Inside Indian indenture. The South African experience, 1860-1911* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2010), pp. 357-370.

Gandhi left South Africa in June 1914 to return to India. His reputation as an apostle of non-violence was firmly established; a view reinforced by biographies by the Reverend Doke and Henry Polak, which were widely distributed internationally.[17]

Yet, a critical reading of Gandhi's South African years sees him as a disenfranchised colonial, seeking inclusion in the Imperial order. He saw Indians as British subjects who should enjoy full rights within the confines of the British Empire. Gandhi's core argument was that passenger Indians came to Natal as "British" subjects and were priviledged to Queen Victoria's 1858 Proclamation which asserted the equality of all British subjects. This strategy came up against white settlers who sought racially exclusive political power and who subjected Indians to racially discriminatory laws.[18]

Still, Gandhi persisted with the strategy of raising the Proclamation, even in the wake of its failure to find purchase with the British. He was imbued with the idea of Imperial brotherhood and this led him time and again to beseech the Crown to advance the rights of Indian British subjects in Southern Africa.

3. THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899-1902

In addition to the British, in the South African environment of the late 19th century, Gandhi had to contend with an African majority who were subject to brutal subjugation and dispossession of land, together with the Boers who had been involved in murderous wars with Africans but were now on the brink of war with the British. Gandhi organised an ambulance bearer corps to assist the British in their war with the Boers. Some have sought to justify Gandhi's decision to show loyalty to the British.

Ramachandra Guha approvingly quotes historian Peter Warwick that African "volunteers believed-or-hoped-that a British victory would bring about an extension of political, educational and commercial opportunities for black people".[19] But Africans fought on both sides of the war, making up "around a quarter of the total Boer manpower in the first phase of the war"[20] and used the conflict to take back lost land. However, Boer and Brit joined forces at the end of the war "to shore up the supremacy of white men and defend white property […] in the Transvaal".[21]

17 Joseph J Doke, *M.K. Gandhi. An Indian patriot in South Africa* (London: The London Indian Chronicle, 1909); Henry SL Polak, *M.K. Gandhi. A sketch of his life and work* (Madras: G.A. Natesan & Company, 1910).

18 Sukanya Banerjee, *Becoming imperial citizens. Indians in the late-Victorian Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 23.

19 Ramachandra Guha, *Gandhi before India* (London: Penguin India, 2013), p. 138.

20 Shula Marks, "War and Union, 1899-1901", in Robert Ross, Ann Kelk Mager and Bill Nasson (eds), *The Cambridge History of South Africa,* Volume 2: *1885-1994* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 157-210.

21 Marks, p. 164.

While many Africans tried creatively to claw back what had been lost in the wars of dispossession, Gandhi was busy trying to obtain official recognition of Indian involvement in the war as stretcher-bearers. The Colonial Secretary turned down Gandhi's request on 9 March 1900 for the chocolate which, he said, was for non-commissioned officers only.[22] When the ambulance corps disbanded, Gandhi wrote to British authorities for "discharges" similar to those given to whites. Indians wanted something in writing "to show that they had the privilege of serving the Queen during the war".

C Donnelly, District Engineer in Durban, wrote to FL Barnes, Chief Engineer, Public Works Department, on 12 July 1900, that Gandhi would "make political capital out of this, and point out how the Indians volunteered for service whereas I(?) distinctly states they never did; they could not possibly avoid going according to their terms of indentureship". Percy Clarence, Superintendent of the Indian Ambulance Corps, considered the request "absurd […] the indentured Indians were not volunteers but were sent by their masters".[23] Even some local white settlers feared that Indians would make political capital of their involvement. In a letter to the *Natal Mercury* on 3 February 1900, "Perambulator" felt that "there would never be an end of writers pointing out that the Indians conquered the Boers and saved Natal from extermination". "Colonist" felt that Indians went to the front "purely from mercenary motives" and that Africans "would have gone for half the pay".[24]

Gandhi hoped that participation, as he wrote to the Colonial Secretary on 19 October 1899, would "bind closer still the different parts of the mighty empire of which we are so proud".[25] In seeking recognition for services rendered by Indian stretcher-bearers in the South African war, the scorched earth policy of the British, the war deaths in concentration camps, the thousands of Africans who died out of hunger and starvation in what was referred to as "methods of barbarism",[26] were overlooked by Gandhi. Despite the outcome of the South African War, Gandhi did not give up on the idea of imperial citizenship. This meant eschewing an alliance with Africans and acting in tacit concert with, or at least turning a blind eye to, the British in their bulldozing of African lives and land.

