

The Violence of Nonviolence: Problematizing Nonviolent Resistance in Iran and Egypt

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Abstract

Our central argument is that the hegemonic story of nonviolent resistance is reinforcing the underlying hegemonic story of neoliberalism. It is hard to dispute that the most popular brand of nonviolence, articulated by Gene Sharp and his followers, has helped people overthrow authoritarian regimes across the globe. Yet Sharp's nonviolence also promotes the spread of neoliberal freedom and democracy, which cause multiple forms of visible and invisible violence. This article's first section examines significant details in Sharp's hegemonic story of nonviolent resistance and problematizes its limited understanding of violence. The following section relates Sharp's approach to Iran's Green Movement and Egypt's Revolution. It shows how strategic nonviolence enabled these social movements, but also pushed them toward neoliberalism. The final section returns to the ideas and practices of Gandhi for a counter-hegemonic story of nonviolent resistance as well as freedom and democracy. We conclude that Gandhi's approach is more promising for people struggling toward ways of life promoting dignity, self-rule, and love of humanity, both in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world.

Keywords

Nonviolent Resistance, Hegemony, Neoliberalism, Violence, Self-Rule

We vividly remember our hopeful sentiments upon witnessing thousands of unarmed people taking to the streets in the Middle East, starting with Iran's Green Movement in June 2009 and culminating with Egypt's uprising in January 2011. Like others, we felt heartened by the promise of nonviolent social movements in countries with populations that have long suffered from oppressive domestic governments and destructive foreign interventions. Soon, though, we realized that the people's courageous struggles were in danger of perpetuating, rather than transforming, the human relations and global paradigm at the root of their suffering. We feared that

promising manifestations of *nonviolence* would end up reproducing various structures and forms of *violence*. Unfortunately, we were mostly right in both cases. Although the Green Movement displayed the Iranian population's capacity for resistance in the face of repressive domination, it did not bring down the Ahmadinejad government or contribute to improved social and economic conditions. And while Egyptians successfully overthrew the Mubarak regime, they eventually brought to power a president and a political party that have failed to enhance the quality of life and dignity of poor people in Egypt. (Note that we wrote this article before the recent fall of the Morsi regime.) What happened?

Iran's struggle began in the summer of 2009 as a nonviolent social movement seeking to elect Hossein Mousavi and reform the national government. In the initial few days, millions of people quietly walked the streets, demanding state recognition of civil rights, democratic accountability to the people, and the end of authoritarian rule. These silent marches soon turned into millions of loud screams demanding civil liberties and democratic accountability, with "Where is My Vote" as the most common slogan. Next, these demands turned into calls for "Death to the Dictator," shifting the target from reforming the political system to forcing the demise of Ahmadinejad's rule. The regime's attempt to regain control was quick, decisive, and brutal. Militants in the Green Movement responded in kind, although mostly with symbolic instead of physical means of violence, representing "the Iranian people" as good and "the Iranian state" as evil. As hope for reform turned into despair, millions of people changed from being active political participants to becoming private spectators, watching media events from the relative safety of their homes instead of risking their bodies through concerted action in public. While Iran's nonviolent social movement slowly dissolved, its regime survived. Four years later, the people's demands have not been met while poverty, social suffering, and political divisions continue to grow.

The 2011 uprising in Egypt was also a nonviolent social movement, with similar liberal-democratic demands as in Iran. After massive mobilizations across the country and occupation of Cairo's Tahrir Square on and after January 25, the Mubarak regime exercised its monopoly of violence and powers of persuasion to repress the

revolutionaries and regain control. With some notable exceptions, the actions of revolutionaries remained mostly peaceful, although many of the slogans and signs—including “Leave Now, Go 2 Hell,” “We Hate You, Mubarak,” and a poster of Mubarak’s face resembling Hitler—displayed symbolic violence. Unlike Iranians, the Egyptian people appeared to win when Mubarak resigned and left the country on February 11, 2011, leading to a take-over by the Supreme Council of Armed Forces (SCAF), which governed until the election of president Mohamed Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood party in June 2012. Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood continue to rule in collaboration with the military leadership, whereas the Egyptian people’s demands for bread, dignity, social equality, and state accountability have still not been met, despite the billions of dollars in U.S. aid and IMF loans received by the new regime (Petras 2012; Prashad 2012). Even the successful removal of a dictator has not significantly reduced the myriad forms of violence suffered by the majority of Egyptian people, especially by the most oppressed among them.

The tragic histories of nonviolent social movements in Iran and Egypt are not without precedents. The Indian independence movement led by Mohandas Gandhi, often seen as the first massive nonviolent social movement, resulted in the forced migration and bloodbath associated with the Partition of India. The South African anti-apartheid movement brought electoral victory to Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC), but has not reduced poverty or violence for millions of South Africans (Desai 2002; Klein 2007). And of course, the mostly nonviolent Iranian revolution of 1979 set the stage for violent domestic regimes in Iran and violent foreign policies in relation to Iran. Nevertheless, social and political scientists increasingly accept the idea that nonviolent social movements are more likely to succeed than violent resistance struggles, with growing influence on mainstream media discourse. In doing so, they pay insufficient attention to more subtle forms of violence within these nonviolent social movements and to visible as well as invisible violence in their aftermath, both in the past and present (Zunes 2009; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Peterson 2009; Kirkpatrick and Sanger 2011; Stolberg 2011).

