

# Non-Violent Resistance: A Strategy for the Occupied Territories

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Non-violence is not an innovation in the struggle of the Palestinian people. Palestinians have used non-violent methods since the beginning of the 1930s side by side with the armed struggle in their attempts to achieve their goals against Zionism. The six-month strike of 1936 and the Arab boycott of Israel are two prominent examples of the use of non-violence in the service of the Palestinian cause. In the occupied territories today, the resistance against the occupation does not generally reflect violent methods. School and commercial strikes, petitions, protest telegrams, advertisements and condemnations in the daily papers, and the attempts to boycott Israeli goods are, in fact, manifestations of non-violent struggle. Syrian citizens in the occupied Golan Heights are also conducting a powerful, concentrated and successful campaign of non-violent resistance to the attempts of Israel to impose Israeli law on the Golan Heights.\* This campaign appears to be well organized, and intelligent in its methods, ideas, and the execution of classic non-violence tactics.

\*See R. Scott Kennedy, "The Golan Druze: A Case of Non-Violent Resistance." *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. XIII, no. 2 (Winter 1984) pp. 48-64—Ed.

This study aims to discuss the issue of non-violence as a serious and comprehensive strategy for resisting the Israeli occupation, and the means and tactical methods to implement this strategy as well as the problems and obstacles which it would face in the occupied West Bank and Gaza.

### *Present Conditions in the Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip*

The following important factors limit the nature and possibilities of the Palestinian struggle in those areas at the present time:

1) There are 1.3 million Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. They are unarmed, not trained militarily and not permitted to possess weapons either as individuals or collectively. Furthermore, they do not have the necessary lines of communication to receive military supplies in sufficient quantities to be able to carry on continuous military operations against the occupiers for any length of time.

2) Palestinian citizens endure the full authority of the power of the military government and its institutions. The military government exercises complete control over all aspects of the lives of the Palestinian people. This authority is exercised through a system for issuing or denying permits or licenses which are necessary for almost every activity. This structure operates as part of a policy aimed at controlling the population through segmenting the society and separating the citizens from one another, making citizens economically dependent on Israel, and utilizing certain sectors of the population and turning them into collaborators. These policies are designed to render the citizens incapable of effective opposition to the occupation authorities.

3) Palestinian citizens lack leadership, since they are separated from their accepted representatives on the outside. Local leadership is under strict scrutiny by the authorities. Attempts to form an organized local leadership like the National Guidance Committee, and attempts to unify their public activities so far have failed. The mayors, who are the more prominent local leaders, face considerable obstacles.

4) There is an Israeli plan for changing the character of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by "Judaizing" it. The authorities impose themselves daily on the land, waters, institutions, and rights of the Palestinian people. A comprehensive structure has been set up for the Jewish settlements. The military government and Jewish extremists are proceeding relentlessly with this plan, and very little is being done to stop, delay, or hamper it.

5) The various methods used to implement this plan rarely depend on

brute force. Rather, the Israelis exercise authority through slow, subtle, well-planned methods which are irresistible because they are built on the absolute authority of the military government and legislation that it creates, and economic and other pressures, as well as the existing departments of the established order. Behind these, of course, lies the power of the army, which intervenes to "maintain the peace" when the occupation faces any challenge. Thus, the plan of "Judaization" is being implemented under the very noses of the Palestinians, who feel utterly impotent to resist or delay these plans despite their awareness of them and appreciation of the danger they pose for them.

6) There are no immediate prospects for the liberation of the occupied territories. The hope that salvation may come from the outside no longer exists. The military branches of the PLO are presently incapable of liberating the occupied territories by force and the Arab governments appear presently unable and uninterested in entering into a broad military confrontation with Israel aimed at liberating the occupied areas by force. Under these conditions, any attempt to halt or delay or obstruct "Judaization" must come from those Palestinians presently living in the occupied territory.