Gandhi's decision to show loyalty to the Empire failed. But by the time the Treaty of Vereeniging brought the war to an end in 1902, the British abandoned any pretence that they supported clauses protecting Indians against racial discrimination. Indeed, racial legislation aimed at Indians gathered force in the years following the war.

22 NAB, CSO 1641, 1462/1900.
23 Goolam Vahed, "'African Gandhi': the South African War and loss of imperial identity", *Historia*, June 2000, pp. 201-219.
24 *Natal Mercury*, 14 December 1900.
25 Vahed, "African Gandhi".
26 See Denis Judd and Keith Surridge, *The Boer War: a history* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013).

4. SERGEANT MAJOR GANDHI AND THE BAMBATHA REBELLION OF 1906[27]

The land grab by both Boer and Brit devastated the Zulu economy. The subsequent looting of the heart of the Zulu kingdom in Ulundi in 1879 by the British accelerated white dispossession of African land. This was accompanied by a series of punitive sanctions. A new one pound tax was levied on all unmarried males over the age of 18 in 1905. By now, the migrant labour system was feeding cheap African bodies to the mines. Dispossession and taxes broke homes, decimated local economies, put thousands of Africans on the move to the edge of cities where they eked out a pitiful existence.[28]

In 1906, Zulus led by Chief Bambatha rose up in rebellion against the tax and the unyielding stranglehold of white power that looted land and cattle in the most vicious manner. Gandhi saw the rebellion as another opportunity to prove his loyalty to the British Crown and once more offered Indian services as stretcher-bearers. On 7 April 1906, a few weeks before Gandhi left for the front, the *Indian Opinion* reported on the use of cannons by the British to kill a dozen or so Africans in response to the death of two whites.[29] Yet the *Indian Opinion* opined,

> "What is our duty in these calamitous times in the Colony? It is not for me to say whether the revolt of the Kaffirs is justified or not. We are in Natal by value of British power. Our very existence depends upon it. It is therefore our duty to render help."[30]

The NIC passed a resolution in support of participation in the war at its meeting on 24 April. Gandhi wrote in the *Indian Opinion* on 28 April 1906 that Bambatha was still at large and maintained that, "It was right and proper of the Indian community to have gone to the help of the Government at such a time. If Indians had not 'made the offer', a slur would have been put on our good name forever."

The Indian corps did duty from 22 June to 19 July 1906. The rebellion was brutally suppressed and its results were devastating for Africans.

> "Almost four thousand Africans were killed and tens of thousands rendered homeless; white casualties were trifling. In the aftermath of the rebellion, the pace of proletarianisation

27 For a discussion of the causes and course of the Rebellion, see Jeff Guy, *Remembering the Rebellion: the Zulu uprising of 1906* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2006); Jeff Guy, *The Maphumulo uprising: war, law and ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005); Paul S Thompson, *An historical atlas of the Zulu Rebellion of 1906* (Scottsville: Privately published, 2001); Michael Mahoney, *Between the Zulu chief and the great white chief: political culture in a Natal Kingdom: 1879-1906* ((PhD, University of California, Los Angeles, 1998); John Labandand and Ian Knight, *The Anglo-Zulu War* (Stroud: Sutton, 1996).

28 Marks, p. 466.

29 *Indian Opinion*, 7 April 1906.

30 *Ibid*., 14 April 1906.

> quickened as destitute people, driven from the land, were forced to seek employment on white farms, mines and industries."[31]

All this appears to have been lost on Gandhi. His silence makes it difficult to defend the idea that Gandhi was simply a "captive of the times".

