

## Making Sense of Civil Resistance: From Theories and Techniques to Social Movement *Phronesis*

Sean Chabot

It is safe to say that no scholar of civil resistance has ever enjoyed the public attention that Gene Sharp received at the beginning of 2011. Journalists, bloggers, and scholars from across the political spectrum heralded him as the central strategic thinker behind the Arab uprisings, especially the revolution in Egypt. BBC News referred to him as “author of the nonviolent revolution rulebook,” the *New York Times* as the intellectual who wrote the “playbook used in a revolution,” the *Nation* as “nonviolent warrior,” and the *Boston Globe* as “the man who changed the world.” There is even a film on Sharp, entitled *How to Start a Revolution*, focusing on the author who wrote the handbook for unarmed people mobilizing to change their world. But what kinds of knowledge on nonviolent action and civil resistance does Sharp provide contemporary activists? Is Sharp really the mastermind behind the wave of nonviolent revolutions?

In this chapter, I challenge the prevailing understanding of Sharp as mastermind behind the current wave of nonviolent revolutions. I argue that although his work contributes a general theory of power and struggle, a long list of specific methods, and a detailed overview of the dynamics involved in civil resistance, it ignores the practical wisdom that activists develop and employ in their immediate social contexts. Bent Flyvbjerg’s *Making Social Science Matter* (2001) is particularly relevant here. It distinguished between three different kinds of knowledge: *episteme* refers to the scientific search for universal, invariable explanations through analytical rationality; *techne* to the pragmatic, instrumental rationality to produce technical know-how for building or doing something concrete, variable, and context dependent; and *phronesis*

to people's experiential and value-based knowledge for making moral judgments and deciding how to act constructively in specific situations. In my view, Sharp's writings focus almost exclusively on the *episteme* and *techne* of civil resistance. I do not deny or dismiss Sharp's important contributions to nonviolent scholarship and activism, but Sharp's approach lacks insight into the kinds of intuitive knowledge that activists need to make sense of their situations, creatively select and apply appropriate methods, and envision the larger purpose of what they are doing. Without greater attention to the development and relevance of *phronesis*, academic theories of civil resistance remain overly abstract, while rulebooks with pragmatic strategies and steps for nonviolent action remain disconnected from the actual lives, experiences, and social spaces of participants.

Drawing on the work of Aristotle, Flyvbjerg regards *phronesis* as the intellectual virtue that allows people to deliberate about what to do in actual situations and contexts, guided by experiential knowledge, ethical reasoning, and "habits of the heart" (Bellah et al. 1985). It is a form of value rationality and moral character that enables people to identify significant problems, develop appropriate strategies, and act upon visions for a better future. He writes:

*Phronesis* thus concerns the analysis of values—"things that are good or bad for man"—as a point of departure for action. *Phronesis* is that intellectual activity most relevant to praxis. It focuses on what is variable, on that which cannot be encapsulated by universal rules, on specific cases. *Phronesis* requires an interaction between the general and the concrete; it requires consideration, judgment, and choice. More than anything else, *phronesis* requires *experience*. (Flyvbjerg 2001, 57)

Unlike *episteme*, *phronesis* does not seek or rely on general theories, laws, rules, explanations, and models. It only works in response to specific contexts. And unlike *techne*, *phronesis* is not about using instrumental know-how to produce something. It is about value judgment and prudence in efforts to achieve concrete purposes. While Aristotle and scholars following in his footsteps do not deny the relevance of abstract understanding and technical skills, they argue that only practical wisdom can ensure that available means are used for beneficial ends.

Take the example of teaching at a public university. Much of the available literature on college teaching offers knowledge that is either theoretical or pragmatic. Some books discuss general philosophies that conceptualize the meanings, practices, and purposes of higher learning, while others provide specific steps and guidelines for developing curriculum, planning lessons,

leading class discussions, and so forth. But meaningful learning as educator emerges from *doing*—from deciding how to act in particular classroom contexts, based on particular moral and intellectual judgments about which practices best promote which educational purposes. Although awareness of educational theories and procedures is useful, educators' practical wisdom or *phronesis* most directly shapes how they interact with students and enable their learning process. Similarly, civil resisters and other activists also learn most from doing, from developing their practical wisdom—their *phronesis*—for pursuing moral–political visions of peace and social justice in concrete social contexts.

In the following sections, I start by briefly reviewing Sharp's work on civil resistance and nonviolent action. Then I compare Flyvbjerg's views on knowledge and learning to Sharp's approach and consider the significance of *phronesis* for studying civil resistance and other social movements. Next I apply my phronetic approach to two specific cases: the Nashville students in the American civil rights movement during the 1960s and the Tahrir Square activists in Egypt's 2011 revolution. I conclude with reflections on how exploring social movement phronesis allows scholars as well as activists to go beyond the limitations of Sharp's influential *episteme* and *techne* of nonviolent action.

### Sharp's Theory and Rulebook of Nonviolent Action

Sharp defines nonviolent action as a *technique* that people can use to actively address political conflicts caused by oppressive structures and circumstances without reverting to violence.<sup>1</sup> Deeply influenced by Gandhi, Sharp's early work (1960, xiii) highlights the moral force of nonviolence. But after a dramatic change in perspective, Sharp favored a strategic and rationalist approach to nonviolence, based on "the ability to be stubborn, to refuse to cooperate, to disobey, and to resist powerful opponents powerfully" (2005, 14), *not* on moral principles like love and human dignity. In *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, widely considered his magnum opus, he makes clear that his approach is scientific and pragmatic rather than partisan or prophetic:

[A] very careful examination of the nature, capacities and requirements of nonviolent struggle was necessary, which needed to be as objective as possible. . . . [R]elationships between this technique and ethical problems and between the technique and belief systems exhorting to nonviolent behavior, are for the most part not discussed here. (Sharp 1973, vi)

Sharp asserts that people don't need particular moral qualities or revolutionary visions to successfully engage in unarmed struggles against tyrannical

regimes. In his view, activists are most effective when they deliberately select and use rational means to achieve clearly defined reformist ends. His work as scholar and director of the Albert Einstein Institution is devoted to gathering, analyzing, and promoting relevant knowledge on effective nonviolent action techniques, which are universally applicable in all cultural and ethical contexts.

Sharp's views of nonviolent action are thus significantly different from Gandhi's. The matrix of four types of nonviolence—pragmatic, principled, reformist, and revolutionary—introduced by Robert Burrowes helps clarify these differences. Proponents of *pragmatic* nonviolence consider it the most rational and effective method available for people seeking to win battles with tyrannical opponents. Proponents of *principled* nonviolence regard it as a way of life, believing that voluntary self-suffering enhances their moral power to promote human dignity and social justice for all. Proponents of *reformist* nonviolence focus on changing specific policies, leaders, and regimes, not on changing the existing system. And proponents of *revolutionary* nonviolence argue that social injustices are deeply rooted and require enduring structural transformation, not just new laws or governments (Burrowes 1996, 99–100).<sup>2</sup> Sharp deliberately reduces nonviolent action to its pragmatic and reformist dimensions. For him, the ideal form of civil resistance involves overthrowing a dictatorship and replacing it with liberal democratic leaders, procedures, and institutions. Popular liberation thus means joining the “free world” led by developed countries and shaped by Western civilization. In contrast, Gandhi's approach goes beyond the binaries between pragmatic and principled, reformist and revolutionary nonviolence. His concept of *satyagraha* (i.e., courageous persistence in the search for truth) starts from nonviolent action as a principled way of life with revolutionary purposes but recognizes the relevance of pragmatic and reformist strategies along the way. It focuses primarily on attacking systems of oppression and improving the everyday lives of the most oppressed people in society and does not assume that removing an oppressive regime and adopting Western-style democracy leads to popular liberation. For Gandhi, therefore, ending British rule in India without deep transformation of self and society entailed substituting one tyranny with another. Media intellectuals who glorify Sharp as the guru behind recent nonviolent revolutions usually fail to recognize that his views in many ways contradict those of Gandhi.

Sharp's approach to nonviolent action draws on a general, realist theory of political power and political struggle. He asserts that in the prevailing monolithic model people depend on rulers and accept the permanence of governments, which leaves only overwhelming violence as a viable method

for taking over the government. His own model, in contrast, argues that domination by rulers depends on the cooperation and obedience of people. This implies that populations can undermine tyrannical regimes by withdrawing their cooperation and obedience without using violence. People in oppressive countries usually refrain from nonviolent resistance due to false assumptions, personal and collective habits, fear, repressive ideologies, selfish interests, charismatic leaders, and lack of confidence. But after overcoming these psychological and cultural obstacles, which exist in all cultures and parts of the world, human beings are capable of challenging authorities through rational forms of nonviolent action.