Our essay problematizes the prevailing views on violence and nonviolence and offers an alternative view that is based on *our* reading

of Gandhi's thoughts, texts, and actions. It contrasts Gandhi's political ethics, guided by value-based reasoning in local contexts and a transformative vision of self-rule, with the instrumentalist approach to strategic nonviolent resistance developed by American political scientist Gene Sharp and promoted by his many advocates. Unlike Gandhi, Sharp excludes ethical considerations and cultural particularities from his writings on the politics of nonviolent action in order to highlight the value-neutrality, scientific rigor, and instrumentalist nature of his work (Sharp 1973). While our essay is mostly conceptual, it briefly returns to Iran's Green Movement and Egypt's uprising against Mubarak to illustrate key arguments, without claiming original or comprehensive analysis of these nonviolent social movements. The central question we explore is: How was it possible that nonviolent social movements like those in Iran and Egypt ended up reinforcing rather than reducing multiple forms of violence? Our basic argument is that by adopting Sharp's instrumentalist and strategic nonviolence, Iranian and Egyptian activists have primarily confronted the *visible* violence of domestic regimes *without* adequately addressing relatively *invisible* forms of structural, epistemic, and everyday violence caused by global neoliberal capitalism, embedded in their societies, and embodied in their relationships. In the process, they have unfortunately ignored the main purpose of Gandhian non-violence, which was to confront "the intimate enemy" infecting individual psyches and social interactions, and to experiment with alternative ways of life untainted by the dominant imperial mentality, not just to undermine tyrannical leaders and states.

GANDHI ON VIOLENCE AND NONVIOLENCE

To understand Gandhi's unique and wide-ranging approach to nonviolence, it is important to start with his broad conception of *himsa*, the Sanskrit word for violence. He basically saw violence as harm or injury in thought, word, or deed that undermines the capacity for self-realization of any living being (Naess 1974:38-43). For him, violence involved much more than the direct, physical, and visible attack of one person or group against another person or group. It also included relatively invisible dimensions such as the *structural violence* of exploitation and poverty, the *epistemic violence* of silencing subaltern people and subjugating their forms of knowledge, and the *everyday*

violence of routine ways of life that normalize indignities and prevent self-realization (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Bourgois 2004). According to Gandhi, modern capitalism produced institutionalized material suffering that undermined the ability of Indian people to meet basic human needs, while the modern state facilitated and legitimated economic injustices that, in his eyes, were the worst forms of violence (Iyer 2000:35; Farmer 1996; Galtung 1969). Proponents of modern civilization, moreover, asserted that the form of instrumental rationality prevailing in Europe was universally superior, and that non-European ways of thinking and indigenous cultures were therefore inferior. Gandhi strongly criticized the unfounded claim that the spread of European science and reason would promote global progress, and argued that preventing the capacity of subaltern people to speak their minds and be heard in their own languages was dehumanizing (Terchek 1998:78-81; Spivak 1988). And finally, he emphasized that individuals internalize violence in their lived experiences, normalizing these destructive forces in relations to themselves, loved ones, strangers, and communities (Terchek 1998:179-228). Gandhi recognized that violence was physical as well as psychological, shaping interactions with external as well as intimate enemies (Parel 1997; Nandy 1983).

Gandhi acknowledged that violence was an integral part of private and public life, shaping all human beings, relationships, and communities. He observed that:

Strictly speaking, no activity and no industry is possible without a certain amount of violence, no matter how little. Even the very process of living is impossible without a certain amount of violence. What we have to do is to minimize it to the greatest extent possible (Terchek 1998:190).

But the fact that some violence was inevitable did not invalidate the need to experiment with struggles against avoidable violence in specific situations.

Gandhi argued that modern civilization, imposed by the British Empire and generally accepted by Indian leaders, was

inextricably linked to visible as well as invisible violence in India. In his book *Hind Swaraj*, published long before he became leader of the Indian independence movement, he stressed that modern civilization was a disease infecting British as well as Indian people. It seduced them into being obsessed with bodily comforts instead of moral conduct, with personal wealth instead of the common good, with unbridled passions instead of disciplined struggles for autonomy, with life-corroding competition instead of loving association, and with mind-numbing machinery instead of dignified labor (Parel 1997:13-119). Shortly before the Salt March campaign, in December 1929, he specified the continuum of violence at the heart of British rule:

The British government in India has not only deprived the Indian people of their freedom but has based itself on the exploitation of the masses, and has ruined India economically, politically, culturally, and spiritually....

India has been ruined economically.... Village industries, such as hand-spinning, have been destroyed, leaving the peasantry idle for at least four months in the year.... Politically, India's status has never been so reduced as under the British regime. No reforms have given real political power to the people.... Culturally, the system of education has torn us from our moorings and our training has made us hug the very chains that bind us.... Spiritually,... the presence of an alien army of occupation... has made us think that we cannot look after ourselves or put up a defense against foreign aggression, or even defend our homes and families (Muzumdar 1934:43-44).

In short, the British Empire not only used visible military violence, but also less visible political, economic, cultural, and spiritual violence to dominate its Indian subjects. And most importantly for Gandhi, the forms of violence associated with Western civilization undermined the dignity and everyday life of Indian people, caused divisions within and

among Indian communities, and colonized Indian minds into “hugging the chains that bind us” and thinking that there was no viable alternative to modern ways of life, social structures, and political systems.