The Gandhian pattern that emerges during the South African War and the Bambatha Rebellion is the use of war and violence as opportunities to display loyalty to local settlers and, by extension, to the British Empire. Ironically, on both occasions, Gandhi was on the side of those with the most fire-power. In Gandhi's notion of *satyagraha*, one can already see how he saw war as an opportunity to develop the "soldierly ethos", the sense of discipline and the idea of following a leader's orders. In exhorting Indians to make common cause with the British during the Bambatha Rebellion, Gandhi wrote in 1906,

> "A man going to the battle front has to train himself to endure severe hardship. He is obliged to cultivate the habit of living in comradeship with large numbers of men. He easily learns to make do with simple food. He is required to keep regular hours. He forms the habit of obeying his superior's orders promptly and without argument. He also learns to discipline the movement of his limbs. And he has also to learn how to live in a limited space according to maxims of health."[32]

5. WORLD WAR I

Gandhi was in London when the First World War broke out. He surprised his supporters by recruiting Indians for non-combatant roles in the war. He wanted young Indians to contribute to the war effort alongside their English counterparts and prove that they were ready for self-government. Around 80 Indian students joined Gandhi's ambulance corps, which was treated officially as a Red Cross Detachment.[33] On 13 August 1914, Gandhi, Indian poetess, Sarojini Naidu, and 50 others circulated a letter to Indians in the UK that they, "after mature deliberation, decided for the sake of the Motherland and the Empire to place our services unconditionally, during this crisis, at the disposal of the authorities".[34] On 14 August they offered their services to the Undersecretary of State for India. This was an expression of "our desire to share the responsibilities of membership of this great Empire, if we would share its privileges".[35]

These reports shocked Gandhi's liberal friends from South Africa, such as Elizabeth Molteno, Emily Hobhouse and Olive Schreiner, who were in England working with conscientious objectors. Schreiner chided Gandhi for volunteering to

31 Marks, p. 202.
32 Yogesh Chada, *Rediscovering Gandhi* (London: Century Books, 1983), p. 110.
33 See Peter Brock's "Gandhi's non-violence and his war service", *Gandhi Marg* 23(2), February 1981, pp. 601-616.
34 *Indian Opinion*, 16 September 1914.
35 *Ibid*.

raise a corps for the British. Gandhi knew Olive Schreiner (1855-1920), sister of the last Cape Colony prime minister, WP Schreiner, from around 1907 and wrote in an editorial in the *Indian Opinion* (2 January 1909) that Schreiner was of "greater permanent value to the world than a continent of Napoleons".[36] Schreiner wrote to Gandhi on 15 August 1914,

> "I was struck to the heart this morning with sorrow to see that you, and that beautiful and beloved Indian poetess whom I met in London some months ago [Sarojini Naidu] and other Indian friends had offered to serve the English Government in this evil war in any way they might demand of you. Surely you, who would not take up arms even in the cause of your own oppressed people, cannot be willing to shed blood in this wicked cause. I had longed to meet you and Mr. Kallenbach as friends who would understand my hatred of it. I don't believe the statement in the paper can be true."

Gandhi wrote on 26 August 1914 that he and 59 others were in a three month ambulance training course[37] under Dr James Cantle and were to serve with the Indian Army in Europe under the command of Lieutenant Colonel RJ Barker of the Indian Medical Service (retired).[38] Gandhi wrote to his nephew, Maganlal, on 18 September that they were to receive two more months of training before going to the Front. He also explained his war stance. He had said that participation in any form amounted to support of the war, but by merely living in England, "I was in a way participating in the war. London owes the food it gets in wartime to the protection of the Navy […] It seemed to me a base thing, therefore, to accept food tainted by war without working for it."[39] Gandhi wrote to Pragji Desai, a South African *satyagrahi*, on 15 November 1914 that he was committed to *satyagraha*, but had not developed "absolute fearlessness" to disappear into the mountains to survive on grass and leaves.[40] As long as he was in London, he felt compelled to serve the British.