According to Sharp, courageous and sustained nonviolent action might trigger “political jiu-jitsu,” when brutality by government forces backfires, enhancing the political power of activists. Sharp identifies four ways that such nonviolent action can succeed: conversion, accommodation, nonviolent coercion, and disintegration. *Conversion* is very rare and involves winning the hearts and minds of opponents; *accommodation* is common and implies a settlement between resisters and their opponents; *nonviolent coercion* occurs when the oppressive government is forced to make concessions; and *disintegration* happens when the regime loses control, and the dominant structures collapse. Each of these dynamics of change focuses on shifts in power relationships between “the people” and “the government” as unitary actors confronting each other, not on the complex processes involved in personal and social transformation.

Sharp’s theoretical framework reflects a positivist approach to knowledge that favors universal truths, fixed binaries, and instrumentalist assumptions about actors, goals, choices, and outcomes. The basic arguments of his *episteme* are clear, simple, law-like, and general. It all starts with a society in which a freedom-seeking population faces an oppressive regime. If the population can overcome its fear and obedience, it is capable of undermining the regime’s pillars of domination through courageous nonviolent action. With adequate strategic thinking, pragmatic decision making, and disciplined resistance, such nonviolent action can succeed by catalyzing the mechanisms of conversion, accommodation, nonviolent coercion, or disintegration. Cultural differences, human spontaneity, moral visions, everyday life, and subtle forms of oppression play only a minor part in Sharp’s model—mostly as indicators of given social conditions or factors obstructing expediency and efficiency.<sup>3</sup>

Sharp’s clear-cut theoretical model primarily serves to frame his overview of the techniques and dynamics of nonviolent action. He identifies 198 different methods of nonviolent action, describing their characteristics and

giving historical examples of implementation. While acknowledging that his overview is incomplete, he leaves no doubt that people in countries across the globe can imitate these techniques and adapt them to their own contexts. Sharp distinguishes between methods of *protest and persuasion* (including public declarations, symbolic acts, street theater, marches, assemblies, and walk-outs), methods of *social noncooperation* (including boycotts and withdrawal from social institutions), methods of *economic noncooperation* (including consumer boycotts, labor strikes, and economic shutdown), methods of *political noncooperation* (including boycott of government institutions, mass noncooperation, and civil disobedience), and methods of *nonviolent intervention* (including hunger strikes, sit-ins, alternative institutions, and land occupations). This extensive list demonstrates to civil resisters that, whatever their struggle and situation, the range of strategic and tactical options is wide and diverse.

The core of Sharp's work, however, is his generic "rulebook" on how to apply nonviolent action techniques in political struggles against oppressive regimes—in particular against dictatorships. The most popular text in this regard is *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, which has guided thousands of civil resisters and inspired the mainstream media to identify Sharp as the strategic guru of recent nonviolent movements. The book's premise is that, according to Freedom House, the number of "not free" countries in the world is still high and therefore the need for liberation struggles is still great (Sharp 2010, 2–4). Its purpose is to show that nonviolent resistance is a more realistic approach than violent resistance for people seeking to overthrow dictatorships and adopt the Western model of liberal democracy. This rulebook specifies the dynamics, weapons, discipline, openness, mechanisms of change, and democratization associated with nonviolent struggle. It proclaims that:

The use of a considerable number of these methods—carefully chosen, applied persistently and on a large scale, wielded in the context of a wise strategy and appropriate tactics, by trained civilians—is likely to cause any illegitimate regime severe problems. This applies to all dictatorships. (31)

Sharp also elucidates the practical reasons and implications of strategic planning. He explains that a "realistic assessment of the situation and capabilities of the populace" is necessary to calculate and select the most effective means to achieve the pro-democracy movement's ends, adding that lofty goals and idealistic visions are admirable but insufficient in this context (39–40).<sup>4</sup> Like military leaders, civil resistance leaders must develop a *grand strategy* with the primary objectives and basic framework of the struggle; a *strategy* with a plan

for when, where, and how to fight for its objectives; a set of *tactics* with limited actions toward fulfilling particular aspects of the strategy; and a set of *methods* of nonviolent action.<sup>5</sup> Sharp also identifies key questions—concerning the choice of means, approach to building democracy, role of external assistance, formulation of grand strategy, campaign strategies, public education, and collective responses to repression by opponents—that movement strategists have to answer.

The final chapters of *From Dictatorship to Democracy* emphasize that, to end dictatorships, civil resisters should stick to their general strategic plan and proceed step-by-step in their long struggle toward democracy. As Sharp explicitly states, movement leaders and activists “should *not* aim for the immediate complete downfall of the dictatorship, but instead for gaining limited objectives” (2010, 59). They should start with *selective resistance*, initiating small campaigns with specific targets that uncover the dictatorship’s weaknesses and highlight their grand strategy. The second step should involve *symbolic challenge*—such as low-risk demonstrations and declarations—to increase public awareness and mobilize for more ambitious nonviolent protest. The third step should consist of *spreading responsibility* to expand the range of participating individuals and social groups, which sets up the crucial fourth step: mass protest campaigns and nonviolent direct action *aiming at the dictator’s power*. At this stage, civil resisters should focus on weakening the regime’s popular support and try to convince some members of the police, bureaucracy, and military forces to assist (and even join) the pro-democracy movement. They should constantly assess whether their campaign strategies are contributing to the dictatorship’s disintegration and make adjustments if necessary (59–65). To be successful, the pro-democracy movement must not only undermine the regime’s authority, bureaucracy, human capital, image, material resources, and repressive abilities, but also strengthen liberal-democratic social spaces and civil society (67–69). According to Sharp, these guidelines explain the success of numerous nonviolent struggles in the past and present, while his rulebook directly influenced civil resistance movements that brought down dictators—especially Serbia’s Otpor movement that emerged in 1996 and removed Milosevic in 2000.<sup>6</sup>

Otpor students were particularly skilled at turning Sharp’s work into the necessary *techné*—the necessary generic rules and universal templates—for waging nonviolent struggle. Based on their experiences, they produced *Non-violent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points*, laying out in highly pragmatic detail how to prepare and plan for each phase of civil resistance. The book recommends, for example, that activists follow five rules in analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT):

1. Be realistic about the strengths and weaknesses of your organization.
2. Analysis should distinguish between where your organization is today, and where it could be in the future.
3. Be specific. Avoid “grey areas” and ambiguity when possible.
4. Always analyze in relation to your opponent.
5. Keep your SWOT short and simple. (Popovic, Milivojevic, and Djinovic 2004, 46)

It also includes a “plan format template” with sections on “Situation” (describing relevant activities by activists and the opponent), “Mission Statement” (stating why the activity is important, how it will be done, when and where it will take place, and who will do what), “Execution” (describing how and when the campaign will evolve), “Administration and Logistics” (identifying what support will be available and how to get it), and “Coordination and Communications (explaining produces for who coordinates between participating groups, what is to be communicated, and how to achieve such communication) (54). In short, the authors used Sharp’s scholarship to formulate well-defined prescriptions and carefully scripted moves, thereby making strategic nonviolence available and accessible to interested protest groups all around the world. However, in doing so, they leave little room for diversity, spontaneity, experimentation, or practical wisdom (see also Helvey 2004).

### ***Phronesis of Civil Resistance and Social Movements***

My phronetic approach to civil resistance and social movements challenges the technique approach popularized by Gene Sharp (and adapted by his followers) in several specific ways. First of all, Sharp draws definite and rigid lines between violence and nonviolence. He classifies activists, protest campaigns, and social movements as either violent or nonviolent, and then examines only the latter. Actual experiences and events show that this binary is not so stable or clear-cut. Some resistance struggles (such as the Zapatistas in Mexico) start with armed attacks and later adopt nonviolent methods; others (like South Africa’s anti-apartheid movement) are initially nonviolent but then adopt armed tactics, and then overlay the violence with mass-based nonviolent resistance. Moreover, acts that appear nonviolent can have violent implications for various relationships between Self and Other, while seemingly violent acts in the present can prevent greater suffering in the long run.<sup>7</sup> Like Gandhi, I accept that any political action involves some degree of physical force and that resistance is never totally nonviolent (Sonnleiter 2006, 164; see also Terchek 1998, ch. 6). Instead of assuming a fixed dichotomy, therefore, I explore how activists develop and display practical wisdom for responding to the complexities of violence and nonviolence in actual situations.<sup>8</sup>



Second, Sharp explicitly stresses that nonviolent action methods should be “carefully chosen, applied persistently and on a large scale, wielded in the context of a wise strategy and appropriate tactics, by trained civilians” (2010, 31). But he assumes that the meanings of these terms are universal and self-evident, based on dominant views of instrumental rationality and rational choice. In contrast, I suggest that words like *careful*, *persistent*, *wise*, and *appropriate* only make sense in particular social spaces and depend on the practical wisdom of participants. Knowing how to act in specific situations requires prudent judgment and keen sensitivity to contextual details, not just awareness of general rules or training in relevant techniques. *Phronesis* enables practitioners to identify concrete problems in everyday life, consider relevant values and interests, evaluate various methods and strategies, and respond intuitively and appropriately to the immediate challenge. In sum, Sharp starts with an abstract theory and a list of distinct methods, and then summarizes in broad terms how these help explain the dynamics of nonviolent action in various countries and historical periods, while I primarily focus on depicting and interpreting the practical wisdom developed and exercised by actual civil resisters in local contexts.