In *Hind Swaraj*, and throughout his activist career, Gandhi favored nonviolence as political and ethical means for minimizing violence and realizing his vision of *swaraj*, the Hindi word for national independence. Gandhi’s unique interpretation of *swaraj* emphasized that India could only be truly free if its people were free to govern themselves:

It is Swaraj when we learn to rule ourselves. It is, therefore, in the palm of our hands.... But such Swaraj has to be experienced, each for himself. One drowning man will never save another. Slaves ourselves, it would be a mere pretension to think of freeing others (Parel 1997:73).

His moral and practical concept of self-rule informed all of the private and public forms of nonviolent resistance that he promoted. It is therefore crucial to keep in mind that Gandhi’s political ethics prioritized *swaraj*, not nonviolence (Parel 2006:175). This explains, for instance, why he preferred courageous violence over passive submission in the face of brutal tyranny, although he also felt that, in the long run, only courageous nonviolence could help liberate the self and society from oppressive conditions.

Early in the twentieth century, the majority of Indian nationalists across the political spectrum focused on removing British rulers from India and occupying their modern political system. Gandhi strongly criticized their presumption that all paths to Indian liberation and freedom—whether by means of violence or persuasion—involved the modern state, thereby taking for granted the superiority of modern civilization. In his debate with the imaginary reader of *Hind Swaraj*, he warned against seeking national independence by kicking out British imperialists and taking over the national state, while adopting the mindset and institutions of modern civilization:

You have drawn the picture well. In effect it means this; that we want English rule without the Englishman. *You want the tiger's nature, but not the tiger*; that is to say, you would make India English.... That is not the Swaraj that I want" (Parel 1997:28).

Here, "the tiger" referred to the British authorities and political system, while "the tiger's nature" signified the modern civilization brought by British imperialism (including its railways, lawyers, doctors, educational system, and machinery), which was violating the capacity for self-realization among the ruled as well as the ruler. Gandhi promoted forms of nonviolence that primarily addressed the deep-seated and seductive force of the intimate enemy ("the tiger's nature"), recognizing that confronting or removing the external enemy ("the tiger") without doing so would only lead to the replacement of British tyranny with Hindu tyranny (Nandy 1983; Parel 2000).

Gandhi's approach to nonviolence called for ongoing individual and collective struggles toward *swaraj* in local communities, interspersed with sporadic direct action campaigns against systems of domination causing visible and invisible violence. Gandhi also made clear that nonviolent resistance should focus on the imperial mentality, not just the imperialists. This imperial mentality, or *imperiality*, enabled and justified the invasion of capitalist exploiters, the imposition of modern civilization and European values at the expense of Indian cultures, and the lack of recognition for Indian people's autonomy and dignity (Slater 2010:195,198-200). Gandhi introduced the concept of *satyagraha*, or "truth force," to articulate nonviolent means for confronting imperiality and enabling *swaraj*. As a philosophy of political ethics, *satyagraha* consisted of three interrelated components: truth (*satya*), nonviolence (*ahimsa*), and self-suffering (*tapasya*). *Satya* referred not only to factual and logical truth but also to moral and spiritual truth. It involved wisdom in the realm of knowledge, righteousness in the realm of human conduct, and justice in the realm of social relations. Gandhi devoted his life to the search for truth and self-realization, and encouraged others to discover their own ways of doing the same. But at the same time he

emphasized that humans were only capable of *relative* glimpses of truth and could never access or achieve *absolute* truth. This limitation implied that struggles for self-realization were never-ending, and that actions based on claims to absolute truth were violent because they prevented others from seeking self-realization based on their own glimpses of truth (Terchek 1998:140-142; Dalton 1993:16-25).

Ahimsa literally meant non-injury or non-harm to all living beings, but Gandhi added positive content to this Indian concept. He underlined the significance of love of fellow human beings—whether friend or foe, similar or different, near or far—in his approach to non-violence. From his perspective, nonviolence that did not come from compassion of Self in relation to Other was not genuine *ahimsa*, nor was nonviolence accompanied by cowardice rather than courage. And finally, *tapasya* signified self-suffering or voluntary sacrifice toward individual self-realization. Such voluntary self-suffering was crucial as a means to contest the violence of an unjust system or situation without violating the humanity of other persons and without losing self-control. It also enabled the self-realization of unique human beings, despite differences or disagreements, central to truth-seeking and self-rule. *Tapasya* demonstrated the satyagraha practitioner's sense of purpose, commitment, and fearlessness, and appealed to the hearts (rather than just the heads) of opponents and audiences. *Satyagraha* was therefore a holistic approach aimed at transforming all social relationships and institutions (Bondurant 1965:15-35; Bondurant 1967).