Indian volunteers received recognition from the War Office as the Indian Field Ambulance Corps on 30 September 1914.[41] Corps members experienced several problems: corporals were appointed without consultation, rations were insufficient and blankets were too short and too few in number. They passed a resolution on 13 October 1914 that, unless these issues were discussed, they would stop drilling. The issues were eventually resolved and on 4 November the Indian Volunteer Corps issued a circular for more volunteers as 470 wounded Indian soldiers had arrived at the Netley

36 *Ibid*., 2 January 1909.
37 *MK* Gandhi, *Collected works of Mahatma Gandhi. Collected works on Mahatma Gandhi (CWMG)* 14, p. 286.
38 Circular, "Indian Field Ambulance Training Corps", 22 September 1914, in *CWMG* 14, pp. 291-292.
39 *CWMG* 14, p. 290.
40 *Ibid*., pp. 313-314.
41 *Indian Opinion*, 4 November 1914.

Hospital. The need for 200 more volunteers was urgent. "It should be considered a proud privilege for us to be able to nurse our own wounded countrymen."[42]

Gandhi returned to India on 18 December 1914, being denied the opportunity to take part in the Corps due to illness. He was given a farewell reception at the Westminster Hotel in London. Guests included Charles Roberts, Sir Henry Cotton, Olive Schreiner, and Henry and Millie Polak, all of whom spoke in his honour. Gandhi said that he regretted not being able to take part in the Corps and thanked Charles and Lady Cecilia Roberts for understanding the Indian contribution and taking excellent care of him.[43]

In India, Gandhi initially remained out of the public limelight. He did promise the British Governor of Bombay, Lord Willingdon, that he would consult him before embarking on political campaigns. While Gandhi was considering his next move, some members of the Indian National Congress (INC) were pushing for *Swaraj* ("home-rule"). Gandhi did not join these factions. Instead he established a settlement in May 1915 near Ahmedabad in Gujarat and entered public life in February 1916, when he spoke at the opening of the Hindu University in Benares of the terrible conditions of the poorer classes. He called for complete social transformation of Indian society, rather than an Indian elite replacing the British ruling class.[44]

Instead of joining advocates of home-rule, Gandhi once more sought to recruit volunteers for the Indian Army fighting for the British. Many people have difficulty reconciling this recruitment drive with the Gandhi who preached non-violence authority. This time Gandhi did not recruit non-combatants as he did in 1899, 1906 and 1914, but combatants in response to the British Viceroy Lord Chelmsford's Indian War Conference (also known as manpower conference) in Delhi from 27 to 29 April 1918. The conference discussed ways to increase support among all classes in India to prosecute the war with increased vigour and effort in Egypt, Palestine, and Mesopotamia in particular. The conference resolved to recruit half a million Indians, starting in June 1918.[45] In his speech, Gandhi said that he supported the resolution "with a full sense of responsibility".[46]

The British had not been able to defeat the Germans with the assistance of the French and the Russians and the problem was compounded with the withdrawal of Britain's ally, Russia, in 1917 due to revolution. The French were in decline and there was political instability in Rome. The German tactic of destroying British ships with U-boats was hurting the British economically. Domestically, there was great agitation over rationing and conscription in Britain. The British needed

42 *CWMG* 14, pp. 295-310.
43 *Indian Opinion*, 27 January 1915, in *CWMG* 14, pp. 323-324.
44 *CWMG* 16, p. 434.
45 Budheswar Pati, *India and the First World War* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1996), p. 33.
46 *CWMG* 17, p. 5.

manpower and passed the Military Service Act 1918 in February 1918, which removed certain exemptions, while the Military Service (No 2) Act 1918 of April 1918 raised the age of conscription from 41 to 50 and allowed for extension to 56, as well as for conscription in Ireland. The latter provision was doomed by opposition from Ireland. India, however, provided a solution to the crisis.[47]