Third, Sharp sees power as a hierarchical force shaping relationships between “the regime” and “the people,” where I see power as a pervasive force shaping all relationships between (and within) Self and Other—not just those between the government and its population. Thus, instead of assuming that civil resistance involves two sides, one relatively powerful and the other relatively powerless, I consider multiple battlefields and forms of rule in multiple social spaces.<sup>9</sup> From this perspective, the specific situations faced by nonviolent activists are much more complex, ambiguous, and conflicting than Sharp’s work implies. Consequently, having access to a generic model of power and struggle, and to a comprehensive overview of nonviolent strategies and tactics, is not enough for participants in unarmed struggles. Activists seeking social and political transformation need to gain the phronetic capacity to know which methods are appropriate for their particular causes and circumstances.

And finally, Sharp’s view of learning is rule based, fact oriented, and analytical, while my phronetic view emphasizes personal involvement, emotional experiences, and intuitive responses to specific situations. Here, I rely on the insights of Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus (1986; Flyvbjerg 2001, ch. 2). Their framework for understanding learning processes indicates that teachers or texts initially simplify a subject into generic, context-free components and provide *novice students* with abstract rules and basic facts for performing an educational task. Next, *advanced beginners* gain the ability to respond to specific instances and to contextualize relevant information, but they still

rely on teachers or texts for guidance and interpretation of the material. Eventually, they might reach the level of competence, at which point students can formulate a plan or select an approach that tells them on which aspects of a situation to focus and which to ignore. Yet the rules and procedures of such a plan or approach cannot possibly deal with all of the complexities and exceptions of real-life situations, forcing students to decide on a strategy without knowing whether or not it is appropriate. Although *competent learners* become more independent, teachers or texts remain crucial as advisers or references. Sharp's writings and workshops—and booklets like *Nonviolent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points*—are obviously useful for nonviolent activists at these early stages of the learning process. They supply the analytical rationality and methodological toolbox for beginners and competent practitioners such as the Otpor students in Serbia (Flyvbjerg 2001, 10–16).

But relying exclusively on analytical rationality actually impedes deeper learning, because it emphasizes rules, procedures, and universal solutions at the expense of emotional engagement, moral imagination, and intimate knowledge of concrete cases associated with value rationality. Practical wisdom and intelligent action involve more than awareness of basic principles, facts, theories, and techniques. To become *proficient performers*, students must be actively involved in their learning process, and no longer merely consume information, adopt models, or follow handbooks. By actually practicing a skill in various contexts, some are able to develop an “eye” for evaluating specific situations.<sup>10</sup> Whereas proficient performers intuitively see what needs to be done, though, *virtuosos* also immediately know how to respond to specific situations, drawing on diverse repertoires for refined interpretations and effortless performances (Bourdieu 1977, 1990; Flyvbjerg 2001, ch. 4). At these advanced stages of the learning process, teachers can serve as exemplary practitioners and mentors, while texts can share passionate stories of real-life experiences and practical wisdom. Students attain mastery in a subject or skill by working as apprentices with several recognized masters, developing their own styles and becoming teachers and exemplary practitioners in their own right. The following case narratives illustrate the proficiency and virtuosity of Nashville students in the early 1960s and contemporary revolutionaries in Cairo.

### **Phronesis in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement: SNCC's Virtuosos**

Although Sharp clearly demonstrates that nonviolent action is a common and global phenomenon, he does not distinguish between rule-based and proficient performances. To be transformative or revolutionary, however, nonviolent action must involve small yet significant groups of virtuoso practitioners,

with highly developed *phronesis* among them. The first and most famous nonviolent movement with such virtuoso practitioners was, of course, the Indian independence movement. The eighty activists that inaugurated the Salt March campaign in 1930 and 1931, for example, consisted of men and women who had mastered the Gandhian repertoire of contention through months—and often years—of experiential learning. Since then, nonviolent movements have only rarely included groups of prominent participants with comparable *phronesis*. The band of Nashville students that emerged in 1960 as the Gandhian “storm troopers” of the American civil rights movement was one of the few exceptions.

On February 1, 1960, four African American students in Greensboro, North Carolina, took a seat in the “whites only” section of the local Woolworth’s lunch counter, launching a wave of sit-ins across the South. In the process, they helped revive the American civil rights movement, which had been languishing after the end of the Montgomery bus boycott and emergence of Martin Luther King Jr. as symbolic leader. But while media attention focused on the groundbreaking efforts by Joseph McNeil, Ezell Blair Jr., Franklin McCain, and David Richmond, there was a less visible group of students in Nashville honing its practical knowledge of Gandhian resistance before engaging in nonviolent direct action a few weeks later. The Nashville students learned the intricacies of nonviolence from James Lawson, a member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). Inspired by radical pacifists who had been trying to build a nonviolent movement since the early 1940s, Lawson had spent several years in India before moving to Nashville and organizing workshops on the Gandhian repertoire in 1959. The Greensboro Four had seen a film on Gandhi and had been in contact with some veteran nonviolent activists, but they were novices who gained competence as they participated in sit-ins. In contrast, Lawson’s students intensively studied the complexities of nonviolence over a long period of time before starting their public campaign, and they eventually became the Gandhian virtuosos of the civil rights movement.

Students in Lawson’s weekly workshops first learned that familiar feelings of inferiority and fear were caused by the South’s structures of segregation, not by any personal flaws. They slowly began realizing that Gandhian ideas about nonviolence applied to their everyday lives and that responding to righteous anger with immediate action was often counterproductive. By examining their emotional and intellectual reactions to concrete situations, they gained insight into the power of nonviolence as a practical means for achieving personal and social liberation. After many months of workshops, participants prepared for application of the Gandhian repertoire by engaging

in role-play. In “socio-dramas,” they enacted realistic encounters with white extremists to develop collective discipline and experience moral dilemmas. They worked out in their minds how to respond and then acted out ways to deal with their complex emotions. In another type of role-play, Lawson turned the church where they met into a restaurant or lunch counter and asked students to play sit-in activists, police officers, white extremists, or bystanders. He later recalled: “We’d try to stage it realistically. I’d say, ‘You have to cuss them out, call them bad names. Put yourself in that mood, and act it.’ So we’d try to get people to *act out* potential scenes. And they did good work of it. People learned. People were confronted by it” (Hogan 2007, 25). Afterward, they would share experiences, feelings, and insights, consider various tactics and strategies, and discuss implications for their vision of a beloved community. By engaging in intense conversations and spending a great deal of time with each other, the Nashville students developed strong interpersonal relationships, political commitment, and moral bonds.

By November 1959, the Nashville students were ready to take what they had learned in the safe confines of a local church and experiment with it in the public arena. To enhance their sense of how nonviolent direct action works in practice, they performed a few small-scale and preliminary sit-ins without challenging any segregation policies or provoking arrests. As one student later wrote:

We would simply enter a store, ask to be served, and if—or *when*—we were refused, we would leave. No issues would be forced, no confrontations created. Our aim was simply to establish the issue, and in the process to dip our toes in the water, to get a taste of the setting. (Lewis 1998, 86; see also Halberstam 1998, 90–92)

They carefully studied the lunch counters, took notes on what happened, and exchanged relevant information about each place and interaction with each other. In short, they explored every relevant detail, context, and possibility that came to mind. And finally, when they were confident of their intellectual and intuitive proficiency in the art of nonviolent direct action, they started talking about the date for their first sit-in (Hogan 2007, 26–27).