For the Palestinians who are living in the West Bank and Gaza during this period, the most effective strategy is one of non-violence. This does not determine the methods open to Palestinians on the outside; nor does it constitute a rejection of the concept of armed struggle. It does not rule out the possibility that the struggle on the inside may turn into an armed struggle at a later stage. Simply put, the thesis is that during this particular historical period, and with regard only to the 1.3 million Palestinians living under the Israeli occupation, non-violence is the most effective method to obstruct the policy of "Judaization." This struggle utilizes the largest possible amount of the potential and resources of Palestinians presently on the inside and offers all sectors of the Palestinian society an opportunity to engage actively in the struggle, instead of observing it passively, by listening to the radio, for example. It can neutralize to a large degree the destructive power of the Israeli war machine, and enlist in our service, or at least neutralize, important sectors of the Israeli society. Such a strategy focuses and increases any beneficial public international attention to our cause by revealing the racist and expansionist features of the Zionist movement and denying it the justifications built on its

purported "security." It removes the irrational fear of "Arab violence," which presently cements Israeli society together. By removing this fear, it contributes to the disintegration of hostile Israeli society and helps to isolate Israel politically and morally.

### *The Assumptions*

This approach is based on certain assumptions:

First, non-violent struggle is a total and serious struggle, nothing short of a real war. There is no assurance that the enemy will be non-violent. On the contrary, there are great sacrifices we should expect in the non-violent struggle. Martyrs and wounded will fall, and Palestinians will suffer personal losses in terms of their interests, jobs, and possessions. Non-violent struggle is a real war, not an easy alternative.

Second, non-violent struggle is not negative or passive. It is an active, affirmative operation, a form of mobile warfare. It will require the enlistment of all resources and capabilities. It requires special training and a high degree of organization and discipline. Secrecy must be maintained in planning, organizing, and coordinating the different operations and campaigns. Most non-violent activities will be illegal according to the laws and military orders presently imposed on the population.

The Israeli soldier is a human being, not a beast devoid of conscience and feeling. He has an understanding of right and wrong to which it is possible to appeal. Similarly, he can be demoralized. He constantly needs a reasonable justification for his activities. On the other hand, he has the potential for evil and oppression like any other person. He is often an intolerant racist and shares most of his government's evil assumptions.

At another level, the Israeli government is sensitive to public opinion, both local and international. It constantly needs international support and aid, and it has an image it wishes to project. At the same time, this sensitivity is limited: the Israeli government is willing to carry out its plans and maintain its oppression regardless of the views of the international community. Nonetheless, Israel does not possess the internal resources which will enable it to bear international isolation for a long time, as is the case with the racist government of South Africa, for example.

Suffering and pain can be useful in forging unity among the Palestinians to resist oppression. They also achieve for the Palestinians moral superiority over the occupiers and set in motion historical factors which insure the survival of the Palestinian people and their eventual

victory. The Palestinian revolution was built on the blood of the martyrs and the suffering of our people. When a non-violent person accepts this suffering voluntarily in defense of his principles instead of having this suffering imposed upon him involuntarily, he or she increases and accentuates these benefits.

Of course, there is no more assurance that a non-violent struggle will be victorious than there is an assurance that armed struggle will achieve its end. Victory and success in a non-violent struggle cannot be measured by easily observable, external, objective criteria. Non-violent struggle achieves its goals and effect upon the hearts and minds of the Israeli soldiers, for example. It can manifest itself in a higher rate of Israeli emigration, by a loss of fighting spirit for the Israeli soldier, by their complaints and protest against the actions of the Israeli government. Similarly, the increasing moral and political isolation of Israel abroad is difficult to measure, but it can be a real and important phenomenon with definite consequences.

### *The Political Positions of the Non-Violent Movement*

The strategy of non-violence does not impose a particular political position. It is not necessary that a non-violent strategy be politically moderate. The non-violent movement need not prefer a solution based on a two-state solution over a secular democratic state in all of Palestine. Nonetheless, all participants in the non-violent struggle must share minimal common political beliefs, must stay within the consensus of the Palestinian people and must work toward the goal of self-determination for the Palestinian people. It must certainly ratify the legitimacy and singleness of the representation of the Palestinian people through the PLO, the popular national positions toward settlement, land expropriation, control over land and water resources, and the unified Palestinian goal of the return of the refugees to their homeland.

### *Points of Contact*

One of the most important aims of any non-violent movement is to find points of contact between the citizens and authorities which highlight the evil and oppression on the one hand, and which lead to a useful and meaningful confrontation on the other hand. The importance of finding

such points of contact becomes clear when we observe two common phenomena:

First, there are the constant attempts of the authorities to distance themselves from the citizens and to interpose Arab intermediaries or "civilian employees" whenever they carry out their most insidious practices, economic or otherwise. This is coupled with the policy of calling in the army, as another face of the occupation, which only acts "to preserve security" when the population rejects these practices.