The resolution at the April conference, and Gandhi's support for it, stands in contrast to the sentiments of others who saw the war as an opportunity to press their claims for home-rule. Gandhi offered different justifications for his actions. One was the nationalist argument that Indians had to contribute to the defence of the Empire if Indians were demanding equal status within that Empire.[48] Gandhi by now envisaged dominion status for India, such as that enjoyed by Australia and Canada.[49] Gandhi argued that defending the Empire would "accelerate" home-rule. It would be "national suicide not to recognise this elementary truth. We must perceive that if we save the Empire, we have in that very act secured Home Rule." Gandhi warned the Viceroy that his sentiments were in the minority and concluded that he was writing because "I love the English nation, and I wish to evoke in every Indian the loyalty of the Englishman".[50]

At a speech at Patna on 25 May 1918, Gandhi reiterated that home-rule did not mean getting rid of the British; rather, they wanted to become partners in the British Empire. India should provide men for the war, but not make it contingent on self-rule as "any calamity that overtakes the Empire is one that overtakes India as well".[51]

Gandhi also felt that the war provided an opportunity for Indians to regain their warrior qualities, which had been lost as a result of subjugation to the British. Gandhi said in a speech in Surat on 1 August 1918 that, "Swaraj (Home Rule) is not for lawyers and doctors but only for those who possess strength of arms…. When the people become physically fit and strong enough to wield the sword, swaraj will be theirs for the asking [...]. Can a nation whose citizens are incapable of self-

47 Brock Millman, "A counsel of despair: British strategy and war aims, 1917-1919", *Journal for Contemporary History* 36(2), pp. 241-270.

48 *CWMG* 14, pp. 435-443, 453, 483; 15, pp. 1-3, 14.

49 At a speech at Nadiad, Gujarat, on 21 June 1918, Gandhi stated that "everyone needs a friend. Every country maintains a connection with another with which it is temperamentally allied. India can be no exception to this." Gandhi wanted a status similar to that of Australia and Canada who "enjoy protection and likewise help in the defence effort. That is exactly what we want for ourselves." Without British support "we would not be able to support ourselves. We could not protect ourselves against the criminal tribes or stand against an invading foreign army." *CWMG* 17, p. 79.

50 *CWMG* 17, p. 8. Letter to Viceroy, 29 April 1918.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 37.

defence, enjoy swaraj?"[52] At Patna, on 25 May 1918, Gandhi stated that the British respected those who "know how to die and who know how to kill".[53]

Gandhi's recruitment leaflet, dated 22 June 1918, added that in order to be regarded as equals of the British, Indians had to "learn the use of arms and to acquire the ability to defend ourselves. If we want to learn the use of arms with the greatest possible despatch, it is our duty to enlist in the army. There can be no friendship between the brave and the cowardly. We are regarded as a cowardly people. If we want to become free from reproach, we should learn the use of arms."[54]

Gandhi's decision to recruit on behalf of the British, Brock argues, was also influenced by the fact that he came to believe that non-violence could be achieved through acts of violence under certain conditions.[55] He wrote to Maganlal on 25 July 1918 that he had come to "see that there is non-violence in violence. […] I had not fully realised the duty of restraining a drunkard from doing evil, of killing a dog in agony or one infected with rabies. In all these instances, violence is in fact non-violence."[56]

Gandhi's stance nevertheless shocked many of his supporters and he had to write to the likes of English missionary CF Andrews,[57] Danish Lutheran missionary, Esther Faering,[58] with whom he exchanged many "love letters", his nephew Maganlal Gandhi who stayed with him in Phoenix,[59] his supporters from South Africa, Henry and Millie Polak,[60] and others, justifying his war recruitment.