Although the Greensboro Four received credit and visibility for sparking the southern sit-ins in 1960, it was the Nashville group that soon stood at the cutting-edge of the civil rights movement. Its sit-in campaign started on February 13, 1960, and followed the letter as well as the spirit of the Gandhian repertoire. After months of participating in Lawson’s workshops, the students were ready for leadership. They formulated their own rules of behavior, took over meetings, and started running their own workshops during the

campaign.<sup>11</sup> They invented a new nonviolent tactic, known as “the human wave technique,” which involved immediately replacing each group that was arrested with another group and left local authorities unsure about how many young activists would join the campaign (Hogan 2007, 27). They created a group-centered organizational structure, initiated a policy of rotating leadership, and formed a central committee for ongoing dialogue on the practical implications of nonviolent action. And in the spring of 1960, they successfully desegregated lunch counters in Nashville, forcing the city’s mayor to publicly acknowledge that it was morally wrong to refuse service to potential customers based on the color of their skin (33).

After the wave of sit-ins peaked, the Greensboro Four disappeared from the public limelight, while members of the Nashville group began occupying positions at the heart of the civil rights movement. They formed the largest and most confident delegation at the conference of student leaders initiated by veteran activist Ella Baker in April 1960. They worked with their mentor James Lawson to draft the statement of purpose of the newly founded Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), highlighting the moral and political force of nonviolent resistance. And several of them became prominent leaders of SNCC, including Marion Barry, John Lewis, James Bevel, and Diane Nash. In fact, it was during Nash’s tenure as president in 1961 that SNCC activists earned their reputation as the “storm troopers” of the civil rights movement.

In 1961, the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) returned from obscurity by organizing the Freedom Ride into the Deep South. CORE activists had been the first to engage in Gandhian sit-ins in the early 1940s, but they had remained in the background during the Montgomery bus boycott and southern sit-ins. When James Farmer, their national leader, announced the campaign to test the law prohibiting discrimination of interstate travelers, SNCC’s John Lewis immediately signed up. After a few days of workshops on nonviolent action, the thirteen Freedom Riders boarded two interstate buses and left Washington, D.C., on May 4. The journey was relatively uneventful until Rock Hill, North Carolina, where white youth punched Al Bigelow, Genevieve Hughes, and Lewis. But the most brutal violence occurred in Alabama, where white extremists bombed one of the buses and viciously attacked civil rights activists on the other bus with chains, pipes, knives, sticks, and other weapons. Afterward, both groups wanted to continue, but CORE leaders felt that the threat to participants’ lives was too great and decided to call off the Freedom Ride. Lewis and other SNCC leaders from Nashville strongly disagreed with this decision, arguing that surrendering in the face of violent opposition would undermine the future of the whole civil

rights movement. So they recruited volunteers, asked Lawson to lead workshops on nonviolence, and prepared to complete the journey.

The Freedom Riders participating in the second phase of the campaign suffered more extreme repression and attacks than in the first phase, but they refused to give up. Led by more than a dozen Nashville veterans, they demonstrated that courageous self-suffering and moral force could challenge the most insidious forms of oppression.<sup>12</sup> Many of the Freedom Riders had to serve sentences of sixty days in Parchman Farm, Alabama's notorious state penitentiary. Yet they even made prison into a space for learning and practicing nonviolence. For example, when prison guards threatened to take away their mattresses if they did not stop singing freedom songs, James Bevel argued: "What they're trying to do is take your soul away. It's not the mattress, it's your soul." So the next time the prison guards came, Hank Thomas told them: "Come get my mattress, I'll keep my soul." After losing their mattresses, the prisoners sang louder and longer than before (Lewis 1998, 169; Hogan 2007, 51). Jail had become an extension of Lawson's original workshops in Nashville, a place for gaining mastery in the art of Gandhian resistance.

The Nashville group remained a central force of the civil rights movement in the years that followed. Its members were directly involved in nonviolent direct action campaigns organized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and led by Martin Luther King Jr. Thus, Bevel and Lewis played leading roles in the Birmingham struggle of 1963 as strategic advisers, organizers, and frontline activists. Its reputation and approach also influenced SNCC's voter registration efforts in the Deep South, directed by Robert Moses. Impressed by the courage displayed in 1961, local African Americans referred to the civil rights workers in their towns as "Freedom Riders," while the decentralized style of SNCC's founders strongly affected the Freedom Summer project of 1964. Charles Cobb's plan for the Freedom Schools, for example, focused on enabling poor Mississippians

to articulate their own desires, demands, and questions . . . to stand up in classrooms around the state and ask their teachers a real question . . . to create an educational experience for students which will make it possible for them to challenge the myths of our society, to perceive more clearly its realities, and to find alternatives—ultimately new directions for action. (Cobb 1963)

Like Gandhi's constructive program and ashrams (self-sufficient communities), therefore, the Freedom Schools that emerged in June 1964 aimed at developing oppressed people's social and political capacities and constructing

alternative institutions. Freedom Summer volunteers also helped form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which allowed disenfranchised African Americans to voice their viewpoints, support their own candidates, and experience participatory democracy in action. Although the MFDP's attempt to reform the Democratic Party failed, it significantly enhanced the critical consciousness and practical wisdom of marginalized African Americans.

As the scope of campaigns and number of participants in the civil rights movement grew, however, it became harder to devote the necessary time and energy for gaining phronetic knowledge of nonviolent resistance. Increasingly, leaders as well as new recruits lacked patience for the kind of slow and deep learning that had characterized Lawson's workshops in Nashville. The influence of SNCC pragmatists who saw nonviolence as merely a tactic grew, crowding out SNCC visionaries who saw it as a new way of life. By the end of 1965, calls for armed self-defense and Black Power started to overwhelm calls for joining hands and building the beloved community. Gradually, activists lost faith in the power of Gandhian nonviolence and the potential for social transformation, precipitating internal divisions within SNCC and decline of the civil rights movement.

Although brief, my sketch of the Nashville group in SNCC clearly illustrates the significance of *phronesis* for civil resistance and social movements. It shows, for instance, that while workshops of a few days might allow participants to grasp the basic principles, rules, and guidelines of nonviolent resistance, it takes many months of study and practice to become proficient performers and virtuosos. Participants in Lawson's workshops took ample time to discuss methods and cases of nonviolent action as well as individual values, political visions, concrete experiences, contextual details, power relations, specific tactics, and long-term strategies. They did not feel the pressure of a deadline, but they were ready to translate their ideas into action when the moment was right. It also highlights that moral growth was at least as important as intellectual insight and technical know-how. Strong commitment to the means of Gandhian soul force and to the end of beloved community enabled Nashville students to confront ambiguous emotions, face opponents with courage, respond intuitively to unexpected situations, and persist over the long haul. In other words, their ethical principles *reinforced* their pragmatic reasoning and interaction. How else can we understand why the Freedom Riders in Parchman Farm chose to give up their mattresses in order to keep singing?

Finally, my case narrative implies that while *episteme* and *techne* might suffice for short-term political struggles aimed at replacing leaders or reforming laws, only *phronesis* enables sustained political struggles toward transforming

self and society. The quality of individual and collective learning shapes the ability of participants in civil resistance or other social movements to fight structures of oppression and promote liberation in specific social spaces and contexts. Although grasping theoretical principles and abstract guidelines is useful, the power of activists to realize visions of beloved community and participatory democracy primarily depends on practical wisdom in concrete situations. As we have seen, Nashville students intuitively knew *that* and *how* they had to continue the Freedom Rides, and they were able to respond creatively and constructively to repressive circumstances in Alabama's state prison. Moreover, Freedom Summer organizers not only came up with innovative ideas like the Freedom Schools but also figured out how to write curriculum, prepare teachers, and arrange classrooms. My main point is that without SNCC workers' practical wisdom to fulfill such mundane yet crucial tasks, the impact of their campaigns and projects would have been less radical and enduring.

### ***Phronesis* in Egypt's 2011 Revolution: Tahrir Square's Virtuosos**

On January 25, 2011, several weeks after the Tunisian revolution ousted President Ben-Ali, tens of thousands of Egyptians took to the streets in cities across the country, demanding an end to the nearly thirty-year rule of President Mubarak. After the "Day of Rage," news and images of the dramatic events in Egypt spread like wildfire throughout the world via mainstream and social media channels. For the next eighteen days, global audiences were bombarded with continuous updates and interpretations of the "Friday of Anger" on January 28, the "Million Man March" on February 1, brutal police repression, clashes between demonstrators and Mubarak supporters, and finally the president's resignation on February 11.

