Stolen from an Op-ed piece in the New York Times. If anyone objects, we'll take it down - can't reachMr Kristoff yet but wanted to bring you his thoughts soonest

Waiting for Gandhi by NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF

Published: July 9, 2010

Despite being stoned and tear-gassed on this trip, I find a reed of hope here. It's that some Palestinians are dabbling in a strategy of nonviolent resistance that just might be a game-changer.

The organizers hail the methods of Gandhi and the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., recognizing that nonviolent resistance could be a more powerful tool to achieve a Palestinian state than rockets and missiles. Bilin is one of several West Bank villages experimenting with these methods, so I followed protesters here as they marched to the Israeli security fence.

Most of the marchers were Palestinians, but some were also Israeli Jews and foreigners who support the Palestinian cause. They chanted slogans and waved placards as photographers snapped photos. At first the mood was festive and peaceful, and you could glimpse the potential of this approach.

But then a group of Palestinian youths began to throw rocks at Israeli troops. That's the biggest challenge: many Palestinians define "nonviolence" to include stone-throwing.

Soon after, the Israeli forces fired volleys of tear gas at us, and then charged. The protesters fled, some throwing rocks backward as they ran. It's a far cry from the heroism of Gandhi's followers, who refused even to raise their arms to ward off blows as they were clubbed.

(I brought my family with me on this trip, and my kids experienced the gamut: we were stoned by Palestinian kids in East Jerusalem, and tear-gassed by Israeli security forces in the West Bank.)

Another problem with these protests, aside from the fact that they aren't truly nonviolent, is they typically don't much confound the occupation authorities.

But imagine if Palestinians stopped the rock-throwing and put female pacifists in the lead. What if 1,000 women sat down peacefully on a road to block access to an illegal Jewish settlement built on Palestinian farmland? What if the women allowed themselves to be tear-gassed, beaten and arrested without a single rock being thrown? Those images would be on televisions around the world — particularly if hundreds more women marched in to replace

those hauled away.

"This is what Israel is most afraid of," said Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi, a prominent Palestinian who is calling for a nonviolent mass movement. He says Palestinians need to create their own version of Gandhi's famous 1930 salt march.

One genuinely peaceful initiative is a local boycott of goods produced by Jewish settlements on the West Bank. Another is the weekly demonstrations in the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah against evictions of Palestinians there. And in Gaza, some farmers have protested Israel's no-go security zones by publicly marching into those zones, even at the risk of being shot.

So far there is no Palestinian version of Martin Luther King Jr. But one candidate might be Ayed Morrar. A balding, mild-mannered activist, he was the mastermind behind the most successful initiative so far: nonviolent demonstrations a half-dozen years ago in the West Bank village of Budrus against Israel's construction of a security fence there. More than many other Palestinians, he has a shrewd sense of public relations.

"With nonviolent struggle, we can win the media battle," Mr. Morrar told me, speaking in English. "They always used to say that Palestinians are killers. With nonviolence, we can show that we are victims, that we are not against Jews but are against occupation."

Mr. Morrar spent six years in Israeli prisons but seems devoid of bitterness. He says that Israel has a right to protect itself by building a fence — but on its own land, not on the West Bank.

Most Palestinian demonstrations are overwhelmingly male, but in Budrus women played a central role. They were led by Mr. Morrar's quite amazing daughter, Iltezam Morrar. Then 15, she once blocked an Israeli bulldozer by diving in front of it (the bulldozer retreated, and she was unhurt).

Israeli security forces knew how to deal with bombers but were flummoxed by peaceful Palestinian women. Even when beaten and fired on with rubber bullets, the women persevered. Finally, Israel gave up. It rerouted the security fence to bypass nearly all of Budrus.

The saga is chronicled in this year's must-see documentary "Budrus," a riveting window into what might be possible if Palestinians adopted civil disobedience on a huge scale. In a sign of interest in nonviolent strategies, the documentary is scheduled to play in dozens of West Bank villages in the coming months, as well as at international film festivals.

I don't know whether Palestinians can create a peaceful mass movement that might change history, and their first challenge will be to suppress the stone-throwers and bring women into the forefront. But this grass-roots movement offers a ray of hope for less violence and more change.