Gandhi wrote to JL Maffey on 30 April 1918, offering his services for the Ambulance Corps.[61] Maffey forwarded the letter to the Governor of Bombay. J Crerar, Secretary to the Governor, wrote to Gandhi on 1 June 1918 that the Governor would like Gandhi to assist with recruiting in the Northern Division and hoped that Gandhi would attend a conference being convened at Delhi on 10 June to discuss this matter in greater detail.[62] L Robertson, Chief Secretary, Political Department, Government of Bombay, wrote to Gandhi on 7 June 1918 that a War Purposes Board would be formed at the conference and that they hoped that Gandhi would support it and agree to be a member. Gandhi replied on 9 June that he could not be part of the Board while leaders like Tilak of the Home Rule League were excluded.[63]

52 *Ibid.*, pp. 170-172.
53 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
54 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
55 Brock, pp. 601-616.
56 Gandhi – Maganlal Gandhi, 25 July 1918. *CWMG* 17, p. 150.
57 Gandhi and Andrews exchanged letters on 23 June 1918. *CWMG* 17, p. 88.
58 *Ibid*., pp. 24-25. Letter to Esther Faering, 11 May 1918.
59 *Ibid*., p. 43.
60 *Ibid*., p. 56, 7 June 1918.
61 *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.
62 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
63 *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

Tilak and members of the Home Rule League were invited to the conference but not given an opportunity to speak because their "loyalty" was conditional on self-rule being granted.[64] Gandhi nevertheless presided over a meeting in Bombay on 16 June to protest Lord Willingdon's conduct at the 10 June meeting. The day was observed as home-rule day. While Gandhi was critical of Lord Willingdon there was a rider, "we must redouble our efforts to help the authorities to prosecute the war. We must not be angered by Lord Willingdon's utterances into taking a false step ourselves. We have too much at stake." Gandhi did not share his countrymen's distrust of the government as resolutions were passed condemning Lord Willingdon's conduct, the method of recruitment and the fact that Indians were treated as second class members of the army (not able to carry arms, a racial bar in the army, not being admitted to military colleges).[65]

Gandhi began his recruitment campaign with a speech at Nadiad, Gujarat, on 21 June 1918, but took ill in mid-August and could not participate in the war. He had hoped to go to France or Mesopotamia as a non-combatant to serve alongside his recruits. He wrote in his autobiography that he felt "great relief" that the war had ended with him not having to fight,[66] but he never renounced his recruitment stand.

6. CONCLUSION

Gandhi offered his services to the British army on four occasions – 1899, 1906, 1914, and 1918. While this appears to be in contradiction with his principles of non-violence or *Satyagraha*, it was consistent with his view that as a loyal citizen of the Empire, working to transform that Empire into a multinational commonwealth, it was his duty to reciprocate support for the Empire.

Gandhi's attitude towards the Empire changed in the years following the war. World War I ended on 11 November 1918 as Gandhi lay ill in his bed in his *ashram*. He and most Indians had remained loyal to the British during the war and Indian soldiers had fought courageously for the Empire in many parts of the world.[67] The war was a drain on British resources and Britain was never again as powerful. In India itself, the destruction of the Ottoman Empire led many Indian Muslims to agitate against the British Empire. And with the British proclaiming that they were fighting for freedom, the maintenance of the Empire was no longer ideologically sustainable.

64 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

65 *Ibid.*, p. 67.

66 Gandhi, *Autobiography*, part 5, chapter 28.

67 India contributed the largest contingent from all British colonies. India's 1,4 million compared to Canada's 640 000, Australia's 401 000, South Africa's 136 000 and New Zealand's 220 000. The British Isles contributed just over 6 million volunteers. Indians were recruited for military work services, railways, inland water transport, Ordinance Labour Corps and other positions such as telegraphists, cooks, carpenters, shoemakers, tailors, and washermen. Pati, p. 39.

When the British government followed the recommendations of the Rowlatt Committee of 1918 and passed the Rowlatt Act ("Black Act"), which gave it wide powers to quell sedition, including a continuation of wartime restrictions in India, such as curfews, the suppression of free speech, and detention without trial, a national work stoppage (*hartal*) was launched by the Indians. Protest culminated in the April 1919 Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in the Punjab when the British military blocked the entrance to Jallianwala Bagh, a walled courtyard in Amritsar, by firing on unarmed protesters, killing and wounding hundreds of Indians. Gandhi's loyalty to the Empire, which he saw as a guarantor of Indian freedom, as a dividend of a British victory in the war, suffered a mortal blow. In the 1920s and 1930s Gandhi was to increasingly turn non-violent resistance against British rule and for Indian independence.