Mainstream media sources primarily focused on the sensational details and immediate implications of what was happening on the ground, glossing over the complexity of historical and social forces. When no leading figure or organization emerged from the ongoing struggle, journalists began pointing to Gene Sharp as the theoretical and strategic inspiration for the Egyptian revolution, especially after Sheryl Stolberg's article on his work in the *New York Times* (2011). Contributors to alternative and interactive media paid more attention to the history of Mubarak's rise to power, American involvement, and social movements in Egypt, and to the oppressive social conditions caused by neoliberal globalization and economic policies. And like most commentators across the political spectrum, they expressed their admiration for the nonviolent protesters and their "pro-democracy" ideals in



glowing terms. But very few reporters or observers shed light on the practical wisdom displayed by revolutionaries in specific contexts. The purpose of this section is to outline a *phronetic* approach to studying Egypt's revolution. Lacking evidence and expertise for an in-depth case study, I just offer three initial glimpses of contentious encounters and everyday practices in Cairo's Tahrir Square.

### ***Asmaa Mahfouz's Calls for Civil Disobedience***

It was a series of passionate pleas by a young Egyptian woman that triggered the "Day of Rage" and ensuing revolution. Images of Asmaa Mahfouz's calls for civil disobedience were posted on the Internet and quickly spread through cyberspace. As a founding member of the April 6 Movement, Mahfouz had mobilized youth activists through Facebook and engaged in civil resistance since 2008. But after witnessing the lack of public response to four Egyptians setting themselves on fire to protest Mubarak's dictatorial regime, she decided to encourage people to take action by appealing to their sense of moral outrage and desire for dignity. In a video posted on January 16, 2011, she urged fellow Egyptians to come to Tahrir Square on January 17 and join her in the struggle against the corrupt government:

I'm going down on January 25th, and from now 'til then I'm going to distribute fliers in the streets. . . . Whoever says it is not worth it because there will only be a handful of people, I want to tell him, 'You are the reason behind this, and you are a traitor, just like the president or any security cop who beats us in the streets.' Your presence with us will make a difference, a big difference. Talk to your neighbors, your colleagues, friends and family, and tell them to come. . . . If you stay at home, then you deserve all that is being done, and you will be guilty before your nation and your people. . . . Never say there's no hope. Hope disappears only when you say there's none. So long as you come down with us, there will be hope. Don't be afraid of the government. . . . I am going down on January 25th, and I will say no to corruption, no to this regime.

The next day, only three male activists showed up at the demonstration in Tahrir Square (as well as three armored cars with riot police). So on January 18, 2011, Mahfouz posted another statement, saying that people should be ashamed of their apathy and show some honor by participating in the following week's event. On January 24, her message was more positive, thanking people of all ages and walks of life for helping her distribute fliers and posters throughout Cairo. Yet neither she nor anyone else could predict whether the emotional declarations and hard work would pay off.

Of course we now know that the turnout on January 25, 2011, was massive, creating a momentum that caused the regime to collapse on February 11. Tens of thousands of protesters clashed with police in Cairo and other cities, seeking an end to the president's rule and political system. Although some threw rocks and attacked opponents, most of the protestors followed the strategic guidelines and steps for nonviolent civil disobedience passed around anonymously.<sup>13</sup> Leaflets distributed in the crowd listed four specific demands: immediate resignation of Mubarak, immediate resignation of the entire cabinet, dissolution of the undemocratic parliament, and formation of a "national rescue government."<sup>14</sup> Despite several deaths and many injuries on the first day, thousands of revolutionaries occupied Tahrir Square and vowed to continue the sit-in until they achieved their goals. They stood their ground in the contentious interactions of the next few weeks, suffering brutal attacks by pro-regime thugs and security forces and staging direct actions involving hundreds of thousands of participants. Finally, their discipline, unity, and courage paid off when Mubarak stepped down after merely eighteen days of revolutionary struggle. Much has happened in Egyptian politics since then, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Civil resistance and social movement scholars generally focus on the dynamics of public displays and protest events. In contrast, a *phronetic* approach highlights the enactment of practical wisdom before, during, and after dramatic encounters between activists and authorities. Asmaa Mahfouz's videos and statements were not just significant as motivators for mass nonviolent direct action and "people power," which in turn brought down the dictator. They were also important sources and manifestations of the kinds of intuitive knowledge that allow activists to respond to concrete situations in creative ways. As noted earlier, the Nashville students did not need to examine philosophical principles (*episteme*) or strategic handbooks (*techne*) to know—in their bodies, minds, and souls—that and how they had to complete the Freedom Rides in 1961. Similarly, Mahfouz's passionate pleas appeared to draw more on moral and contextual reasoning than on grand theories or technical rules. By primarily speaking to fellow citizens, she clearly demonstrated a sense of power as a pervasive force, shaping not only relationships between the people and the regime, but also among the people themselves. As students of contentious politics, we need to gain deeper insight into the *social movement phronesis* developed and performed by activists like Mahfouz. We also need to consider how such practical wisdom shapes what happens during visible confrontations between opposing sides in the struggle as well as what happens behind the scenes and beyond the public limelight.

### ***Occupying and Organizing Social Space in Tahrir Square***

Another important site for exploring movement *phronesis* was Tahrir Square—which means “Liberation Square”—before and after the dust of clashes between protesters and police had settled. During the height of the revolution, Egyptians transformed this social space at the center of Cairo from a bottleneck for traffic into a sprawling camp. As an interactive map on the website of BBC News shows, in early February Tahrir Square consisted of several autonomous zones and parallel institutions.<sup>15</sup> There were food stalls, toilets, and places for water and flag sellers in the northern part. The central area was full of tents, surrounded by the wall of martyrs, and included a kindergarten, garbage bins, and corner for bloggers. The pharmacy and main stage were at the southern end, while there was another campsite to the west. And on the eastern side, there were health clinics, a newspaper wall, and works of art. This is also where people sat and slept on the tanks parked by the major entrance to the square, to prevent the army from regaining control. All of these basic services were voluntary and initiated by the occupants themselves, without guidance from formal rules, leaders, or organizations. In other words, they emerged from the people below, not from authorities above.

For the people occupying Tahrir Square, reclaiming social space at the center of Cairo quickly became as important to the revolution as surviving confrontations with the security forces. After suffering vicious attacks by pro-Mubarak thugs, they focused their collective energy on forging social relations for governing everyday life within this emerging zone of autonomy, soon named the “free people’s republic of Tahrir” (Elshahed 2011). They created entry points and appointed volunteers to check for identification and weapons, to keep out representatives of the Mubarak regime and maintain trust among occupants. As a result, the main street leading into the heart of Cairo—which was lined with barricades—became a space of uncertainty, paranoia, and violent encounters, while the central section became a social space of stability and commonality (Rashed 2011). Some protesters set up tents and settled in the square, but many more were daily visitors who spent hours talking with strangers, enjoying the festive atmosphere, and deliberating the next moves of the political struggle.

Mohamed Elshahed, a resident of Cairo and a social scientist, offers a detailed description of everyday life in Tahrir Square at this time:

There was an amazing cross-section of Egyptian society—a mix of class, gender, age, sexual orientation, dress code, ethnicity, and religion—strangers who under normal circumstances would never have met. The revolutionary spirit seemed to break down the longstanding barriers, and

to imbue a new sense of solidarity and acceptance. During these days, Tahrir became a hub for social activity and artistic creativity. People sold food and drinks, set up recycling bins and portable toilets, organized the logistics of daily life. . . . Throughout the square bloggers were streaming comments and images onto the Internet. Doctors and nurses were providing free healthcare in impromptu clinics. Filmmakers were interviewing protesters and creating an instant archive, a visual and oral record of history as it was unfolding. Musicians, professional and amateur, wrote songs and tested them on eager audiences. There were poets, puppeteers and comedians. Art teachers provided supplies and then displayed the artworks that resulted on a public wall. There was even an artist who painted a large canvas that invited protestors to participate in its making. Tahrir Square had been transformed not only into a social and public space but also into the biggest spontaneous event of community organizing and nation building the country had ever seen. With the protection of the army, as the security threat abated, Tahrir took on the atmosphere of a carnival. (Elshahed 2011)

In other words, the occupants demonstrated that they did not depend on government officials or authorities, but could govern themselves through popular committees and self-management.<sup>16</sup> They could establish and organize their own social space, where they could engaging in daily practices guided by egalitarian values like mutual aid, voluntary association, spontaneity, and unity in diversity (Elshahed 2011; see also Jensen 2011).