Second, there is the instinctive need of demonstrators to draw the Israeli army into a confrontation with them. The method most commonly used presently is to burn tires, throw stones, or set up roadblocks. In some cases, demonstrators have called up the army by telephone. Some Israeli politicians (such as Moshe Dayan) realized the wisdom of reducing these confrontations by minimizing the military presence, particularly in the cities. Such a wise policy (from their point of view) does, in fact, reduce the points of contact and confrontation, without improving the position of the Palestinians. Therefore, it is necessary for any non-violent movement to seek points of contact and to select among them the useful points which can lead to fruitful and successful confrontations.

### *Methods of Non-Violent Resistance*

The most complete list of methods that have been used in non-violent resistance is found in Gene Sharp's *The Politics of Non-Violence* (Boston: Sargent, 1973). I will mention here a few of these methods as they have been used or may be used in the occupied territories.

#### *Demonstrations*

This has been the most commonly used method in the occupied territories. The aim of demonstrating is usually to educate, express positions, indicate solidarity and support, protest, and make demands. It is, in other words, a means of expressing a point of view. The most successful demonstration is one where the organizers have asked, and answered in advance, the following queries: What is the message that we wish to get across? Who is our target audience: the international press, local Palestinians, the military government, the Israeli public? It may be necessary for us to try to reach the common Israeli soldier with our message as well. It goes without saying that we must attempt to understand

the psychology of the target audience and to use this understanding in formulating the content and method of the demonstration.

In developing demonstrations, creativity and innovation are important. Gathering large numbers of people for marches and raising the Palestinian flag is excellent, but after 16 years of occupation we need creative ideas for demonstrations. Some tactics can include protest prayers, fasts, silent demonstrations, using powerful symbols such as yellow armbands (which the Nazis forced the Jews to wear), concentration camp costumes, commemoration services for martyrs, guerrilla theater, as well as affirmative and constructive activities such as giving gifts to commemorate national occasions, giving prizes to honor fallen martyrs, and the like. One of the more successful demonstrations was the clean up campaign which the youth of al-Bireh and Ramallah undertook to protest the dismissal of the mayors and the closure of the municipalities. A demonstration can be creative, or even humorous, as long as it succeeds in delivering its message. An example of this type is blowing whistles and carhorns in Ramallah to protest the closure of Bir Zeit University. That demonstration frustrated the Israeli army in Ramallah. The authorities pursued the demonstrators and the whistlers with the same vigor that they use to pursue stone-throwers, but without the explanations and the justifications which soldiers used in the past to beat them and humiliate them.

### *Obstruction*

The goals of the occupation authorities are generally opposite from those of the population. This is very clear in the cases of building settlements, opening roads, and land confiscations. These operations, however, can be obstructed and effectively prevented. It has happened before that Palestinians have thrown their bodies before bulldozers in order to prevent them from carrying out their functions. The reader may consider this foolhardy, but it has, in fact, accomplished something in the past and may indeed be extremely successful. Palestinians on the inside can attempt to block roads, prevent communications, cut electricity, telephone, and water lines, prevent the movement of equipment, and in other ways obstruct the government in carrying out its unjust plans. If this obstruction occurs violently (such as by throwing stones or closing the road with a roadblock without staying in its vicinity), the reaction of the authorities will also be violent and the authorities will find a ready excuse

to redouble its efforts. Soldiers will shoot, claiming self-defense. New forces will be called in under the pretense of "protecting" the innocent civilian plans from troublemakers and attackers, and other such justifications. If the obstruction occurs in a non-violent fashion, and the obstructors openly declare that they do not wish to injure anyone, but that they are merely obstructing a plan which injures them and their interests, then repression will also follow and soldiers will shoot in this case as well. But the situation will be entirely different. Palestinians in this case will be accepting and suffering the sacrifices, and even the martyrdom, as a price they are willing to pay to preserve their land, and as a sign of their love for that land and their resistance to injustice and oppression. This message will also be very clear to the Israelis. They cannot, in such a case, accuse anyone of anti-Semitism or hatred for Jews. Neither will they be able to use the excuse of "terrorism," or to claim that the disturbances are the creation of a small, hateful minority of troublemakers, cowards, and provocators who inflame the rest of the population. All these myths will be revealed for the lies that they are. Instead, these self-sacrifices will achieve their maximum effect. Their influence will not only fall on public opinion, but will also touch concerned Israelis and Palestinians. Attention will center on the immediate issue—the particular parcel of land being confiscated, the specific settlement which is being built, the family which is being deprived of its home, the building which is being destroyed. At the very least, the Palestinians will in this fashion be able to record in an unequivocal manner their steadfast position, for which position they are willing to sacrifice and suffer consequences.

### *Refusal to Cooperate*

This method is similar to the method of obstruction described above, but it is based on the fact that Israel cannot govern the West Bank and the Gaza Strip without the cooperation of the subject people. This cooperation is usually obtained by force, threats, violence, and punishments (individual and collective). Yet, in spite of all this, the oppressed people always have the option of refusing to cooperate if they are willing to pay the price.

The Syrians in the Golan Heights have taken such a decision. They have clearly indicated that their identity is an internal matter and no amount of external force or persecution can force them to be anything



other than what they are—an occupied Syrian people. In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, refusal to cooperate can take several forms, each with its own potential and its own problems. I will list them here briefly as an example of the possibilities, not a comprehensive list. It must be borne in mind that conditions may not presently be suitable for carrying out some or all of them, and that each requires thorough study and planning before it is attempted.

- (1) Refusal to work in building Israeli settlements or opening roads or any of the other “Judaization” construction projects;
- (2) Refusal to work in Israeli factories;
- (3) Refusal to fill out any forms, give any information, or give any cooperation to the authorities (the police or the army);
- (4) Refusal to carry or produce identity cards;
- (5) Refusal to pay fines, thereby filling the already overcrowded jails and disrupting the entire judicial and “security” apparatus;
- (6) Refusal to submit requests for the many licenses and permits which are required under different laws or military orders;
- (7) Refusal to appear, when summoned, to the offices of the police, the civilian administration, or the military government;
- (8) Refusal to cooperate with or contact the officers or employees of the military government or the civilian administration that operate in the fields of health, education, agriculture, or others;
- (9) Refusal to sign or fill out any forms or documents that are printed or written in Hebrew;
- (10) Refusal to participate in any celebrations or activities initiated by the military government, the civilian administration, or known collaborators, or activities in which such people participate;
- (11) Refusal to work as employee of the military government or the civilian administration;
- (12) Refusal to pay income taxes;
- (13) Refusal to pay the value-added tax or any other tax;
- (14) Refusal to abide by house arrest orders or restrictions on travel, or orders declaring an area to be closed, or curfew orders;
- (15) Collective social boycotts of traitors and collaborators.

All these activities are within our power to execute. They are, in the first place, based on refusal or rejection. It is elementary that Palestinians can only carry out such activities selectively, one or several for a limited or permanent period based on the objective conditions prevailing at each particular stage. The existence of broad mass support for any activity

reduces the dangers and sacrifices that any one individual would have to make in order for that activity to succeed. This method of resistance, at a minimum, forces the authorities to utilize a very large number of employees and soldiers to rule the occupied territories. Similarly, this refusal to cooperate overburdens the governing system and may even paralyze it.

It is also obvious that some of the activities listed above are impractical or unwise at the present stage, and must await a later stage in the struggle.

### *Harassment*

This is different from the methods of obstruction or refusal to cooperate, in that it concentrates on the psychological aspects of harassing the Israelis, their employees and collaborators as they carry out their duties in the occupation system.

Since this method is a form of psychological warfare, it must be exercised after a thorough understanding of the Israeli mentality, and after carefully selecting the suitable tactics at each stage. Persistence is a basic element in the method of harassment. Hot/cold tactics may be utilized. This means a quick switching between protest and denunciation on the one hand, and appeals and affirmation of good will, on the other hand. It is possible under this method to use the telephone, letters, whistling, calling, provocations (but avoid curses and unjustified humiliations), slogans, hand gestures, body motions, and the like. The idea is never to allow the existence of any quiet or calm that may be interpreted as an acceptance of the prevailing situation. The person being harassed must be constantly reminded of the role that he plays in the injustice from which we are suffering and against which we are demonstrating. It is possible that this harassment may increase until it reaches the level of obstruction, or negatively, until it reaches the level of non-cooperation. However, the distinctive feature of this method is that it is constantly active, affirmative, always taking the initiative, and aimed against the morale, the psychology and the mentality of the oppressor.

### *Boycotts*

One of the major themes of the occupation is the subjugation of the economy of the West Bank and Gaza to the Israeli economy. These occupied areas have become a large market for Israeli goods and services. During the past 16 years Israeli goods have flooded the Arab markets and

have even taken the place of the traditional production and consumption. Tnuva dairy goods, for example, are found everywhere, and the government bus company, Egged, runs its buses on several Arab lines. "Elite" chocolates, Israeli cigarettes, soft drinks, soaps, and many other Israeli goods are commonly found in Arab homes and markets. The initial call for a boycott of all Israeli goods and services which was made at the beginning of the occupation was unorganized and impractical. Today, however, it is possible to boycott one particular product or company, and to link the boycott to a single goal or demand which is reasonable. Such a limited boycott will be very effective and can accomplish intermediary goals upon which it is possible to build, and proceed to further gains.

Resources must also be aimed at creating alternatives to Israeli goods, and toward a return to natural foods in home consumption, for example. At any rate, natural foods are tastier and more nutritional than the pre-packaged and canned products of Tnuva.

The importance of boycotting Israeli goods and services is well known. What is required is organizing limited, partial boycotts against some of these goods, linking them to specific demands, creating reasonable alternatives for these products and improving the Arab goods and services, for example, making the buses run on time.

Boycotts are very effective since there is no law—and can be no law—which forces Palestinians to buy or use Israeli goods and services, particularly if the Palestinians are willing to sacrifice by giving up such goods totally (assuming there are no alternatives). It is important to note that the residents of the Golan Heights did, in fact, boycott all Israeli goods and foods which they found it possible to do without, and have returned to reliance on local goods, plants, herbs, and other popular foods.

### *Strikes*

Strikes are a form of refusal to cooperate (see above) which have long been used by the Palestinians. This method must be improved, particularly with respect to the period and length of the strike, when and how it is utilized, and how it can be used for attainable intermediary goals. Declaring an open strike calling for "the end of the occupation," for example, is a serious error.

### *Support and Solidarity*

Acts of support and solidarity are important to demonstrate and

deepen unity and cooperation among Palestinians; to reduce the impact of Israeli oppression and penalties by distributing it among a large number of people, and to escalate the confrontation with the authorities and create "points of contact" (see above) in a manner that helps the Palestinian struggle.

The Israeli policy of punishments and suppression is built on the principle of isolating anyone who opposes its laws or policies, labelling such an individual a "troublemaker" or an "inciting element," then punishing him or her severely as a "lesson" to others. Therefore, all activities of solidarity and support for such an individual defeat the aims of this policy.

One example of this was the rebuilding of five homes in Beit Sahur which were destroyed on the grounds that the owners' children had thrown rocks at an Israeli army vehicle.

Another instance occurred when an Israeli court attempted to try six Syrian Druze in the Golan Heights for failure to possess and produce an identity card. Several thousand Druze congregated outside the court to hand themselves in, insisting that they were all guilty of the same "crime" since they also refused to carry Israeli identity cards.

It is clear that in both these, and in many other examples of support and solidarity the authorities were prevented from achieving their aims. On the contrary, they created a strong sense of solidarity, a deeper unity and a more stubborn rejection of the Israeli practices.

### *Alternative Institutions*

Perhaps one of the most important methods of non-violent resistance to the occupation is the creation of alternative institutions and methods to replace the present unjust institutions of the occupation. This can occur in three separate ways.

First, the building of an entire infrastructure independently of Israel (universities, factories, institutions, libraries, hospitals, schools, etc.). This infrastructure becomes the necessary nucleus for the future Palestinian state. The creation of these institutions obstructs the process of annexation and "Judaization," and makes possible a political solution built upon Israeli withdrawal and the creation of an independent Palestinian state. It is also, in the long run, the best guarantee for the continued steadfastness and survival of Palestinian nationalism and the Palestinian people upon their land.

Second, the process of creating alternative social institutions for solving problems or offering services for which the population must presently turn to Israeli-run institutions, or for which permits and licenses issued by the military authorities are necessary. An example of this is the corrupt court system. Here it may be possible to create an alternative by strengthening and developing the process of arbitration or traditional law, after removing the backward aspects of that system. Similarly, it is possible to create alternatives for the health insurance (*Kopat Holim*) and other services.

Third, making plans, enlisting resources and setting up committees to provide for the needs of the population in case individual or collective punishments are imposed during the struggle. An example of this is taking care of the needy families of detainees. Another is to create alternative curricula and programs for study in case schools and universities are closed, make arrangements to meet in homes, store food, water, fuel, and candles to be used during prolonged curfews and economic sieges. In addition, we need to arrange alternative methods of contacting the foreign press and the outside world, or receiving and transmitting news in the eventuality that a certain area is closed off. Finally, we need to set up popular committees to carry out the functions of the municipalities when they are closed, or when they are turned over to Israeli officers or collaborators, in order that the population will continue to receive the necessary services during that period.

Here, it is important to note that new methods of channeling funds (other than the bridges and the Joint Jordanian-Palestinian Committee) must be found, and better utilization of local resources must be made to fund projects in case the authorities prohibit or delay the entry of monies from the outside.

In pursuing this method, we must make every effort to utilize existing loopholes and legal opportunities in creating new institutions. We should utilize existing licensed institutions and develop them as well as create unofficial bodies, such as *ad hoc* popular committees, which meet to coordinate a project, but then proceed to act separately without a recognized legal structure. The Arabs in East Jerusalem could set up societies, or companies under the more liberal Israeli law could be utilized. Such bodies could then proceed to operate in the West Bank and Gaza as if they were "Israeli" bodies.

### *Civil Disobedience*

Civil disobedience usually comes at a much later and developed point in the non-violent struggle. It involves the conscious and deliberate commission of illegal acts and violation of known military orders and laws. This form of direct action must be carefully contemplated. A non-violent person utilizing this method must be willing to take the full legal consequences of his or her actions. This could be done by prominent individuals deliberately accepting punishment to highlight the injustice of the law in question, or it could be a mass movement aimed at paralyzing the particular law and showing that it cannot work without the consent of the population.

In embarking upon civil disobedience, the planners must anticipate different responses by the authorities. These may range from ignoring the protest to selective enforcement against leaders or prominent individuals or massive and brutal repression. During civil disobedience, nationalist leaders may choose to declare that one of their goals is to fill up all the jails. This would be relatively simple to achieve since the jails are already crowded. Such a declaration, if acted upon, could prove extremely effective. It would rob the jails of their effectiveness in frightening the population and in ensuring compliance, since every additional person jailed would bring the leaders one step closer toward achieving their goals. Secondly, pursuit of this goal would strengthen solidarity among the Palestinians and make jail a symbol of victory and success rather than a feared punishment. Thirdly, if there were mass support for this goal, the law in question could easily be rendered ineffective, since the authorities cannot afford to use up all the jail space simply to enforce one military order or law.

One aspect of non-violence that is worth emphasizing in this respect is that the Palestinians would be voluntarily accepting and rejoicing in the persecution and suffering inflicted on them. Bravely and steadfastly to accept persecution for one's beliefs brings one very close to the power of non-violence. It neutralizes the effectiveness of the instruments of repression and improves the internal steadfastness and power of the resister. The greatest enemy to the people and the most powerful weapon in the hands of the authorities is fear. Palestinians who can liberate themselves from fear and who will boldly accept suffering and persecution without fear or bitterness or striking back have managed to achieve the greatest victory of all. They have conquered themselves, and all the rest will be much easier to accomplish.

Non-violence is the most effective method of resisting the Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza today. The methods, tactics, and strategy of classic non-violence must, of course, be modified to meet the present circumstances, but they have considerable applicability in this situation. Moreover, these methods can be successfully utilized, at least in part, by individuals who are not necessarily committed to non-violence and who may choose, at a different stage, to engage in armed struggle. Meanwhile, non-violent struggle continues to offer Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza an excellent opportunity to struggle toward liberation.