In practice, *satyagraha* mostly involved grassroots organizing and activism toward developing the capacity for self-rule throughout Indian society, especially among the most oppressed and marginalized. Gandhi initiated what he called a “constructive programme” to create alternatives to violence and imperialism in local communities across the country. This *constructive program* was at the heart of his approach to nonviolence. It set the stage for major civil disobedience campaigns and was the main engine for personal and political transformation toward *poorna swaraj* or complete independence. As Gandhi observed at the height of the Indian independence movement: “For my handling of civil disobedience without the constructive programme will be like a paralysed hand attempting to lift a spoon” (Gandhi 1961:36). To address direct violence, the constructive program

stressed the need for Hindu-Muslim unity. In response to structural violence, it promoted economic equality, production of *khadi* (homespun, cotton clothing), and local industries. As an antidote to epistemic violence, it focused on basic education and literacy programs, indigenous languages, and the autonomy of women. And to fight everyday violence, it aimed to end untouchability, alcoholism, and unsanitary conditions. Gandhi pointed out that, among these diverse initiatives, economic equality was “the master key to non-violent independence,” adding that: “A non-violent system of government is clearly an impossibility so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists” (Gandhi 1961:24). By not discussing the “place of civil disobedience” until the very end of his booklet on the subject, moreover, he made clear that relatively invisible forms of nonviolent constructive work were actually *more vital* than highly dramatic satyagraha campaigns like the Salt March.

Civil disobedience mostly served to confront immoral laws and local ways of life, raise and expand popular consciousness, and challenge authorities seeking to preserve dehumanizing conditions. Gandhi outlined concrete strategies, organizational approaches, and protest methods for satyagraha campaigns. He highlighted the need for self-reliance, public education, careful deliberation, cooperation with opponents, and refusal to compromise on basic principles. And he articulated specific steps for nonviolent social movements: Negotiate with authorities; prepare for direct action; demonstrate to involve wider audiences; issue an ultimatum; initiate economic boycotts and strikes; proceed with disruptive acts of non-cooperation; raise the stakes with mass civil disobedience; and create alternative social and political institutions (Bondurant 1965:36-41). Yet Gandhi (1961:35) insisted that nonviolent direct action was not the main site of transformation: “It should be clear to the reader that civil disobedience in terms of independence without the co-operation of the millions by way of constructive effort is mere bravado and worse than useless.” A nonviolent society based on self-rule for all had to start from the everyday lives and local communities of the people suffering the most from violence (Parekh 2001:92-110).

Gandhi’s political ethics on violence and nonviolence fueled a radical vision of democracy, promoting popular participation and the common good. Gandhi imagined a new society with decentralized

networks of small towns and local villages, each fostering individual freedom and social equality through mutual aid and respect:

In this structure composed of innumerable villages, there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life ... will be an oceanic circle whose center will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of village, till at last the whole becomes one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore, the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it (Dalton 1993:21).

His vision of a nonviolent democratic society relied on courageous individuals, committed to experimenting with autonomous and dignified ways of life. To ensure that everyone was capable of participation, Gandhi emphasized that “the weakest should have the same opportunity as the strongest” and that each action should enable the poorest people to gain control over their own lives and destinies (Terchek 1998:160; Parekh 2001:61). Governments and politicians had to act as servants of people’s autonomy and defenders of the common good, *not* as servants of rich elites at the expense of poor majorities (Terchek 1998:139-178).

GANDHIAN MOMENTS IN IRAN AND EGYPT

As soon as Iran’s Green Movement became a global news story in June 2009, observers began associating reformist presidential candidate Mir Hussein Moussavi with Gandhi, and the mass demonstrations with a Gandhian nonviolent social movement. The *New York Times*, for example, noted right away that his followers called him “the Gandhi of Iran,” while political scientist Ramin Jahanbegloo heralded events in his home country as “the Gandhian moment.” Jahanbegloo asserted that the civil disobedience movement in Iran was similar to the Indian independence movement and the American

civil rights movement, arguing that it had adopted Gandhi's concept of satyagraha (Hashemi and Postel 2010:20). But mainstream journalists and prominent scholars did *not* specify whether or how Iranian people were experimenting with truth-seeking nonviolence and self-rule through ongoing constructive work in local communities and everyday life. They invoked Gandhi rhetorically to contrast moral and nonviolent Green activists with the brutality and violence of the Ahmadinejad regime, but mostly ignored the transformative implications of Gandhi's approach.

Nevertheless, Iran's Green Movement did involve some glimpses of Gandhian ways of life. For example, Mousavi supporters often bridged relational divisions between individuals and social groups that previously regarded each other as strangers or enemies. Iranian philosopher Ali Alizadeh commented that:

Mousavi's people, the collective that appears at the rallies, include religious women covered in chador walking hand in hand with westernized young women who are usually prosecuted for their appearance; war veterans in wheelchairs alongside young boys for whom the Iran-Iraq war is only an anecdote; and members of the working class who sacrifice their daily salary to participate in the rally next to the middle classes ... (Hashemi and Postel 2010:6).

Like Gandhi, Mousavi emphasized the need to "strengthen the social nuclei among us," although without proposing specific constructive initiatives for doing so (Hashemi and Postel 2010:127). One of us, Majid Sharifi, witnessed loving relationships across differences resembling *satyagraha* as participant. During the Friday sermon on July 17, 2009, Majid saw how secular Iranians showed respect for Islamic rituals, while devout Iranians patiently explained their traditions to them. Such practices of recognizing and relating to "the other" led to an unprecedented sense of spiritual freedom and social solidarity. But defenders and representatives of Iran's regime failed to appreciate these connections across differences. As soon as Mousavi

supporters arrived at the place where the sermon would be held, security forces quickly re-established divisions between Muslim and secular, traditional and modern, pro-regime and the people. In response, Green activists began substituting their political ethical approach with a more instrumentalist strategic approach to nonviolence (resembling that favored by Sharp), with devastating consequences. Thus, Gandhian moments during the Green Movement were much more sporadic and fleeting than most sympathetic commentators acknowledged.

Gandhian moments during Egypt's uprising in 2011 were more enduring and pervasive. Most significantly, the people who occupied Cairo's Tahrir Square created autonomous public spaces where Gandhi's notions of *satyagraha* and *swaraj* infused ways of life for several months. They demonstrated the capacity for ruling themselves by creating committees to take care of the necessary infrastructure and daily tasks. They pitched tents, built toilets, kept the square clean, set up media centers, held general assemblies, and collectively dealt with many challenges. Besides such constructive work, they also prepared for and engaged in nonviolent direct action campaigns (Newman 2011; Bamyeh 2011). As Gigi Ibrahim, a 24-year-old Egyptian activist, wrote:

From day one, Tahrir Square was really a mini-example of what direct democracy looks like. People took charge of everything – trash, food, security. It was a self-sustaining entity. And in the middle of this, under every tent, on every corner, people were having debates about their demands, the future, how things should go economically and politically. It was fascinating. It was a mirror of what Egypt would look like if it was democratic (England 2011).

Clearly, occupiers in Tahrir Square and other public spaces were practicing a Gandhian form of political ethics, prioritizing experiments with alternative ways of life and recognizing that confrontations with authorities were only part of ongoing struggles for dignity and autonomy. Yet even these promising efforts slowly but surely

dissipated after the ouster of president Mubarak in February 2011. The subsequent take-over by the security council and election of president Morsi, whose government continues to rely on free-market rationality and neoliberal policies, have failed to reduce social suffering in Egypt. In the end, the Egyptian movement was successful in removing its dictator and transitioning toward a Euro-American model of democracy, but not in addressing the deeply rooted imperial mentality or reducing the multiple dimensions of violence.

SHARP ON VIOLENCE AND NONVIOLENCE

References to Gandhi remain common in academic, journalistic, and informal discussions of nonviolence. Yet contemporary nonviolent social movements in Iran, Egypt, and elsewhere largely rely on a pragmatic approach informed by instrumental reason that is significantly *different* from Gandhi's political ethics. Scholars and media experts generally agree with Peter Ackerman and Jack Duval (2000:3) that "the great theoretician of nonviolent power" today is Gene Sharp, a former Harvard University professor. While Sharp's early work passionately supported *satyagraha*, his best-known texts rely on scientific rationalism and detached realism (Weber 2003:251). By focusing exclusively on nonviolence as *political technique*, without connecting it to particular ethical principles or cultural belief systems, he has made his universal brand of "generic nonviolence" readily available throughout the world (Sharp 1973:vi; Weber 2003:252). It is not surprising that journalists often refer to Sharp as the "Machiavelli of nonviolence" (Larmer 1986).

Unlike Gandhi, Sharp pays little attention to the multiple dimensions of violence or their effects on moral and political relationships. He observes that violence is action that involves visible physical injury, material destruction, or both (Sharp 1973:65). And he describes how both governments and citizens often assume that violence is the most effective method of action for gaining political power in conflict situations (1973:4). But he does not examine structural, epistemic, or everyday violence in detail. And he certainly does not criticize modern Western civilization as at the root of violence in today's world. From his perspective, *nonviolent action* is simply a technique of struggle that is active and powerful yet avoids direct violence: "[It] is a generic term covering dozens of specific

methods of protest, noncooperation and intervention, in all of which the actionists conduct the conflict by doing—or refusing to do—certain things without using physical violence” (1973:64). It involves conflicts that go beyond institutionalized political processes with the purpose of using nonviolent “people power” to challenge and destroy illegitimate “regime power.”

Sharp’s approach is *pragmatic* in the sense that it sees nonviolence as the most effective method for winning conflicts with opponents whose interests are incompatible. It relies on a clear separation between means and end: The goal of nonviolent activists is to defeat unjust rulers, even if using nonviolent means causes the latter to suffer. It perceives nonviolence as an instrumental strategy for beating oppressive authorities, not as a holistic political ethics for bridging divides or transforming relationships (Burrowes 1996:99). Sharp’s approach is also *state-oriented* in the sense that it focuses on popular mobilization to reform unjust government policies or overthrow authoritarian regimes. It assumes that undemocratic states and elites are the main causes of social problems, while freedom-seeking citizens and civil society organizations are the main engines for promoting modern democracy. And contrary to Gandhi, it does not call for long-term struggles toward structural transformation of capitalist economies and liberal political systems, or prioritize ongoing constructive work and individual experiments with truth in local communities (1996:99-100).

Sharp’s main purpose is to “clarify, classify, and define” a wide range of nonviolent methods, strategies, and dynamics in a value-neutral way (Weber 2003:252). His achievements in these areas are extensive and impressive. He catalogues 198 distinct methods of nonviolent action and offers historical examples of each of them. He classifies them into three categories: nonviolent protest and persuasion, nonviolent non-cooperation, and nonviolent intervention. The first primarily includes symbolic forms of action—such as demonstrations, marches, and picketing—contesting specific policies or a dictatorial regime. The second involves withdrawal from the political system with tactics like strikes, boycotts, and work stoppages. And the third category entails confrontations with the political system, through direct actions like sit-ins, occupations, and nonviolent invasions, and the creation of alternative institutions and a parallel

government. These campaigns achieve their goals by changing the minds of authorities and bystanders (conversion), negotiating and compromising with opponents (accommodation), imposing their will on opponents (nonviolent coercion), or completely breaking down and taking over the system's political order (disintegration). For Sharp, strategic thinking and planning are particularly important, since they require calculating "how to act realistically in ways that change the situation so that achievement of the desired goals become more possible" (Sharp 2009:27). Accordingly, nonviolent resisters need to be smart, stubborn, and united—much like disciplined soldiers (Sharp 1973:112-114,452-453). Sharp's work resonates widely, because it offers a comprehensive handbook with guidelines for overthrowing domestic tyrannies and gaining control of the political system (Ackerman and Kruegler 1993; Roberts and Garton Ash 2011; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011).

Sharp's approach to nonviolence closely resembles *duragraha* ("stubborn persistence"), a type of nonviolent resistance vehemently opposed by Gandhi. While *satyagraha* prioritized "a quiet and irresistible pursuit of truth," *duragraha* allowed for the use of any means that avoids visible violence to pressure, humiliate, and undermine opponents (Bondurant 1965:v,42-43). While Gandhian nonviolence involved truth-seeking, self-suffering, and nonviolent ways of life in order to promote self-rule in the long run, therefore, Sharpian nonviolence only includes the negative aspect of *ahimsa* with the purpose of enabling "the people" to win relatively short-term battles with "the regime" (Burrowes 1996:99-100). While Gandhi highlighted the constructive program and downplayed the role of civil disobedience campaigns, Sharp focuses on dramatic mobilization and mass direct action against undemocratic states *without* aiming to contribute to personal, relational, social, or global transformation (Weber 2003:260-262). And since Sharp's work takes existing ways of life and systems of domination as given, *it is easily adaptable to the contemporary imperial mentality and neoliberal world-system*. Although it has helped nonviolent resisters in many countries overthrow authoritarian regimes within months or even weeks, it has *not* enabled oppressed people in the world to create alternatives to today's dominant forms of imperialism and capitalist democracy—or to reduce the violence associated with them.

Sharp and scholars inspired by his work point to recent cases of success to demonstrate the power of strategic nonviolence, especially to the United Democratic Front in South Africa from 1985 until 1990, the Philippine struggle against President Ferdinand Marcos in 1986, and the Serbian student movement to against Slobodan Milosevic in 2000 (Sharp 2005; Ackerman and Duvall 2000; Zunes, Kurtz, and Asher 1999). They argue that these nonviolent social movements won because participants forged unity of purpose among a broad coalition of pro-democracy groups, engaged in deliberate planning and developed smart strategies, and maintained nonviolent discipline in contests for legitimacy and allegiance. And they often refer to Freedom House, an American non-governmental organization, for evidence that nonviolent social movements have helped people in many “part free” and “not free” countries gain individual freedom and democratize governments (Ackerman and Duvall 2005:45-46; Zunes 2009).

Yet Sharpian scholars usually fail to mention that victorious strategic nonviolence has consistently produced political systems favoring *global neoliberal capitalism*, the prevailing imperialism in the twenty-first century. Without going into detail, we interpret global neoliberal capitalism as involving ideologies, discourses, and public policies that encourage the spread of free-market rationality and limit the role of states to promoting economic growth and consumerism instead of social equality and human well-being (Steger and Roy 2010:11-14; Harvey 2005). Sharp and his proponents ignore, for example, that the movements in South Africa, the Philippines, and Serbia not only successfully undermined existing leaders and governments, but also opened the door to global neoliberal forces that have enriched wealthy elites at the expense of growing dispossession and desperation among the poor in these countries (Desai 2002; Lindio-McGovern 2007; Bello 2009; Elich 2009; Grubacic 2010). Clearly, therefore, Sharp’s version of nonviolence primarily targets domestic regimes branded as un-free and un-democratic, not global neoliberal capitalism. Contrary to Gandhi’s version, it does not contest or seek alternatives to the dominant imperial mentality of the day, or to its violent repercussions for the most oppressed people in society.

In *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, Sharp (2010:2) draws on Freedom House's annual report to argue that his main purpose is to assist people living under authoritarian governments to join the ranks of free and democratic countries in the world. According to this report, the United States and Western-European countries receive *perfect scores* for levels of civil liberties and political rights, and categorizes most of their allies as "free." It regards governments that oppose Euro-American leadership or neoliberalism as "part free" or "not free" (Freedom House 2013; Giannone 2010). Influenced by democratization scholars and foreign policy experts like Robert Dahl (1972), Samuel Huntington (1991), and Larry Diamond (2006), Freedom House adopts a minimalist perspective of democracy known as *polyarchy*, in which the majority of citizens limit their participation to electing leaders, whose main task is to obey the rule of law, implement formal procedures, protect individual freedoms, and increase economic growth. Proponents of polyarchy discourage active participation by poor or working-class people, and promote the spread of global neoliberal capitalism instead of social equality and welfare programs (Robinson 1996:50-51). By relying on Freedom House to conceptualize freedom and democracy, Sharp makes clear that nonviolent social movements against authoritarian states are successful when they achieve regime change at home and follow the "pro-democracy" norms and ideologies promoted by the United States and its allies throughout the world. Peter Ackerman, a former director of Freedom House, makes the same point in his writings, as do others specializing in strategic nonviolent resistance (Ackerman and Duvall 2005:46; Zunes 2009; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). Again, the contrast with Gandhi's vision of truth-seeking and self-rule as ways of life could not be starker.

SHARP'S INFLUENCE IN IRAN AND EGYPT

Soon after Iran's Green Movement captured the imagination of audiences around the world, the global media anointed Gene Sharp as its guru and intellectual inspiration. Conservatives, liberals, and radicals around the world agreed that the peaceful protests against suspected electoral fraud by the Ahmadinejad regime demonstrated the powerful desire for freedom and democracy among Iranian people, and often invoked the iconic names of Gandhi and King. But

many analysts interested in the immediate catalyst for the Green Movement concentrated on Sharp's widely available handbooks for waging nonviolent struggles as direct influence. Scholars and authors often pointed to the same source when the so-called Arab Spring movements spread across the Middle East in late 2010 and early 2011, especially during Egypt's uprising against the regime led by Mubarak, a former U.S. ally (Stolberg 2011; Peterson 2009; Zunes 2009; Wellen 2011).

Sharp's work served as guide for these uprisings in several ways. Reformist strategists and leaders in Iran relied heavily on Sharp's brand of nonviolent resistance to prepare for the presidential election campaign. Taking a page from his classic book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, they selected green as symbolic color, refused to negotiate with the regime, demanded a recount of election results, and made public statements calling for strict nonviolent discipline. Green movement participants painted their faces in green, held marches, and held up signs with slogans like "Where is My Vote?" and "Death to the Dictator!" (Sharp 1973:chapters 3-8). Downloads of Sharp's texts in Farsi rose rapidly, while one young strategist told a journalist: "One of my wishes is to meet Gene Sharp. The hand of a person like Gene Sharp, who has created such a nonviolent theory to guide people's power, should be kissed" (Peterson 2010:451).

Sharp's approach was no less influential in Egypt. Student activists in the April 6 Youth Movement, for example, discovered his work in 2005. Soon after, some participated in workshops on nonviolent action held in Cairo and organized by the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), founded by Peter Ackerman (Bramhall 2012). Jack DuVall (2008), director of the ICNC, traveled to Egypt and personally participated in a seminar for nonviolent activists in 2007. According to Ahmed Mahrer, a leading strategist, they studied Sharp's "198 Methods of Nonviolent Action" and discussed how to adapt them to Egyptian circumstances. Another workshop participant, Dalia Ziada, later organized her own workshops on nonviolence and shared Arab translations of recent texts by Sharp, including *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (Kirkpatrick and Sanger 2011; Sharp 2010). Like with the Green Movement, leaders and organizers of the Egyptian Uprising used Sharp's approach as strategic guide for nonviolent resistance.

These nonviolent social movements were neither homogenous nor static. Both included individuals and groups with diverse strategies, purposes, and ideas about progress. But as Iran's Green Movement and Egypt's uprising evolved, their leaders and participants increasingly turned to neoliberal visions and discourses—such as those promoted by Freedom House—as the most realistic and best available options. Mousavi's Green Movement Charter, for example, called for “the active participation of parties and associations” to “generate a liberal environment for intellectuals as well as social and political activists who are loyal to our national interests” (Hashemi and Postel 2010:337). It declared that: “[H]olding elections is the best way... that the movement will continue its efforts to safeguard the people's votes until such time as free, competitive and fair elections... can be guaranteed” (2010:339). And it accepted participation in neoliberal global capitalism: “The Green Movement wants to strengthen the national economy in the international arena and promote investment [in Iran] with the goal of increasing the purchasing power of the Iranian people” (2010:344). Although Mousavi's statements did not explicitly support neoliberal policies, they fit within the global logic of neoliberal discourse and the imperial mentality. Similarly, Iranian exile and public intellectual Hamid Dabashi asserted that the Green Movement was “an inherently victorious, nonviolent, civil rights movement that will demand and exact civil liberties—freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom to form political parties, freedom to choose a democratic government” (Dabashi 2010a, 2010b). He articulated a vision of Iran's future that was eerily similar to that of Freedom House: “I see an Iran where people have the same freedoms that every individual has in America. I see an Iran where a person can stand up and say what they believe. This vision is realistic” (Mukesh 2010). In other words, leaders, participants, and advocates generally agreed that the Green Movement sought the same modern forms of freedom and democracy as in the United States or Western Europe. According to Dabashi, Iranian people merely wanted what “we,” in the West, already have.

After Mousavi lost the election and the Green Movement faded, though, the United States and its allies—the countries with the highest levels of freedom and democracy according to Freedom

House—began imposing stricter sanctions on Iran and undermining its national currency to increase pressure on the Ahmadinejad regime. The impact on people’s everyday lives has been disastrous: “[A]s sanctions have become increasingly punitive in the face of Iran’s intransigence, it is ordinary Iranians who are paying the price” (Greenwald 2012). The cost of living, unemployment rates, and severity of poverty have grown rapidly, producing fertile ground for increases in food riots and police brutality against demonstrators. Ironically, therefore, the same neoliberal countries that the Green Movement’s nonviolent resisters invoked in their visions of progress also condoned or supported policies that have caused severe social suffering among Iranians.

Contrary to Iranian activists, Egyptian revolutionaries successfully used instrumental nonviolent strategies to achieve their goals of ending dictatorship and opening the door to democracy. Yet the seductive force of neoliberal capitalism has proven no less invasive and pervasive in Egypt. Following the removal of Mubarak, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces temporarily took over the Egyptian state and ruled with a heavy hand for over a year. On June 24, 2012, Egypt’s electoral commission finally announced a new national leader, Mohamed Morsi, the candidate for the Freedom and Justice Party with strong links to the Muslim Brotherhood (Kirkpatrick 2012; LeVine 2012; Abdel Ghafar 2012). But while many Egyptians and commentators initially celebrated this milestone, it is now clear that the Morsi government has adopted the prevailing imperial mentality and promoted the neoliberal brand of freedom and democracy, without reducing the multiple forms of violence in Egyptian society. After Mubarak’s exit, the interim government signed a \$3.2 billion IMF loan and accepted more than \$1.5 billion in US aid (Stein 2012; Cornwell and Mohammed 2012). And since president Morsi’s election, ruling political parties have been equally eager to improve Egypt’s economic growth rates by adhering to the logic of neoliberalism, with devastating effects (Asher-Schapiro 2012; Kaminski 2012; Hickel 2012). Tragically, the majority of Egypt’s population seems to have accepted that there is no alternative to neoliberal forms of freedom and democracy. Although some former revolutionaries decided to boycott the elections, others saw Morsi’s victory as a step forward. April 6 Youth Movement member Mohamed

Ahmed, for example, joined supporters of the new president in Tahrir Square, declaring: “I feel like there is hope again” (Kirkpatrick 2012). Like others seduced by imperiality, Ahmed acknowledged that the road ahead would be full of dangers and uncertainties, but failed to see another possible path toward progress.

Both in Iran and Egypt, courageous resisters primarily targeted *direct and visible violence* as personified by their political leaders—Ahmadinejad and Mubarak—and institutionalized in their authoritarian regimes. Green reformers in Iran failed to achieve their goal of electing Hossein Mousavi as new president, while revolutionaries in Egypt successfully undermined the ruling party, held elections regarded as free and democratic by the United States and its allies, and voted for Mohamed Morsi as new president. Yet so far, neither nonviolent social movement has adequately confronted the imperial mentality at the root of multiple forms of indirect and invisible violence.

CONCLUSION: BEYOND THE TWO-STEP STRATEGY OF NONVIOLENT SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

In the introduction, we posed the question: How was it possible that nonviolent social movements like those in Iran and Egypt ended up reinforcing rather than reducing multiple forms of violence? Basically, our response is that the main reason for the tragic outcomes of these movements is that their participants and advocates primarily relied on Sharpian political realism instead of experimenting with Gandhian political ethics. We showed that these people power struggles mostly focused on mass mobilization and civil disobedience against the authoritarian regime, while mundane constructive work in everyday life and local communities toward individual, relational, and social transformation was sporadic and short-lived. We also argued that, in the end, Iranian and Egyptian activists saw no way out of the trap of imperiality and straitjacket of neoliberal capitalism. In other words, nonviolent social movements in Iran, Egypt, and elsewhere have failed to promote the capacity for self-rule and dignity of oppressed people, because they have ignored Gandhi’s warning against removing “the tiger” without addressing and creating alternatives to “the tiger’s nature,” and consequently have been unable to move beyond the violence of nonviolence.

A growing number of contemporary scholar-activists are affirming Gandhi's crucial insights in his book *Hind Swaraj*. Immanuel Wallerstein points out that anti-systemic social movements since the 19th century have generally used a two-step strategy: first take over the state, then transform society and the world. In his view, this state-oriented approach to radical social and political change has not worked: "The two-step strategy failed because, once the first step was achieved—and it was indeed achieved in a very large number of countries—the new regimes did not seem to be able to achieve the second step" (Wallerstein 2000:152). Wallerstein proposes that social movements prioritizing new forms of cultural politics and ways of life—such as the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico—are more promising. Other revolutionary thinkers and practitioners agree. John Holloway (2002) discusses how the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico are "changing the world without taking power," Marina Sitrin (2012) highlights the potential of horizontalism and everyday revolutions in Argentina's struggles since December 2001, while Grace Lee Boggs (2011) depicts how grassroots rebels in Detroit are implementing the kind of alternative strategy called for by Wallerstein.

We argue that activists who adopt the brand of strategic non-violence favored by Gene Sharp and his many advocates are repeating the historical mistake of the two-step strategy. While their pragmatic orientation has allowed them to win some battles with authoritarian regimes, they have lost enduring struggles against neoliberalism and for humanity. We conclude that revolutionaries who recognize the pervasive dangers of imperialism and tentacles of violence are more likely to make other worlds possible by experimenting with Gandhian self-rule, truth-seeking, and nonviolence in their everyday lives and local communities. So where do we, as constructive radicals, go from here? Will we let Sharp or Gandhi guide our struggles for autonomy, dignity, and global co-existence?

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