Along with alternative forms of self-organization and social interaction came new forms of participatory democracy. From the beginning of their occupation, people in Tahrir Square talked incessantly about causes of oppression, stories of suffering, visions of Egyptian society, and strategies of resistance—both in private conversations and public forums. Revolutionaries regularly gathered by the main stage to discuss political events and engage in direct decision making. Political scientist David McNally summarizes how this process worked in Cairo and elsewhere:

Organized into smaller groups, people discuss and debate, and then send elected delegates to consultations about the movement's demands. As one journalist explains, "delegates from these mini-gatherings then come together to discuss the prevailing mood, before potential demands are read out over the square's makeshift speaker system. The adoption of each proposal is based on the proportion of boos or cheers it receives from the crowd at large. . . . Tahrir Square and public spaces in Alexandria, Suez and dozens of smaller cities are now site of ongoing festivals of the oppressed." (McNally 2011; see also Campbell 2011)

In this way, all participants—whether young or old, rich or poor, male or female, highly educated or illiterate, Muslim or Christian—were able to express their viewpoints and proposals, without control by any dominant parties, leaders, or ideologies. Drawing on (and accountable to) the diverse voices from below, council members represented the “street demands” to wider audiences and negotiated with authorities about crucial issues like the new constitution, a provisional government, and new elections. Most of these council members came from the youth coalition, which consisted of six groups: the April 6 Movement, Justice and Freedom, and its El Baradei affiliates, as well as the Democratic Front party, the Muslim Brotherhood, and independents. Despite internal differences and disputes, this coalition kept the lines of communication open and displayed “militant patience” in dealing with government officials (Olzen 2011). Although the process of deliberation and decision making was far from perfect, it helped turn Tahrir Square into an exemplar of participatory democracy for activists and social movements around the world.

A *phronetic* approach offers new ways of exploring the significance of institutions, relationships, and democratic practices in social spaces like Tahrir Square. It seeks finer and deeper insight into how people on the ground learned to transform the central area in the regime’s capital into a revolutionary space, both during dramatic contentious encounters and during the “down times” preceding or following them. As we saw, taking care of basic human needs (food, bathrooms, water, garbage, education, and health) and opportunities for social interaction (computers, newspapers, and public art) fueled and complemented the direct action events highlighted by the global media. Within this new context, people built new social relationships and a new sense of community. They collectively developed novel strategies for maintaining security, promoting trust, fulfilling mundane tasks, encouraging creative expression, including multiple social groups, and having fun. They also experimented with innovative forms of political communication, deliberation, decision making, and self-government. By closely examining what actually happens in social spaces, *phronetic* researchers are able to see participants as whole human beings (each with a body, mind, and soul) and consider individual as well as collective learning processes. They can show that the practical wisdom of people in Tahrir Square was the crucial ingredient for transformation, not the general knowledge of experts or recipes for success in handbooks.

### ***Reviving Revolutionary Social Space in Tahrir Square***

At the end of June 2011, someone posted a page on Facebook entitled “The Second Egyptian Revolution of Rage.” It summarized the popular sentiment since the resignation of Mubarak and called on people to revive the revolution:

Seeing that the situation, under the leadership of the [Supreme] Council of the Armed Forces, is only going from bad to worse, and [since] the council has proven from day one that [public] pressure is the most effective policy for achieving the demands of the legitimate revolution, we have decided to take to the streets and squares [once again] and demonstrate throughout Egypt until our demands are met. (MEMRI 2011)

After the initial euphoria in February 2011, many Egyptians quickly realized that the new regime, consisting of Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) members, was incapable of improving material conditions and meeting the revolution's basic demands (Green and Blough 2011). Thousands of angry people returned to the streets and clashed with the interim government's security forces in cities across the country. On June 28, 2011, for example, violence broke out when police prevented several families of martyrs killed during the eighteen days of revolution from attending a commemoration, and protesters responded to attacks by throwing rocks, pieces of concrete, and Molotov cocktails (Chediak 2011; see also Kouddous 2011).<sup>17</sup> In the wake of these nationwide street battles, the revolution's coalition of political groups set aside internal differences of the previous five months and announced that massive demonstrations would take place on July 8, 2011, labeled "Friday of Justice for Revolution Martyrs" (Harrison 2011).

On February 12, 2011, thousands of people volunteered to clean up Tahrir Square, symbolizing the renewal of their government and society.<sup>18</sup> But only a few days later, the army suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, and announced it would take over the government until presidential and parliamentary elections in September 2011. It also banned mass gatherings and labor strikes and removed the demonstrators still living in "liberation square." In April, thousands of protesters defied the army in the center of Cairo, increasing the pressure on the new regime to meet the revolutionary demands of "bread, freedom, social justice" (Martin 2011). By the end of June, protesters started returning to Tahrir Square, setting up another tent city in preparation for the mass sit-in campaign (MacKey 2011; Stevenson 2011).<sup>19</sup> On July 8, 2011, over one hundred thousand people took to the streets in Cairo and announced a new set of demands, which included:

1. Banning military trials of civilians and releasing civilians sentenced by military court;
2. Establishing a special court for suspects in killing of protesters and suspending all guilty police officers;
3. Firing of the current minister of the interior and restructuring of the Ministry of Interior;

4. Firing of the current prosecutor general and appointment of a legitimate replacement;
5. Bringing Mubarak and other criminals in his regime to trial;
6. Revoking the current budget and drafting a new budget based on the basic demands and needs of Egypt's poor people;
7. Open debate about the role of the SCAF and its relation to the cabinet of ministers in the future (after removal of all former members of the regime).<sup>20</sup>

And this time, they declared that the occupation would last as long as the government refused to respond to their basic needs and to their desire for dignity (Naib 2011).

As in the first phase of the revolution, occupants were using their creativity and practical wisdom to develop autonomous institutions, relationships, and democratic practices in the social space of Tahrir Square. To survive in the summer heat, they connected large white sheets and installed a huge tent in the center to provide shade for as many of the twenty thousand “permanent residents” as possible.<sup>21</sup> They also added a cinema, a bookstore, a radio station, several open-air restaurants, and a school for street children to the previous infrastructure. Volunteers in “Tahrir School” began lessons with puzzles, artwork, and storytelling to engage students aged ten to fifteen in the education that they have lacked, hoping to empower them as active citizens in the new Egypt. After school, students often went to the cinema to watch films about the revolution or visit the library to borrow books. Other residents listened to “Revolution Radio,” wrote blogs on their laptops, or enjoyed the bazaar-like shopping area. Yet as Mahmoud Salem, a founder of Tahrir School, observed:

While some outsiders may view the atmosphere in Tahrir Square as festival-like, I believe it is there to prove a point. It's become a social experiment, which can prove that, since our demands are not being met, in the meantime, we can create a more utopian microcosm of Egypt. (Doss 2011)

Besides reinventing social life, occupants also continued to hold political discussions, both informally and at the stages for public rallies and forums set up by the Revolution Youth Coalition, Muslim Brotherhood, and other political groups.<sup>22</sup> While the deliberation and decision-making process were similar to that in February, the role of striking workers and their associations grew, as did the number of people on hunger strikes (Green and Blough 2011). But after the false promise of the “first revolution,” Egyptian activists knew at the time that they were participating in the “second revolution” for the long haul.

Clearly, social and political struggle for transformation did not end after the people of Egypt brought down the dictator. With a *phronetic* approach, we can explore what and how Egyptian activists learned—both individually and collectively—in the aftermath of the initial revolution. Some significant changes occurred in the ways Egyptian protesters responded to new contexts and circumstances. First and foremost, many protesters soon realized that replacing the Mubarak regime with the SCAF’s interim government did not contribute to political or economic progress. Since “taking the state” did not enable renewal of society, they once again reverted to “taking the streets,” seeking to rebuild social spaces through direct action and occupation. After some violent reactions to the lack of justice for martyrs in the summer of 2011, activists announced another revolutionary campaign with new demands. These demands were more specific than earlier ones and aimed at “cleansing” the old regime, restructuring the political system, and ensuring that the economy primarily serves the well-being of people and communities rather than the wealth of elites and corporations. Egypt’s revolutionaries also reclaimed Tahrir Square and experimented with new institutions, relationships, and practices, making them suitable to current conditions and visions of participatory democracy. And on June 24, 2012, after an arduous electoral process, Egyptians finally greeted their new president Mohamed Morsi, the candidate for the Freedom and Justice Party and Muslim Brotherhood. Several organizations at the forefront of the Egyptian revolution—including the April 6 Youth Movement—subsequently collaborated with Morsi, pushing him to implement the people’s demands and appoint youth representations to his administration and cabinet.<sup>23</sup> Tragically, however, the *phronesis* for self-rule developed by Egyptian people proved to be insufficient for the social and political transformations they had hoped to achieve—especially after Morsi’s ouster by a military coup in July 2013 sparked widespread anti-Muslim Brotherhood sentiment and civil strife.

### Concluding Reflections and Challenges

As we have seen, Sharp’s approach to civil resistance produces knowledge that is useful but limited. By defining nonviolent action as a technique, it draws attention to its pragmatic, strategic, and rational dimensions, and away from its moral, cultural, and emotional aspects. And by relying on a positivist understanding of social science, it is able to theorize power, list methods, analyze dynamics, and propose generic guidelines for nonviolent action, but it is unable to consider the actual meanings, values, and lived experiences associated with these methods, dynamics, and guidelines. In short, by appealing to “the head,” Sharp dismisses “the heart” of nonviolent action and activists.



Flyvbjerg's work offers promising avenues for going beyond Sharp's approach to civil resistance. It recognizes the relevance of general theory (*episteme*) and specific techniques (*techne*), but prioritizes the practical wisdom and experiential learning of practitioners (*phronesis*). It avoids splitting mind from body, morality from reason, and head from heart, highlighting their interdependence in the creation and enactment of knowledge. More specifically, it accentuates that distinctions between violence and nonviolence are always problematic; that success or failure of choices depends on context and practice; that power is pervasive in all Self–Other relations and social spaces; and that the proficiency and virtuosity required for revolutionary transformation emerges from experiences, experiments, and intuition. Flyvbjerg's approach also allows us to see the arrogance in portraying Sharp (or any other foreign thinker) as the mastermind behind past, present, and future civil resistance movements. Clearly, the practical wisdom of activists themselves, as it relates to their own situations and contexts, is more directly significant than the texts and models of anyone else.

The two case narratives are initial glimpses of a *phronetic* approach to civil resistance and other social movements. They indicate where we might look for *social movement phronesis* and illustrate what we might find. The case of Nashville students and the SNCC shows that deep learning takes time and shapes people's bodies, minds, and souls. The workshops led by James Lawson, for example, enabled moral as well as intellectual growth, both within and outside of the classroom. The *phronesis* emerging from these workshops shaped the social movement practices of Nashville activists, including their strategies, campaigns, leadership, organizations, experiences in jail, and interactions with oppressed African Americans in the Deep South. For them, nonviolence was clearly more than just a philosophy or set of procedures; it was a way of life affecting all of their ideas, relationships, and social spaces. The case of Egyptian revolutionaries in Tahrir Square also demonstrates the relevance of individual and collective practical wisdom. The first time Asmaa Mahfouz's plea for direct action spread through social media, for instance, the response was disappointing. Only three demonstrators stood by her on January 18, 2011. Yet only one week later the same message brought over one hundred thousand Egyptians to Tahrir Square, setting the stage for eighteen days of revolution. Mahfouz's words and courage touched many people at an emotional, moral, and experiential level. They knew intuitively that she was right, and they finally decided to risk their lives by expressing their grievances through public protest. It was her and their own *phronesis*—not analytical thinking or pragmatic know-how—that pushed them to break out of the prison of fear and participate in the fight for human dignity. The occupation

of Tahrir Square allowed Egyptian revolutionaries to continue their learning process, as they realized that reinventing everyday life was as important to their struggle as confronting security forces and authorities. By reclaiming this social space, they began creating a new society in the shell of the old. And when removing the dictator did not bring improvements in social conditions and personal well-being, they reoccupied Tahrir Square and expanded experiments with cultural and political renewal—this time on a more permanent basis. Although the Egyptian people’s efforts have so far failed to bring enduring liberation, they demonstrated the potential for dignity and autonomy.

Clearly, my case narratives only hint at the potential for new inquiries and insights in this area of research. We need more, richer, and finer-grained explorations of *social movement phronesis* to gain a better sense of *how* activists become proficient and virtuoso performers, and *how* their practical wisdom matters for political struggles. The challenge, though, is to imagine and engage in research on practical wisdom that avoids the limitations of conventional approaches. While we can examine and write about *episteme* and *techne* apart from action, we can only examine and write about *phronesis* through the individual and collective actions that flow from the character of participants. As Richard Halverson points out:

The challenge for research dedicated to *phronesis* is to uncover the rhythms of the practices of interested practitioners, represent those practices in ways that are accessible to other practitioners, and develop better ways to communicate good practice. In order to learn *phronesis*, we must be able to see it in action. (2004, 6–7)

Our task is to create and employ approaches for seeing social movement *phronesis* in action and to share exemplary practical wisdom with other researchers and activists.

## Notes

1. My brief review of Sharp’s work draws primarily on the three volumes of *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973), *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (2010), and *Waging Nonviolent Struggle* (2005).

2. But see chapter 10 of this volume, where Chaiwat Satha-Anand suggests that the distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence may be illusory.

3. It is not surprising, therefore, that Sharp sees his role as a social scientist producing theoretical models and identifying specific techniques of nonviolent action, while Gandhi devoted his career to engaging in “experiments in truth” and

encouraging others to do the same for themselves. In short, Sharp's message is in his writings and methods, while Gandhi's message was in his life.

4. According to Sharp, creativity must serve the purpose of strategic thinking: "Creativity and bright ideas are very important, but they need to be utilized in order to advance the strategic situation of the democratic forces" (2010, 41). Later he highlights that "formulation of strategies for the struggle . . . requires an informed creativity" (53).

5. Sharp writes: "Just as military officers must understand force structures, tactics, logistics, munitions, the effects of geography, and the like in order to plot military strategy, political defiance planners must understand the nature and strategic principles of nonviolent struggle" (2010, 53).

6. Sharp (2005) includes twenty-four case studies of successful civil resistance movements in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. For the Serbian case, see chapter 27, 315–39.

7. For example, Martin Luther King Jr. noted that "the tactic of nonviolence without the spirit of nonviolence may become a new kind of violence." He therefore favored nonviolence as a way of life seeking the beloved community. See Hogan (2007, 252).

8. For more on the complexities of violence and nonviolence, see esp. Howes (2009).

9. For more on power as pervasive, see esp. Flyvbjerg (2001, 116–28, 131–32).

10. As Dreyfus (2002, 40) observes: "Proficiency seems to develop if, and only if, experience is assimilated in this embodied, atheoretical way. Only then do intuitive reactions replace reasoned responses."

11. The Nashville campaign relied on the following rules of behavior ("Dos and Don'ts"). "DO NOT: 1. Strike back nor curse if abused; 2. Laugh out; 3. Hold conversations with floor walker; 4. Leave your seat until your leader has given you permission to do so; 5. Block entrances to stores outside nor the aisles inside. DO: 1. Show yourself friendly and courteous at all times; 2. Sit straight; always face the counter; 3. Report all serious incidents to your leader; 4. Refer information seekers to your leader in a polite manner; 5. Remember the teachings of Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Love and nonviolence is the way" (Lewis 1998, 98).

12. Nashville participants included James Lawson, John Lewis, James Bevel, C. T. Vivian, Bernard Lafayette, Joseph Carter, Alex Anderson, Matthew Walker Jr., Rip Patton, John Lee Copeland, Grady Donald, Clarence Thomas, and LeRoy Write (Arsenault 2009, 261, 266–67). For more on the Nashville workshops, see Isaac et al. (2012).

13. The anonymous document listed strategic goals: taking over government buildings, attempting to win over members of the police and army, and protecting

fellow activists. As steps for carrying out the plan, it mentioned assembling in residential streets far away from security forces, shouting positive slogans in the name of Egypt and the people's freedom, encouraging other people to participate, going into major streets with large groups to form a massive assembly, and heading toward government buildings while shouting positive slogans in order to occupy them. This document also offered advice on clothing and accessories, how to interact with security forces, positive messages to write on signs ("Long Live Egypt!" and "The People and the Police Stand Together Against Oppression"), and how to publish and disseminate information (stressing that people should avoid social media like Twitter and Facebook). See Madrigal (2011) and Black (2011).

14. See "Communiqué from the Tahrir Square Sit-In," Anarkismo.net, January 26, <http://www.anarkismo.net/article/18612>.

15. For the map and links, see "Egypt Unrest," BBC News, February 11, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-12434787>.

16. Interview with Jano Charbel, "Fire in Cairo: An Egyptian Anarchist Talks about the January 25th Revolt," Libcom.org, posted May 28, <http://libcom.org/library/fighting-dictators-old-new-egyptian-anarchist-talks-about-january-25th-revolt>.

17. Robert MacKey (2011) points out that the Egyptian police used tear gas shells with "Made in U.S.A." on them, some of them manufactured in the United States as recently as the previous month.

18. See "Cairo's Tahrir Square on February 12, 2011—Pics," Democratic Underground.com, February 12, 2011, <http://journals.democraticunderground.com/Kadie/1726>.

19. For an Al Jazeera report on preparations, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uiO-pL6wShM&feature=related>.

20. The Egypt Revolution Youth Coalition issued the joint statement with several other protest groups outlining these demands. For the demands, see "Egypt Revolution Youth Coalition and Allies Demand Curb on SCAF Powers," Al-Ahram Online, July 9, 2011, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/15922.aspx>. See also Adams and Ytterström (2011).

21. See "Searing Heat Newest Challenge for Cairo Protesters," Associated Press, July 21, 2011, <http://newsok.com/searing-heat-newest-challenge-for-cairo-protesters/article/feed/278363>.

22. The Egypt Revolution Youth Coalition consists of the April 6 Youth movement, Justice and Freedom, Muslim Brotherhood youth, ElBaradei's campaign, the Popular Democratic Movement for Change, the Democratic Front, and Khaled Saeed Facebook group administrators. For more on the Youth Coalition, see Shukrallah (2011).

23. See Kirkpatrick (2012); "Morsy Pledges to Include Revolutionary Youth in Administration," Egypt.com, June 22, 2012, <http://news.egypt.com/english/permalink/126812.html>.

## Bibliography

- Adams, Brian, and Viktoria Ytterström. 2011. "The Masses Return to the Streets in Egypt: Revolution until Victory!" *Fightback: The Marxist Voice of Labour and Youth*, July 11. <http://www.ireland.marxist.com/international/8270-the-masses-return-to-the-streets-in-egypt-revolution-until-victory>.
- Arsenault, Raymond. 2009. *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Black, Ian. 2011. "Egypt Protest Leaflets Distributed in Cairo Give Blueprint for Mass Action." *Guardian*, January 27. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jan/27/egypt-protest-leaflets-mass-action/print>.
- Bellah, Robert, et al. 1985. *Habits of the Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Burrowes, Robert. 1996. *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense: A Gandhian Approach*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Campbell, Horace. 2011. "Echoes from Tunisia and Egypt: Revolutions without Self-Proclaimed Revolutionaries." *Pambazuka News*, no. 515, February 3. <http://www.pambazuka.net/en/category/features/70670#top>.
- Chediac, Joyce. 2011. "Thousands Fight Police in Tahrir Square." *Workers World*, July 11. [http://www.workers.org/2011/world/tahrir\\_square\\_0714/](http://www.workers.org/2011/world/tahrir_square_0714/).
- Cobb, Charles. 1963. "Prospectus for Summer Freedom School Program in Mississippi." [http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCfiles/B\\_05\\_ProspForFSchools.htm](http://www.educationanddemocracy.org/FSCfiles/B_05_ProspForFSchools.htm).
- Doss, Leyla. 2011. "Nearing 2-Week Mark, Tahrir Sit-in Becomes Tahrir City." *Egypt Independent*, July 20. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/nearing-2-week-mark-tahrir-sit-becomes-tahrir-city>.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L. 2002. *On the Internet*. London: Routledge.
- Dreyfus, Hubert L., and Stuart E. Dreyfus. 1986. *Mind over Machine: The Power of Human Intuition and Expertise in the Era of the Computer*. New York: Free Press.
- Elshahed, Mohamed. 2011. "Tahrir Square: Social Media, Public Space." *Places*, February. <https://placesjournal.org/article/tahrir-square-social-media-public-space/>.
- Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2001. *Making Social Science Matter*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Green, Niall, and Les Blough. 2011. "Mass Protests Continue against Egyptian Regime." *Axis of Logic*, July 16. [http://axisoflogic.com/artman/publish/Article\\_63395.shtml](http://axisoflogic.com/artman/publish/Article_63395.shtml).
- Halberstam, David. 1998. *The Children*. New York: Ballantine.

- Halverson, Richard. 2004. "Accessing, Documenting and Communicating Practical Wisdom: The *Phronesis* of School Leadership Practice." <http://flyvbjerg.plan.aau.dk/Halverson04PhronesisAJE.pdf>.
- Harrison, Patrick. 2011. "Egypt: Fresh Protests to 'Save the Revolution.'" *Green Left Weekly*, July 11.
- Helvey, Robert. 2004. *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking about the Fundamentals*. Boston: Albert Einstein Institution.
- Hogan, Wesley. 2007. *Many Minds, One Heart*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Howes, Dustin Ells. 2009. *Toward a Credible Pacifism: Violence and the Possibilities of Politics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Isaac, Larry W., Daniel B. Cornfield, Dennis C. Dickerson, James M. Lawson, and Jonathan S. Coley. 2012. "'Movement Schools' and Dialogical Diffusion of Nonviolent Praxis: Nashville Workshops in the Southern Civil Rights Movement." *Research in Social Movements, Conflict, and Change* 34:155–84.
- Jensen, Jon. 2011. "Egypt: How to Build a Camp in Tahrir Square." *The Casbah* (blog), July 14. <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatches/globalpost-blogs/the-casbah/egypt-how-build-camp-tahrir-square>.
- Kirkpatrick, David D. 2012. "Power Struggle Begins as Egypt's President if Formally Sworn In." *New York Times*, June 30. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/01/world/middleeast/morsi-is-sworn-in-as-president-of-egypt.html>.
- Kouddous, Sharif Abdel. 2011. "Five Months of Waiting: What Happens When a Revolution Stalls Out?" *Foreign Policy*, July 15. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/07/15/five-months-of-waiting/>.
- Lewis, John. 1998. *Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*. New York: Harcourt Brace.
- MacKey, Robert. 2011. "Protestors Return to Cairo's Tahrir Square." *The Lede* (blog), June 29. <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/06/29/protesters-return-to-cairos-tahrir-square/>.
- Madrigal, Alexis C. 2011. "Egyptian Activists' Action Plan: Translated." *Atlantic*, January 27, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/01/egyptian-activists-action-plan-translated/70388/>.
- Martin, Jorge. 2011. "Egypt: Through What Stage Is the Revolution Passing?" In *Defence of Marxism*, March 25. <http://www.marxist.com/egypt-through-what-stage-is-the-revolution-passing.htm>.
- McNally, David. 2011. "Mubarak's Folly: The Rising of Egypt's Workers." February 11. <http://davidmcnally.org/?p=354>.
- Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI). 2011. "Disappointed with Revolution's Gains, Egyptians Renew Protests." Special dispatch no. 3963, July 3. <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/0/5429.htm>.

- Naib, Fatma. 2011. "Tahrir Square: 'This Time We're Here to Stay.'" Al Jazeera, July 8. <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/07/20117814138272938.html>.
- Olzen, Jake. 2011. "A Modest (Anarchist) Proposal for Egypt." *Waging Nonviolence: People-Powered News and Analysis*, February 14. <http://wagingnonviolence.org/2011/02/a-modest-anarchist-proposal-for-egypt/>.
- Popovic, Srdja, Andrej Milivojevic, and Slobodan Djinojic. 2004. *Nonviolent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points*. Belgrade: Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies. [http://www.usip.org/files/resources/nonviolent\\_eng.pdf](http://www.usip.org/files/resources/nonviolent_eng.pdf).
- Rashed, Mohammed Abouelleil. 2011. "The Egyptian Revolution: A Participant's Account from Tahrir Square." *Anthropology Today* 27:22–27. [http://ucl.academia.edu/MohammedAbouelleilRashed/Papers/494991/The\\_Egyptian\\_revolution\\_A\\_participants\\_account\\_from\\_Tahrir\\_Square\\_January\\_and\\_February\\_2011](http://ucl.academia.edu/MohammedAbouelleilRashed/Papers/494991/The_Egyptian_revolution_A_participants_account_from_Tahrir_Square_January_and_February_2011).
- Sharp, Gene. 1960. *Gandhi Wields the Weapon of Moral Power*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Trust.
- . 1973. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Boston: Porter Sargent.
- . 2005. *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*. Boston: Porter Sargent.
- . 2010. *From Dictatorship to Democracy*. Boston: Albert Einstein Institution.
- Shukrallah, Salma. 2011. "Egypt Revolution Youth Form National Coalition." Ahram Online, February 9. <http://english.ahram.org/NewsContent/1/64/5257/Egypt/Politics-/Egypt-revolution-youth-form-national-coalition.aspx>.
- Sonnleiter, Michael. 2006. "The Birth of Gandhian *Satyagraha*: Nonviolent Resistance and Soul Force." In *Gandhi's Experiments with Truth: Essential Writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. Richard Johnson, 163–74. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Stevenson, Wendell. 2011. *New Yorker*, June 30. <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/wendell-stevenson/2011/06/tahrir-square-tents-and-portents.html>.
- Stolberg, Sheryl Gay. 2011. "Shy U.S. Intellectual Created Playbook Used in a Revolution." *New York Times*, February 16. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html?\\_r=1&ref=genessharp](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/17/world/middleeast/17sharp.html?_r=1&ref=genessharp).
- Terchek, Ronald. 1998. *Gandhi: Struggling for Autonomy*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield.