REVIEWS

adrienne maree brown: [1] Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good

AK Press, 2019

Reviewed by **Artemis Duffy**, ***University of Massachusetts, Amherst***

Pleasure Activism is adrienne maree brown's call to action for everyone to intentionally engage with the process of recognizing the power of the erotic, utilizing it to guide their personal and public liberation practice and to do the work necessary to honor ourselves and our comrades in our fight for liberation by centering pleasure.

The first piece in this anthology is 'Uses of the Erotic' by Audre Lorde, wherein Lorde provides our initial exposition to the erotic as a source of power, one not exclusively sexual but inherently pleasurable. Lorde aids the reader by categorizing the erotic into multiple categories of function, which are visited in many ways by brown and others throughout the book. The first is as a form of power that is found when sharing in joy with another person which can be used as 'a bridge between sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them' (Lorde, 2019, 31). The next is our 'erotic knowledge,' which is the personal usage of our senses to understand our full propensity for joy and satisfaction. From this knowledge of the self—this knowledge of our ability to feel and live joy—comes a refusal to settle for less in all areas of our life. As Lorde notably writes:

> For as we begin to recognize our deepest feelings, we begin to give up, of necessity, being satisfied with suffering and self-negation, and with the numbness which so often seems like their only alternative in our society. Our acts against oppression become integral with self, motivated, and empowered from within (Lorde, 2019, 33).

This idea that once we can see, understand, cultivate and harness our erotic knowledge of the self we will then be able to engage in the difficult work

[1] adrienne maree brown writes her name with lowercase letters as a personal and aesthetic choice regarding hierarchies, which I am respecting throughout this review.

necessary to be a part of liberatory movements—with a joyousness that is intrinsic to the self—is a recurring theme throughout the piece. Pleasure activism attempts to create a new way of engaging with liberation work, an engagement that focuses intently on how we can devote ourselves to this work in a way that values our needs and centers our pleasure. It focuses on strategies to re-imagine how we do liberation work—work that is characterized by constant over-extension of the self, burnout, and exploitation of the most marginalized in the space—by creating a pleasure ethic that centers creating pleasure for the organizer/activist/general participant in every and all revolutionary efforts.

While centering pleasure can look a lot of different ways, adrienne maree brown compiles essays and interviews that all center around two notions introduced by Toni Bambara (1980); these are made clear in the essay by Alexis Pauline Gumbs (2019). First, Gumbs references Bambara's novel, *The Salt Eaters,* to explain the purpose of writing: 'writing was a tool for the revolution, that our task was to make the revolution irresistible' (Bambara, 65). Second, and one that strikingly holds true through out every piece, is that: 'if we want to have a revolution, we have to have revolutionary relationships, in action, not simply in rhetoric' (Bambara, 71).

This is where *Pleasure Activism* departs from much of revolutionary literature in that it focuses—with microscopic intensity—on the ways in which revolution is enacted by us upon our own bodies and in our relationships to live a life in honor of the post-revolutionary world. In the opening to their article, 'Toward Non-Violent Economics,' Chuck Matthei and Joanne Sheehan point to Gandhi's approach to beginning nonviolence by addressing needs. They write, 'unmet humans needs are the economic roots of violence and dominations, their fulfillment is central to conflict resolution' (Matthei, Sheehan, 2001, 22). Unmet needs that range throughout the article apply to any number of material effects necessary for survival and, to some extent, for comfort. It is notable that when speaking of unmet needs as the root of violence and domination that furthers inequality, they never speak of the deficit of joy and pleasure in one's life. Often, we are referring to housing, food, clothing, or medicine, which are undoubtedly necessities without which the search for pleasure or joy may be entirely impossible. Still, this does nothing to speak of the importance of centering the pleasure of the person who has obtained these unmet needs to prevent the same taproot of violence and domination in all areas of one's life in the form of things such as interpersonal violence, self-shame, as well as internalized racism. If we do

not continuously reevaluate even the very spaces we claim to be liberatory, we run into the real danger of simply recreating the same structures, or of limiting our ideas of what a revolution can be. *Pleasure Activism* invites the reader to look for more, not just a revolution of economy or of classes, but of the bodies that make up our communities. brown writes:

> 'We could say on the spectrum of pleasure, yes, I like to get touched, I like to get fucked, but also, what about for my community, for my people? What is pleasurable in finding a place of grace and well-being and transcending oppression? If we are not imagining where we are going, then it will constantly just be pushing back outside from inside cages, as opposed to imagining what outside the cages (39).

Finding what causes us to say YES to the movement, to ourselves and to our future is pivotal to the accessibility of the contemporary liberation movement. Without the conscious effort to hone our own senses (not simply the senses of the theorists that we read from) of what is working towards freedom and what is not, it is incredibly easy to be sucked into organizing and change work only to be exploited in those spaces as well. Micha Cárdenas writes in her essay, 'Beyond Trans Desire,' that 'I have, in recent years, finally been able to build a deep self-love and self-respect that I did not learn from queer communities or radical political communities, where I often felt further devalued, excluded, and objectified' (Cárdenas, 2019, 289). As our liberatory movements grow, it is important to take note of whose judgment and enthusiastic yes's are we looking for to validate our work, who do we consistently make space for and accommodate, and whom do we leave behind? Is change work less legitimate if those that are most marginalized within a space (typically trans or cis women, Black, Indigenous and disabled folks, and so forth) do not feel pleasure in those spaces? adrienne maree brown uses *Pleasure Activism* to argue yes, that when we as individuals identify and honor what keeps us coming back to a movement beyond the dedication to our revolutionary imaginations of a world beyond what we know now, we are better equipped as a community to hold the needs of others and force this revolution from the margins of books into our daily interactions with ourselves and others.

To demand so much from ourselves and the organizing spaces we occupy can be extremely daunting; having a pleasure ethic involves processing internalized practices of exploitation, recognizing privilege,

addressing trauma, demanding something of the space we exist in—honing senses many have been taught their whole lives and within the revolutionary movement to view as nonessential, like joy, anxiety, fear, grief and, most importantly, pleasure. However, brown has a simple line that comes to mind as the reader moves from the tenets of a pleasure-oriented ethic into the last pages, enumerating some steps to being a pleasure-oriented practice: 'We are what we practice. We become what we do over and over again' (brown, 269). It is through the enacting of a pleasure ethic that brown says one will:

> Be unconditional in your commitment to the movement, be transformational in every area of your life and work […] When people find movements that meet their needs, welcome them whole, affirm them, commit to their transformation and actually feel good, they stay, and the movement grows (brown, 433).

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Walid Daqqa: Consciousness Molded: or the Re-Identification of Palestinian Torture Jalbu'a Prison

Reviewed by **Dr. Ashjan Ajour, *Brown University, Rhode Island***

Walid Daqqa is a Palestinian political prisoner currently spending his 34th year in Israeli prisons. Born in 1961 in Baqaa' al-Gharbiyeh, he affiliated with The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in 1983 and was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1986, for planning the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier as collateral to free Palestinian prisoners. Subsequently, the Israeli authorities refused to release Daqqa in prisoner exchange deals. He has become a prominent figure in the Palestinian prisoners' movement, and his sophisticated interdisciplinary writings include politics, philosophy, and literature. Whilst in captivity he obtained his BA and Master's in political science and is currently pursuing his doctorate in philosophy. He has written a number of works about his life in prison which are smuggled out for publication. Regarded as a threat by the Israeli Prison Authority (IPA) he was placed in solitary confinement.

Walid Daqqa published *Consciousness Molded: or The Re-Identification of Palestinian Torture* in 2010. It investigates the technologies used by the IPA to mould prisoners' consciousness and their collective resistance values. Incarceration is an integral part of the broader system of Israeli colonial repression; he uses this case study to illuminate the way in which the Israeli state implements its colonial social engineering more generally on the Palestinian people. The book is written in Arabic and has not been translated into another language. Efforts to decolonise resistance studies need to bring to light indigenous activists and intellectuals who write from the depth of the experience of resistance and this is an important book within this domain. Daqqa's intellectual writing is an everyday form of resistance (*Sumud*) in the Israeli prison system. Abdul-Rahim Al-Shaikh comments that 'The writings of Walid Daqqa are not only a rich example of revolutionary poetics but also a philosophical trial in demonstration of the popular politics of hope in the heavy presence of hapless official Palestinian politics' (2019:5). Daqqa's writings represent intellectual products that come from what he coins 'parallel time'—time in captivity as opposed to social time lived outside the prison's bars—and the revolutionary aesthetic of his writing engages culture as a political practice.

He argues that Israel has created a system based on the most updated modern theories of human engineering and social psychology in order to mould Palestinian consciousness by shattering its collective values: 'The occupier derives his ideas, theories and tools of repression from a postmodern civilized reality or as what Bauman terms 'Liquid Modernity" (2010:22). He posits that modern oppression techniques are hidden, masked and difficult to be seen or defined. They are a compilation of small, fragmented procedures which are hard to define separately as tools of torture. Modernist repression is disguised, hidden and presented as a response to human rights; in this book he attempts to 'realize the overall framework and logic behind this system […] The prisoner's body is no longer the direct target: the spirit and the mind are' (2010:21). Such techniques make prisons a replica of the segregated and thoroughly controlled Palestinian lands, and the prisoners become laboratory mice for the experiments of taming Palestinians. The conditions of Palestinian citizens are identical to the conditions of Palestinian prisoners, not only in the form of oppression and torture, but also in the way they are held in segregated geographical cantons and isolations. This fundamental similarity allows the study of the prisoners' lives to reveal a picture of how the Palestinians live in the occupied Palestinian territories and it enables us to understand the entire Palestinian scene—from the small prison to the big prison.

Daqqa asserts that Israel's practices exceed its security needs: 'Since 2004, Israel has implemented a comprehensive and dangerous scientific system that adopts the latest theories in human engineering and group social psychology in order to mould Palestinian consciousness by deconstructing the Palestinian collective national values' (2010:29). He derives this from statements by Moshe 'Bogie' Ya'alon, the former Israeli Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Force, who during his military service in the Intifada argued that Palestinian consciousness must be moulded, and that the military plans of his army were focused on achieving this; the target is not the body in the collective genocide but the soul as a way of cultural and moral genocide. In this light, Daqqa contends that the term 'occupation' is no longer sufficient, nor even 'settler occupation' to describe the comprehensiveness and depth of the situation in Palestine, particularly after the Oslo agreement.

The author develops a theoretical framework utilizing both Michel Foucault's D*iscipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977) and Naomi Klein's *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007), for his own analysis of the modern forms of torture that occur in Israeli prisons, and

beyond in historical Palestine, with the aim of moulding and destabilising the collective moral. Foucault's panopticon is applied in Israeli prisons as a tool of control and discipline. Israel has established isolation and segregation in the prisons and more generally in the occupied territories, to create the threat of constant surveillance over each citizen. This system of control and isolation aims to make the prisoners passive submissive objects so that there is no need for the authority to embody itself. This apparatus is a machine for creating power independently of the person who exercises it, to the point that the prisoners exercise this power over themselves. The driving force of this system is that power must be visible and intangible, with prisoners being constantly under a watchful gaze.

Drawing on *The Shock Doctrine*, Daqqa discussed the techniques of Dr Ewen Cameron, the psychiatrist who used electric shock treatment. Funded by the CIA, he experimented on patients to find a way to reprogram and reshape human beings, with his methods including all kinds of sensory deprivation. Daqqa explains how Dr Cameron recreated prisoners through making them lose a sense of time and place, thus transforming them into a whiteboard onto which he could instil the concepts and behaviours he wanted, commonly referred to as brainwashing. The physical torture of prisoners paralyzes the ability of logical thinking and weakens resistance to the administration's will. In a similar manner, traumatized societies tend to compromise their principles and thus resistance. The primary goal of this strategy is not simply to put an end to armed Palestinian resistance by making the idea of resistance costly, it also aims to erase the set of concepts and values that constitute the moral infrastructure of the resistance and the national values protecting the struggle:

> Israel wanted the destruction and killing to create a shocked and traumatic state that would cause Palestinian society and the national elites to lose the ability to think logically so as to facilitate the brainwashing process without resistance. This is to achieve through introducing concepts and ideas that are empty of their resistant content (Daqqa 2010:42).

Daqqa uses the collective hunger strike in 2004 as an example of the shock doctrine to mould the prisoners' consciousness and to strike at the moral infrastructure of the prisoners. He sees the hunger strike as a turning point in the prisoners' lives, which was exploited by the IPA to establish new policies and procedures. The IPA used the hunger strike as a second shock after the

shock of invasions and arrests, following it with a process of brainwashing and reformation of consciousness:

> We were facing a system of repressive measures that are frightening in their logic and science. The Israeli government supported them (the IPA) politically at the highest levels, and the Israeli minister of prisons stated that the prisoners on hunger strike can die, as he does not intend to respond to their demands (Daqqa 2010:51).

Although the author utilized Michel Foucault's framework in his analysis of the technologies of power, in contrast to Foucault he emphasises the possibility of resistance and sheds light on the agency and resistance subjectivity of the political prisoners:

> The Israeli targeting of the moral infrastructure of the Palestinians with the aim [of] mold[ing] their consciousness expresses a psychological and moral structure that makes *Sumud* (steadfastness) under the oppression of the Israeli military machine possible, and even made the passive steadfastness possible, as well as the positive and proactive steadfastness (Daqqa 2010:28).

The author's positionality is both as an object and a subject. Daqqa indicates in his introduction that sometimes language is inadequate to convey the torture and suffering experienced in the Israeli prisons. The prisoner faces the option of being an object for the jailor or transforming the self to redefine this suffering and its reasons:

> To be the research subject and the subject of research at the same time means to be the victim under torture and the reporter of torture, to be the scene and the witness, to be the details and abstraction together (Daqqa 2010:19).

Therefore, he stresses the necessity of writings because he believes that 'the success or failure of the Israeli plan to mould Palestinian consciousness depends on our ability to uncover it' (Daqqa 2010:24).

The significance of this book, along with the other writings of Waleed Daqqa is that they enable him to exercise *Sumud* to transform the colonial system into a generative Palestinian site for constructing national resistant consciousness. Despite Dr Cameron's efforts to erase the individual's mind

and instil new patterns of behaviour, and the Israeli state attempts to erase Palestinian national consciousness, Waleed Daqqa emerges as an example that demonstrates that Palestinians are not stripped of soul—the creation of 'parallel consciousness'. For him, Palestinians will continue to fight and struggle, so that their existence is not drowned out by the plans and visions of the settler coloniser—a vision articulated by the former Israeli prison director Jacob Janot in the yards of Gilboa prison in 2006, when he boasted to his superiors 'I assure you that you will be confident that I will make the prisoners raise the Israeli flag and sing the 'Hatikvah" (Daqqa 2010:58).

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Brad Evans & Natasha Lennard: Violence: Humans in Dark Times

City Lights Books, 2018

Reviewed by **Craig Brown**, ***Journal of Resistance Studies***

Violence: Humans in Dark Times is a compilation of interviews comprising the authors' series on violence in the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Review of Books*, still ongoing in the latter. This is a rich, engaging and indeed disturbing account of the nature and dynamics of contemporary violence. However, as the authors state, they were 'acutely aware that there was no point in discussing violence unless something could be done about it' (Evans & Lennard, 2018, p.5). Therefore, I will focus here on the contributions made by the text to understanding resistance to violence, which despite the somewhat ominous title is an area where practical application is informed through the varied individual contributions and experience. As the title of the book alludes to, Hannah Arendt's work provides some philosophical underpinning to the exploration of violence in the work (see the interview with Bernstein, p.132), which draws attention to the significance of Arendt's analysis of violence having a parallel in the development and understanding of resistance, including nonviolent resistance (see Schell, 2005, p.223; Brown, 2019). Ultimately, this text offers an introduction to work on resistance that I would suggest warrants engagement and potential collaboration with by the body of researchers working around the *JRS*.

The 'Aesthetic Turn' as Resistance

In Evans and Lennard's (2018) introduction, the authors caution against the 'so-called "aesthetic turn" in politics' being undermined 'if the work of artists is merely appropriated to make a theoretical point'; rather, 'the call for more compassion, dignity, and love in the sphere of the political demands seeing art itself as integral to the political field' (p.8). Many of the interviewees make robust cases for the role of various arts; Simon Critchley argues that understanding the damage of the cycle of violence and counterviolence, and the 'deep history and tragic complexity of political situations' may be strengthened through theatre—specifically Greek theatre, but also 'the best movies and TV dramas' (pp.23-24).

The contribution of such art to resistance is emphasised particularly when we consider the political context within which many of these interviews were carried out, with increasing right-wing populism and complexities of online communication seeming to make 'truth' increasingly precarious. This is not, as certain managers of late capitalism would say, the erosion of values by 'postmodernism', rather it is a political project of individualisation and fracturing of solidarity where the most marginalised are further victimised, as this book effectively exposes (for example George Yancy interview, p.41; Henry Giroux interview, p.75). Part of the remedy and indeed resistance to this project would be to see art forms such as theatre as invoking ancient shared stories. Thus while opera revives many stories of the Greek theatre which are couched in warnings against the cycle of violence (See Christopher Alden interview, chapter 21), these narratives in some cases have intertwined origins stretching back to the world's earliest civilisations. Considering Evans and Lennard's position that 'a conversation on violence demands creating an ethical platform based upon reciprocity' (p.6), furthermore and quite simply, the presentation of ideas and experiences through art is a convincing way in which the suffering of 'the other' may be brought to attention and lead to strengthened solidarities.

Everyday/Multitude of Resistance

Various interviewees acknowledge the seemingly insurmountable nature of challenging structural violence, yet remain optimistic regarding their efforts and the resistance that may be offered through art (for example Gottfried Helwein interview, chapter 15; Bracha L. Ettinger interview, chapter 10). However, the interview with Oliver Stone (pp.147-158) is notable and almost poignant in what seems to be the resignation to his own failure in challenging violence through his films. One may well disagree with his personal evaluation, although it is worth assessing a bit further why this might be the case. Stone acknowledges how his films anti-war stance may have been missed (pp.149-150), although a significant issue is the US film industry's closeness to the military industrial complex, as well as the lack of funding and exposure to a broad audience for independent filmmaking (p.157). Yet other interviewees point to positive interventions through independent or grassroots initiatives (Gottfried Helnwein interview, pp.162-163), including cinema (Michael J. Shapiro interview, p.305; John Akomfrah interview, p.209), pointing to the potential advantage of a multitude of resistance

or everyday resistance, which may feed into broader, more pervasive and dynamic trends and movements.

Here it is necessary to highlight Evans and Lennard's (p.10) suggestion there are 'two distinct types of violence' at work, although they acknowledge their interrelationship 'in subtle yet complex ways'. The first is a 'widespread disposability of human populations, those countless, nameless, and faceless victims, who experience violence often', and 'live out a wide range of human insecurities, indignities, oppressions, and hardships' (p.10). Against this, the authors suggest the 'often contained' and "disposable' populations' may 'at times overspill their confinement to reveal the violence of the hidden order of politics', giving the examples of Black Lives Matter or bodies of child refugees such as Aylan Kurdi (p.10). The second type of violence as 'more orchestrated spectacles of violence, from real events to cultural and entertainment productions', are fundamental to: 'the normalisation of violence and in producing the conditions for violence to come. We can explain this in terms of the interplay between disposable lives and sacrificial violence, onto claims for militaristic forms of justice' (p.10) Sacrificial victims become part of 'the spectacle of a truly intolerable moment' which is 'politically appropriated to sanction further violence in the name of the victims' (p.11).

Returning to resistance then; if, as Evans and Lennard suggest, that post 9/11 violence has become 'more intimate and individualising', and 'there is something about the raw realities of intimate suffering which affects us on an all too human level' that is pervasively replicated across popular culture (pp.4-5), the strength of what is revealed about resistance is this. Aylan Kurdi's horrifying death 'overspilled' confinement largely because of his individualised or specific resonance within an image that was finally able to move many over the far greater violence and daily comparable deaths which it encapsulated. Thus, understanding violence in this manner may again inform our understanding of the subtleties of everyday resistance to it, perhaps allowing greater cognisance of the basis of solidarity particularly when 'overspills' of violence occur that trigger overt outrage, finding ways to sustain concerted resistance in the face of individualised violence and making the spectacle of violence backfire.

The 'Quantitative Turn' in Nonviolence

Engagement with theories and the practice of power and the development of the resistance literature has made significant steps in strengthening the understanding of nonviolent resistance. However, one notable strength of Evans and Lennard's book in dealing with contemporary violence is that it that it may be read as a warning against complacency in the wider field of nonviolent literature. This concerns Evans and Lennard's (2018) criticism of 'the methodological trap set by the likes of [Steven] Pinker', where:

> Attempts to offer quantitative reflections on violence in fact lead precisely to the forms of utilitarian calculations through which some forms of violence are continually justified or presented as the 'least worse'. As a result, the human dimensions to the violence—for example, the qualitative aspects of it—are often written out of the script (p.14).

The justification of liberal violence is but one facet with which we might join the confident quantitative claims over nonviolence's effectiveness, which are excessively prescriptive and too content to define 'success' within a narrow set of measures and norms within a liberal democratic paradigm (Jackson, 2015, p.31-37). A number of articles in *JRS* (see Brown, 2018; Case, 2018; Sorensen 2017) have drawn attention to the problems with the 'strategic' or 'pragmatic' position on nonviolence that is insufficiently nuanced or glosses over violent aspects. Furthermore, nonviolence's political cultural nuances in different contexts has been stressed as neglected (Chabot & Vinthagen, 2007, p.94; Vinthagen, 2015, p.111-112; Jackson, 2015, p.31-37), something which may be tied substantially to the quantitative nature of much recent research, particularly since Stephan and Chenoweth (2008). In building constructive nonviolent alternatives both of these trends are damaging, while it will not do to leave violence uncritiqued or unengaged with philosophically, however awkward, as there is a risk of theorisation and abstraction with the loss of concerted practical solutions.

One consideration in this regard is the complexities of violence in resistance which is expressed by certain interviews in Evans and Lennard's book; Bernstein (pp.128-29) argues an increasingly held position that Frantz Fanon offers a critique rather than condoning of violence through his work, something that is readily sustained through a close reading. Meanwhile, the right to resist violence through violence (Spivak interview, pp.78-79; Bernstein interview, pp.128-129) and the extension of solidarity to such

violent resisters—often when they are facing far greater means and systems of violence—is of increasing significance to nonviolent resistance activists and academics, not least in the wake of events over the past year where resistance methods in places such as Hong Kong have clearly operated in the significant grey areas between 'nonviolence' and 'violence'. Indeed, in Evans and Lennard's (2019) interview for this violence series, Lennard raises the issue of solidarity with violent resistance and suggests nonviolence is a privilege. Moreover, as Spivak observes, 'There is a difference here between condoning such a [violent] response and trying to understand why the recourse to violence becomes inevitable' (p.78).

Solidarity with violent resisters, the potential privilege of nonviolence and how violence is treated by other activists or analysts are all crucial issues, particularly given the growing arguments and evidence offered through research in favour of nonviolence's superiority as a strategy (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011, p.27; Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013, p.416). Again, the tendency in some of this literature to quantify, for example, the effects of 'violent flanks' during resistance (Chenoweth & Lewis, 2013, p.422; Chenoweth & Schock, 2015, p.282), avoids contending with questions over the very inevitability of violence in resistance and the implications (see Brown, 2018; Case, 2018). Furthermore, in the rush to consolidate nonviolence's 'superiority', there is much to debate within the realm of morality and principled action, both concerning nonviolence and violence; Evans and Lennards' *Violence* is a strong contribution in this regard.

Concluding Remarks

Although not writing a conclusion for the book may have been a conscious decision to avoid reducing the varied ideas of the authors into prescriptions, providing an index would have assisted the reader with linking concepts throughout the book. This may have been particularly useful for those newly engaging with violence and indeed resistance. Additionally, with the aspiration of a trans-disciplinary approach in mind (Evans & Lennard, 2018, p.6), this could have offered some direction of fields' relevance to violence and resistance. The upshot is again that readers across various disciplines may perceive the text as having relevance; in terms of exploring the myriad forms and dynamics of violence, yet the myriad forms and dynamics of resistance to it, *Violence* speaks to current debates in resistance studies.

Overall, Evans and Lennard's text is a very powerful and necessary compilation of interviews on the subject of violence and resistance. As noted in the introduction and as is worth emphasising again here, this is an ongoing project of great value to both academics and practitioners in the resistance field, for example interviews with Mark Duffield (Evans & Duffield, 2018) and Todd May (Evans & May, 2018). Despite some of the interviews likely being rather academic for a newcomer to the field, they are justifiably challenging in dealing with the complexities of violence and rewarding to engage with, such as the interview with Jake Chapman (pp.237-247). Indeed, of the books and articles in the broad critical theory field that are dealing with violence and indeed resistance, the interview style and variety of responses make for a highly accessible text overall. Ultimately, the urgency of the subject does require—and the responses within the book reward—concerted engagement, and they complement the work of nonviolence theorists particularly over the past decade.

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Wildfire/Headline Publishing Group, 2019

Reviewed by **Joseph Geraci**, ***Satyagraha Foundation for Nonviolence***

Our world is beset. The corona pandemic, massive fires engulfing tens of thousands of acres, hurricanes of record force have brought global crises into our most private spaces, our living and bedrooms, our homes and states of mind. That a lack of respect for and understanding of the natural world is a contributing factor to this global crisis is ever more obvious and of critical importance with every disaster. It is not as if we have not been informed and forewarned. Many in the peace, nonviolent, and climate change movements for decades have been making the argument that the 'war against nature' and indeed the 'end of nature' is our most critical issue.

Some might argue that nuclear weapons proliferation better occupy our attention, but that is in a way to say the same thing. Both climate change and nuclear proliferation pose threats to our survival. Indeed, Naomi Klein and others have made the case that climate change be considered a form of war, unleashing as it does devastating, if preventable, forces of violence against life and property (Klein 2015). We are accountable for the 'Sixth Extinction' of countless species; the devastating Australian fires of 2019, according to a BBC News report (2020), accounted for the death of 3 billion animals, as well as over thirty human lives. The logic of nuclear weapons raises the stakes of war from devastation to mutual annihilation. Left unchecked, does the logic of climate change lead to extinction, and is survival the necessary framing? In a leaked report to *The Guardian* (Greenfield & Watts, 2020), JP Morgan, the world's largest investor in fossil fuel companies, concluded that climate change could have 'catastrophic outcomes where human life as we know it is threatened.' And they are among the supporters of climate denial.

Given the enormity of climate change, posing risks to our survival, the means for combating it is of central importance. Would it not be self-defeating to employ or justify means that mirror the cause, use violence to combat violence when violence has been one of the reasons we are at such a juncture? It is heartening, therefore, to see climate change organizations such as Extinction Rebellion, Greenpeace, 350.org, and organizers such as Bill McKibben, embrace nonviolence as their strategic modus operandi.

But what exactly is their nonviolence? Is it the nonviolent civil resistance model articulated and enacted by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., sometimes referred to as principled nonviolence, or is it perhaps Gene Sharp's (2012) model of strategic nonviolence? Are climate change groups closer to the Occupy model of 'diversity of tactics,' in which nonviolence is one tactic among many? The degree of loyalty these groups might command, and the degree of their success, is dependent upon their strategy and tactics. Diversity of tactics divided the Occupy movement. We need only think of Chris Hedges' (2012) controversial article, 'The Cancer in Occupy,' passionately warning against diversity, or the destructive impact of the violence in the Oakland Occupy movement to understand how important it is to be clear in our definitions. Thomas Merton's famous statement bears repeating, 'For nonviolence to be effective (it) has to be extremely careful and clear' (Peters 2012).

Two new books give us clues as to the type of nonviolence intended. In his contribution to Extinction Rebellion's new anthology, *This Is Not a Drill: An Extinction Rebellion Handbook*, XR co-founder Roger Hallam writes:

> The rich and powerful are making too much money from our present suicidal course. You cannot overcome such entrenched power by persuasion and information. You can only do it by disruption […] There are two types of disruption: violent and non-violent.

He rejects the violent model and states that 'the message is clear; if you practice non-violence, you are more likely to succeed. We call this the 'civil resistance model" (*This is Not* 2019; p. 100). In his six-point general outline of disruption, Hallam also reasserts the need for nonviolence: '[Civil resistance…] has to stay non-violent' (*This is Not* 2019; p. 101). Meanwhile, XR's Media and Messaging coordinator, Ronan McNern, underscores their civil resistance model: 'Our media messaging is based on research by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan,' namely their influential,

groundbreaking book, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (*This is Not* 2019; p. 126; see Chenoweth & Stephan 2011). Extinction Rebellion is also proposing a Citizens' Assembly that would advise and pressure governments on climate change, and would also build Local Councils, namely democratic citizens groups that distinguish themselves from official political parties, espoused by Mahatma Gandhi (his Constructive Programme) and by Martin Luther King, Jr. (his 'Beloved Community' and Poor People's Campaign).

XR's website (www.rebellion.earth) further clarifies their commitment: 'At the core of Extinction Rebellion's philosophy is nonviolent civil disobedience.' The website further states:

> We work from the perspective of strategic nonviolence, meaning that we are choosing it primarily because it is the best strategic choice as clearly demonstrated by the social science research. One of our main references for this is the work of Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan […] Nonviolence is our primary stance, but some rebels may have a spiritual and faith-based stream which contains a principled stance when it comes to nonviolence. Both positions are welcome within XR and help us to guide our actions.

Hallam also directs a blunt question to the climate change movement: 'Why have we failed so miserably to stop climate change?' (*This is Not* 2019; p. 101). Carbon emissions are continuing to rise despite all the protests. Chenoweth and Stephan's research is relevant here. In their study of 'over one hundred major nonviolent campaigns since 1900' they concluded that, 'nonviolent resistance campaigns were nearly twice as likely to achieve full or partial success as their violent counterparts' (Chenoweth & Stephan 2011; pp. 6, 7). Perhaps most relevant to the climate change movement is their contention that:

> Nonviolent campaigns fail to achieve their objectives when they are unable to overcome the challenge of participation, when they fail to recruit a robust, diverse, and broad-based membership that can erode the power base of the adversary and maintain resilience in the face of repression (Chenoweth & Stephan 2011; p. 11).

Climate marches and protests have rallied large numbers. Indeed, in 2009, 350.org organized 5200 rallies in 180 countries, which CNN called the

'most widespread day of political action in the planet's history' (Center for Biological Diversity, 2009). Given such numbers, and success, is the best strategy going forward mass mobilization, raising consciousness, or reduction of carbon emissions? Numbers are important. Citing Chenoweth and Stephan's research, XR's website also maintains that: 'XR is aiming to grow the movement to a critical mass of 3.5% of the population: Throughout history, a mass movement that has mobilised more than 3.5% has never failed.' But must these numbers now be in the service of a greater goal, which Hallam suggests is reduction of carbon emissions? Is a shift of strategy now necessary?

Bill McKibben expresses a similar concern about the failure of the climate change movement in his most recent book, *Falter: Has the Human Game Begun to Play Itself Out?* McKibben is a co-founder of 350.org, and has been one of the foremost climate activists for over three decades. His first book, *The End of Nature* (1989), is considered one of the movement classics. It is of especial significance, therefore, that he considers nonviolence as one of the two hopes for solving the climate change crisis, the other being technologies such as solar and wind power. In *Falter* he comes the closest of any in the organizations mentioned to give a definition of nonviolence. He writes, and it is worth quoting in full:

> When I say 'nonviolence,' I do not mean only, or even mainly, the dramatic acts of civil disobedience that end in jail or a beating. I mean the full sweep of organizing aimed at building mass movements whose goal is to change the zeitgeist and, hence, the course of history. (Indeed, Gandhi made it clear that his satyagraha also included 'constructive work' to build local economies) (McKibben 2019; p. 223; brackets in original).

McKibben also calls nonviolence, 'One of the signal inventions of our time—perhaps, if we are lucky, the innovation for which historians will revere the twentieth century' (McKibben 2019; p. 219). It is startling and challenging to read his phrase 'this technology of nonviolence' (McKibben 2019; p. 223). And he cites the source of his inspiration: 'One of the finest theoreticians of nonviolence was Jonathan Schell,' namely, Schell's *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People.* As McKibben describes Schell's theory, 'Violence is increasingly dysfunctional, [Schell] wrote, and 'forms of non-violent action can serve effectively in the place of violence at every

level of political affairs'. Or, more eloquently, it was the method by which '*the active many can overcome the ruthless few*" (McKibben 2019; p. 219; italics in original). McKibben finds Schell's work 'the best' American work on nonviolence.

In what way is Schell's theory especially applicable to the climate change movement? Schell thinks that nonviolence turns conventional political theory on its head, namely that political power proceeds from the top down. He argues instead that Gandhi and King were proposing an 'inverse', grassroots model, and that the first principle of nonviolent civil resistance, therefore, and the force behind nonviolence, might be stated as: We the people hold the reigns of power, not those who 'govern' us. Schell states unequivocally that the 'consent of the governed is the 'bedrock in Gandhi's political thinking". He further cites Gandhi's belief that all government, 'depends for its existence on the cooperation of the governed. If that cooperation is withdrawn, the government will be helpless.' Gandhi was citing Thoreau's essay 'Civil Disobedience', but as Schell points out this inverse theory of political power was articulated as early as the sixteenth-century by the French thinker de Boétie, and later by the English philosopher David Hume, as well as by Thoreau, Tolstoy, Gandhi, and King (Schell 2003; pp. 128-129).

Schell, paraphrasing Gandhi, states that 'The central role of consent in all government meant that non-cooperation—the withdrawal of consent—was something more than a morally satisfying activity; it was a power weapon in the real world' (Schell 2003; p. 129) He quotes Gandhi directly as saying, 'I [Gandhi] believe and everybody must grant that no Government can exist for a single moment without the cooperation of the people, willing or forced, and if people withdraw their cooperation in every detail, the Government will come to a standstill' (Schell 2003; p. 129). Schell cites another important quote by Gandhi, that, 'Some Englishmen state that they took and they hold India by the sword […] The sword is entirely useless for holding India. We alone keep them' (Schell 2003; p. 129). This people-based theory of political power alters our perception of government. Not only are we equal partners in our governance, but we are also the final arbiters. Schell's nonviolence shifts the political relationship away from the dependency or co-dependency of the governed, to responsibility and activism. In other words, climate change is in our hands, in our demands and protests and insistence. It is the stagnant mindset of tacit complicity that Extinction Rebellion, McKibben and 350.org, would change.

That Extinction Rebellion and 350.org stress the central role local organizing must play in the climate change movement also has a parallel history in the nonviolent movement. Gandhi is an important example. He was the leader of the Congress Party, and decided not only to resign but also no longer to belong to any political party. The CP was the largest political party in India, and his resignation would have been as momentous as it would be today for, say, Nancy Pelosi not only to resign as Speaker of the House but also from the Democratic Party in order to organize locally. Gandhi's consciousness of nonviolence had shifted. If nonviolence were truly rooted in the power of the people then nonviolence had to stay rooted in the people. It was one of the motives for Gandhi's Constructive Programmes. McKibben and Extinction Rebellion want to mobilize the base, across the political spectrum, because we hold the power, not the political parties, central government, presidency, or ruling state.

The model of nonviolence that Extinction Rebellion and McKibben would seem to embrace, therefore, is one that privileges strategic nonviolent civil resistance over violence, and would also mobilize the people directly through councils and assemblies, thereby recognizing a people-based model of political power that upends the standard view. By framing climate change as a matter of survival, and by also acknowledging failure, Extinction Rebellion and McKibben are challenging their movements to rethink fundamental strategy and resolve the tension between winning hearts and minds, and reducing carbon emissions, between drawing attention to, and ending. Their recent call for boycotts of those banks and financial institutions financing carbon industries, their advocacy of divestment and a rapid transfer to alternate energy sources indicate that a multi-faceted strategy, rather than a reliance on one solution, might be the best way forward.

What does this mean for the peace and nonviolent movements? Given what is at stake, the climate movement's radical faith in nonviolence has now placed nonviolent civil resistance at the heart of the battle for survival and the preservation of life. In *Falter*, McKibben makes an observation, which, for its humility and modesty, is well worth pondering: 'Nonviolence is a powerful technology, despite the fact that we still know very little about it' (McKibben 2019; p. 224). And yet, despite the little we know he still would pin his hopes on nonviolent civil resistance. His comment is an invitation not only to the climate change, but also to the peace and nonviolent movements, to reinvigorate their commitment to nonviolence, while acknowledging failures

and ignorance. The limitless creative and spiritual potential of nonviolence may be our most powerful weapon. Could the stakes be higher?

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Jennifer A. Reich: Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines

New York University Press, 2016

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Summary

In *Calling the Shots: Why Parents Reject Vaccines*, sociologist Jennifer A. Reich examines vaccine refusal from a variety of perspectives, seeking to offer a 'middle ground' analysis that resists the polarization that often occurs within discussions between pro-vaccination and anti-vaccination views in the United States. To do so, Reich focuses on the ways by which different people understand and make meanings of vaccines, as well as notions of risk, rights, benefits, responsibility, and necessity. Drawing upon a wide range of qualitative data—including in-depth interviews with parents who refuse vaccines for their children, pediatricians, and complementary healthcare providers (for example chiropractors) in the Colorado area, ethnographic observations of meetings, lectures and conferences, and content analysis of emails, newsletters, and blogs from different stakeholders—Reich presents a multifaceted analysis of parental vaccine refusal, which expands beyond the thoughts and actions of individuals to also consider the social, historical and cultural contexts in which such decisions are being made.

After giving a general historical overview of vaccine developments, mandates and controversies, Reich focuses on how the parents in her study define themselves (i.e., as experts on their own children) as well as the vaccines (i.e., unnatural and inferior to 'natural' immunity). Then, she analyzes parents' relationships and interactions with different authorities (including healthcare providers and schools) and the parents' management of risk and social disapproval in their everyday lives. Ultimately, the organization of the book (i.e, the move from internal, self-definitions and individual understandings to the more external, micro-level interactions of the everyday) enables Reich to highlight the contradictory forces and commitments at play when parents attempt to resist state power on the one hand, yet support individualism and class-based, intensive parenting on the other.

Analysis: Entangling Powers

Reich's work calls to mind a Foucauldian analysis of the state and biopower. For example, several parents spoke of their resentment of state intervention in their families, with one respondent referring to immunization records as 'womb to tomb tracking' (230). To circumvent this tracking, one parent, who allowed some vaccinations for their children, avoided documentation in the statewide vaccine registry by going to the health department for the vaccines, instead of a family doctor, who must submit records (228). In this way, parents try to manage access to their information and subsequently resist the surveillance and documentation embedded in the concept of biopower. Further, parents also shared advice and information online with each other about strategically using vaccine exemptions, both personal and religious. Some parents utilized blogs and online forums to seek advice and/or share tactics about evading state intervention (for example vaccine mandates).

Although refusing vaccines pushes back against biopower, it also reinforces the ideology of individualism, and in doing so presses the class privilege of many parents who reject vaccines. As Reich writes, the United States fosters a 'regime of the self,' which in this particular context informs an 'ideology of individualist parenting' (11). This ideology 'prioritizes individual choice for one's own children over community obligation' and 'ignores how some families with fewer resources have fewer options' (12). For example, when parents spoke about conducting their 'own research' on vaccinations, some lamented the 'unconscious decisions' other parents would make by following the medical guidelines (73). This may appear at first to be a challenge to medical authority, but it also supports individualism and often class-based intensive parenting. In other words, the efforts reported by the parents in the study—including navigating exemptions, creating alternative vaccine schedules, and promoting health through organic foods—are time and resource intensive practices, which are not available to all parents. Questions of vaccine choice, as well as vaccine access, for less advantaged families are largely ignored. Accordingly, parents who reject vaccines—who are often white and of a higher socioeconomic status—wield their privileges in order to disrupt hegemonic state and medical powers.

Overall, resistance can undermine a specific form of power, while simultaneously building, accommodating, or reinforcing another form. In *Calling the Shots*, the interplay between two hegemonic powers or dominant ideologies in the U.S.—that is, systems of state power and the rhetoric of

individualism/parent autonomy—is particularly salient, as parents who refuse vaccines are often reinforcing the latter to resist the former.

Concluding Remarks

In *Calling the Shots*, Reich provides a comprehensive account of the different meanings that people attach to vaccines and their risks and benefits. Reich is clear about her position in the book and discloses that her children have received all recommended vaccinations. Although she is not 'neutral' on the decision to vaccinate, her arguments are balanced, as she looks beyond individual thinking and choices to also consider the contexts in which such individuals are acting. In other words, decisions do not happen in a vacuum. Rather, Reich highlights the tensions that can occur from the entanglements of different power structures with contradictory ideologies, imperatives and norms. On the one hand, 'good parenting' is often viewed through an individualistic lens, emphasizing personal responsibility and parental authority. On the other hand, the power of the state in the context of vaccines requires parents to forego personal choice for the health of the community. Though the breadth of the analysis allows for such patterns to be drawn out, the particularistic dimensions within the regimes of uptake for *certain* vaccines may get lost. For example, the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine often generates questions around adolescent sexuality, morality and cancer prevention that can add further nuance to parental vaccination decisions.

It is particularly interesting to be reading this book now in the winter of 2020, as vaccines for COVID-19 are currently being produced and distributed. Though written in 2016, Reich's assertion that public health campaigns 'requires individuals to give up some personal liberty or freedom to protect the well-being of the population' (8) is eerily relevant at this time, especially as her conclusion asks the question, 'What do we owe each other?' Further, given Reich's insights into vaccine meanings, confidence and uptake, this is a book that people—academics, medical professionals, and parents alike—could be turning and returning to as more information develops, in order to begin to untangle questions around how we will make sense of the coronavirus vaccine and the factors that explain high or low vaccination rates.

Music Review
Dorian Electra: My Agenda

Self-released, 2020

Reviewed by **Jordan M. Sanderson**, ***University of Massachusetts, Amherst***

A Textual Review of Transgender Resistance in Music Performance and Nerd Culture

In sociology and resistance studies, music has received very little attention with regards to analysis and understanding of various groups of people. However, it has not been completely excluded from the sphere of these disciplines. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois incorporated the lyrics of 'The Sorrow Songs' at the start of each chapter. Du Bois used these spirituals to both better understand the *souls*, or consciousnesses, of black folk and to reinforce the reality that black folk were essential in the development of America as a society. Almost ninety years later, William Barlow, in his book *Looking Up At Down: The Emergence of Blues Culture*, argued that blues music 'remained on the cutting edge of African-American cultural resistance to white domination'. In this work, Barlow engaged in discourse with musical lyrics, provided context to the experience and identities of blues artists, and described how blues as a genre has provided African-Americans with a platform to express their identity. Music can be used as method and an empirical example, especially in resistance studies and the discipline of public sociology. In the following paragraphs, I provide a review of Dorian Electra's latest project released on October 16th, 2020. Their queer, experimental pop album, *My Agenda*.

The musical style of *My Agenda* aligns closely with the current movement towards the electronic dominated genre of hyperpop by the likes of 100 gecs, Kim Petras, the late SOPHIE, and other queer artists. The sound itself is genre bending, consisting of fleeting synths, distorted bass drops, and pop surrealism. While the musical component of *My Agenda* is deserving of its own review, there have been plenty of reviews published that go in depth on these aspects of Dorian Electra's art. Instead, I will review the textual lyrics of the album and its connection to everyday resistance. First, it is important to contextualize Dorian Electra's intentions behind *My Agenda.* Dorian Electra identifies as non-binary, explaining that they are 'not

a woman dressing as a man' and that 'it's so much more complex than that (Beaumont-Thomas, 2019).' Additionally, they believe that the fluidity of gender is one that reflects their experience, saying:

> When I came across 'gender fluid', I was like: that term actually really resonates with me. But the core of my being is not gendered at all – even 'gender fluid' is a form of identity that can put somebody in a box (Beaumont-Thomas).

When working on *My Agenda*, Electra continued to address gender roles, expectations, and toxicity, challenging the online 'incel'[1] subculture of misogynism and white-male entitlement. They explain that 'there's this rampant kind of misogyny and self-loathing, [that] overlaps with the alt-right, and people getting radicalized through YouTube and 4Chan (Kim, 2020).' With this in mind, much of *My Agenda*'s tracks work to satirize, challenge, and connect with alienated, young white males.

The opening track, 'F the World,' begins the album by directly addressing these feelings of alienation. According to one interview, Electra explains that it is 'written from the perspective of male outcasts' (Enis, 2020). The main chorus repeats the song title on each line while following it up with sentiments like 'because I love it … I want to hug it … I want to kiss it … because you made me … because it pains me … because it hates me … so I can get laid.' 'F the World' illustrates a crisis in masculinity for young males who blame society for their lack of intimacy and closeness with others. This song is followed by the title track, 'My Agenda,' which parodies the homophobic and transphobic fear of the LGBTQ+ 'agenda' through Dorian Electra declaring their own agenda. One verse goes as follows: 'Have you seen my pamphlets? Have you read my blog? Have you seen my army marching down to city hall? You can always spot us, by the way we walk. As we're plotting to take over and destroy you all.' Electra satirizes this anti-LGBTQ+ hysteria by playing into their fears, implying that their agenda is to replace compulsory heterosexuality and cisgender norms with a

[1] *Incel* refers to the subculture of self-described 'involuntary celibate' males who place blame on women, feminism, and modern society for their sexless, isolated lives. Most males who are associated with this subcategory consider themselves nerds and are typically engaged in alt-right movements that desire a return to Western traditional family structure (Tomkinson. Atwell & Harper, 2020).

militant, queer ideology. One version of the main chorus reaffirms this, with Electra saying 'My agenda, my freaky gender, out here flexin' in my rainbow suspenders. My agenda, will infect ya, out to getcha.' Even the featured artists on this track allow for intergenerational and cross-cultural relevance and resistance. By including the 70's disco group Village People and Russian protest punk group Pussy Riot on the title track, Electra is able to connect with other listeners from various paths of life. Lastly, the song 'My Agenda' concludes with a reference to an infamous rant by alt-right commentator Alex Jones. The lyrics go: 'Poison in the water, you lap it up. I know you're very thirsty baby for this drug. We mind control you just for fun. We're out here turning frogs homosexual.' Here, Electra reveals and reclaims the absurdity of homophobic conspiracy theorists by directly incorporating their conspiracies into Electra's agenda, regardless of how infeasible it is.

After diverting away from the album's main theme, Electra returns to commentary around toxic-masculinity and misogynism prominent among socially isolated young males. The following two tracks, 'Gentleman' and 'M'Lady,' work in tandem with one another. 'Gentleman' emphasizes the incel subculture's obsession with the appearance of chivalry and being a 'gentleman' despite disregarding respect, boundaries, and consent. In contrast, 'M'Lady' describes the incel male's ideal woman. Not only does this description include a hyper-fetishized expectation of a woman' physical appearance, it also references patriarchal expectations for women to behave submissively and accept a subjugated position in relation to men. While Electra uses the incel male's perspective to convey these issues, they also stress how these expectations are impossible to realize. They write 'M'lady can't find her. M'lady's not real. M'lady's a dream. M'lady's a deal. A deal with the devil, a very good price. The price of my soul, my heart is like ice.' The conclusion of this song emphasizes how these misogynistic expectations are unrealistic and damaging for both the female victim and the incel male perpetrator. By embracing this viewpoint, incel males become desensitized and isolated in search for a fantasy that they created.

There are many more songs on *My Agenda* that could be commented on, such as the theme of objectification in 'Barbie Boy', as well as 'Iron Fist,' 'Ram It Down,' and 'Give Great Thanks,' which explore BDSM culture/behavior. However, I primarily want to focus on two more singles from the album. The song 'Edgelord' continues the exploration into the incel subculture, with a twist. Electra uses incel aesthetics and the subculture's language of being social outcasts to position their experience of being

genderqueer. As someone who is not cisgender, Electra is an 'edgelord' in cishet[2] society. I read the song as if they feel like they are being 'pushed… to the edge' by the societal pressure to conform. Rather than conforming, they reject the behaviors, norms, and perspectives associated with the gender assigned to them at birth. They resist these expectations and prioritize their personal identity. The song's featured artist, Rebecca Black, of 'Friday' fame, reinforces this point with the line 'Told you I could smash your petty trash labels.' The last song I want to visit is '*Sorry Bro (I Love You)*.' In this track, Electra satirizes the heteronormativity and hypermasculinity associated with male friendships. The pre-chorus is clearly homoerotic, with the masculine perspective singing 'I know, I know, we always wrestle. I know sometimes I put up a fight. I know, I know, we always tussle. But maybe it's because I love you.' However, the singer backtracks, stating to his friend, 'And when we're kickin' it you know I think it's chill. 'Cause I can count on you to always keep it real. That's why I'm singin', man. 'Cause I want you to know bro, no homo.' The conflict that is being conveyed here is that of internalized homophobia. In '*Sorry Bro (I Love You)*,' Electra attempts to uncover the masked internalized homophobia and reveal these homophobic fears to the listener. By doing so, it oddly normalizes this experience. Those who suffer from internalized homophobia can work toward accepting their sexuality despite its association with masculinity and gender.

As a work of media that provides commentary on misogyny, toxic-masculinity, and heteronormativity prevalent among young males, *My Agenda* acts as an expression of everyday resistance. In their book *Conceptualizing 'Everyday Resistance'; A Transdisciplinary Approach*, Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen democratize James Scott's original perspective of 'everyday resistance,' defining it as 'a practice/technique (not an intention, consciousness, ideology, recognition, or outcome/effect) … always oppositional or related to power/dominance/hegemony' (Johansson & Vinthagen, 2019). Applying this definition, Electra is engaging in everyday resistance as a technique in their preferred medium, music. As a transgender artist, Electra stands in opposition to cisgender norms, compulsory heterosexual expectations, and homophobic/transphobic

[2] Abbreviation of the combination of cisgender and heterosexual. In this particular use of the word, I am referencing the concept of compulsory heterosexuality and cisgender identification as the hegemonic ideology in modern Western society.

narratives. Regardless of intention (or lack thereof), *My Agenda* provides an antithesis to the incel subculture while using nerdy/angsty aesthetics typically associated with this group. While satire is predominately thought of as a means to exaggerate and make fun of something, it can also be used as Electra uses it. They use satire as a way to criticize a particular group's hegemonic views of LGBTQ+ people, confronting the powerful transphobic and homophobic incel discourse within nerd culture (Forbes, 2010). For someone who identifies as a nerd themself, Electra is resisting these harmful narratives by exposing the violence and reclaiming their nerd identity (Kim, 2020).

Electra's *My Agenda* also provides an appeal to those who may be transgender themselves but possibly fear violence from incel males in the broad nerd community. Throughout the album, Electra normalizes the relationship between nerdiness and queerness. In several of their music videos, Electra references and draws from several aspects of nerd, gaming, punk, and internet culture (Droke, 2020). *My Agenda* works to undo many of these transphobic and homophobic norms, either by directly criticizing them or by Electra embracing themselves as an agent of transgender representation. Electra understands that there are transgender people everywhere. They make transgenderism more accessible, which Patricia Gagné and Richard Tewksbury (1998) provide some insight into in their article, 'Conformity Pressures and Gender Resistance among Transgendered Individuals':

> When immersed in a community of like-minded others, the perceived norms of that community can be very powerful, and in the case of transgenderism, could be defining elements in identity transformation. When the community of presumably similar and accepting others suggests that membership is conditioned upon achieving certain characteristics and behaviors, new members have a tendency to accept the judgments and perspectives of existing members. When individuals exploring transgenderism and searching for a comfortable identity and style of presentation first locate and initiate interactions with a transgender community, they often believe that they have found the only few others who 'truly understand' and accept them for who they are. Therefore, being accepted by these others is highly valued, and the norms that structure this newly discovered community become

> important. Perhaps more importantly, the community's values and belief systems are believed to be correct and to deserve conformity (97).

While Gagné and Tewksbury are speaking about a generalized 'transgender community,' Electra is applying the same line of thought to the nerd subculture within the queer community. They appeal to both the closeted nerd who suffers from internalized queerphobia and the nerdy queer person who does not 'fit in' with 'passing' or 'normal' LGBTQ+ culture. *My Agenda* reinforces a queer space for nerds while also providing a familiar arena for one's queer identity transformation.

Overall, Dorian Electra's *My Agenda* is a hyperpop album that explores themes around gender, misogyny, and queerness. Despite being a work of music rather than an academic article, book, or study, Electra is able to engage in everyday resistance as well as present a way to resist the violence of incel subculture. While some social scientists may question the validity of the musical, non-academic nature of *My Agenda,* its unconventional form of analytical expression provides a substantive examination which may reach demographics that would not have otherwise heard these perspectives. To this point, I doubt Electra would be any more concerned about this than I am. Everyday resistance is meant to be polarized from the hierarchical and hegemonic order. Resistance studies, sociology, and academia is not exempt from resistance by those who lack power, agency, or a platform. While this review did not use music as eloquently as W.E.B. Du Bois did in *The Souls of Black Folk*, the methodological sentiment is shared. Music can provide sociological insight on a community, culture, and social group while also being more accessible than conventional scholarly media.

Another struggle for music is the question of an artist's intent. However, Johansson and Vinthagen's (2019) conceptualization of everyday resistance allows for a lack of intent, ideology, and recognition. Regardless of Electra's intent, *My Agenda* opposes homophobic and transphobic power dynamics in a way that can be practiced every day. That being said, Electra does provide some insight into their framework for *My Agenda*. They explain:

> From a sociological perspective, we really need to look at what is the root cause of this new version of the right and the alt-right. Why has this come about and how do we combat this and how do we try to communicate to these people that there are more positive solutions to their problems than some of the ideology that is found on these corners of the internet?

> I'm a very pragmatic person, so when I find solutions, I want to look for things that work and ask how we heal the cultural divide that we have going right now—the growing division between the left and the right and culture wars that we're in the middle of experiencing right now. To me, it starts with just learning, researching, and understanding. The best way to communicate with someone on 'the other side' is to first understand them and know where they're coming from to be able to better communicate with them as opposed to just shutting them out, shutting them down, preventing communication, preventing basically any possibility for change, learning, growth, or development on their part. I think that we need a renewed sense of openness and duty to have civil discourse because online it can just get so [complex] so quickly (Droke, 2020).

Electra's position is to resist this alt-right movement within nerd culture. While many academic researchers would rather interview individuals associated with this group or build an elaborate quantitative test, Electra speaks as a member of this community. They are a nerd and grew up surrounded by nerd culture. This is a strength that no outside researcher could replicate since they understand the nuances, aesthetics, and cultural identifiers associated with this group. Additionally, using the accessibility of music as a platform follows the tradition of other marginalized peoples, fostering resistance for themself and other queer people listening to, discussing, and recommending the album. On October 24th, 2020, shortly after *My Agenda's* release, Dorian Electra performed their album at a virtual event. The event itself hosted thousands of viewers, all of whom engaged in mutual everyday resistance, and fundraised for Black Trans Femmes in the Arts., *My Agenda*'s greatest strength as a work on everyday resistance is its accessibility and impact. I assert that these two characteristics are fundamental to the spirit of everyday resistance. *My Agenda* serves as both an act of everyday resistance from Electra and a resource to resist misogyny, toxic masculinity, transphobia, and compulsory heterosexuality championed by the alt-right.

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A. Rafik Mohamed: Black Men on the Blacktop: Basketball & the Politics of Race

Lynne Rienner, 2017

Reviewed by **Risa F. Isard**, ***University of Massachusetts, Amherst***

Introduction

This book review of *Black Men on the Blacktop: Basketball & the Politics of Race* uses a resistance studies lens to review sociologist A. Rafik Mohamed's ethnography about Black men's everyday resistance through pickup basketball. Mohamed demonstrates that pickup basketball is a cultural phenomenon that illuminates socio-political issues, specifically politics of race and gender. The book review places Mohamed's arguments in conversation with foundational texts of everyday resistance, namely James C. Scott and Asef Bayat. Further, the book review notes Mohamed's contributions—making a compelling case for sport as a site of everyday resistance—and limitations, namely a singular focus on Scott's theories and a limited exploration of masculinity.

Summary of Main Arguments.

At its core, *Black Men on the Blacktop* shows how and why pickup basketball and everyday resistance intersect. Given the history of sport as a way for white, upper-class men to maintain their gender, class, and racial status (pp. 45-52), the 'Ballers' enact everyday resistance when they '[take] over public spaces' (p. 56) on the Southern California courts where this study mostly focused. It is not just the existence of such public games that resists traditional power structures, but the way Ballers play the game. Through the enactment of *'Black Man's Rules'* (the culture of Black men dictating the terms of the game, p. 68), *'Blacktop Expressionism'* (part playing style, part emotional outlet, pp. 26, 41), and the *'Cool Pose'* (making basketball skill look easy, p. 84), pickup basketball becomes a 'resistive sphere' for Black men (p. 111). That is, the Ballers create pride in Blackness and reject dominant white culture—without risking social or legal repercussions (pp. 71, 162). In sum, the hidden box score of the pickup game measures winners and losers by disrupting the status quo of racial privilege (pp.72, 75). Despite these opportunities, Mohamed argues that the stereotypes of black male athleticism (what he calls '*Mandingo Syndrome')* that Black men themselves

sometimes perpetuate for momentary gain may hinder the advancement of racial equity in the long run. If the goal is social progress, understanding pickup basketball through the lens of everyday resistance is a place to start.

Everyday resistance. Mohamed explicitly and singularly relies on James Scott's conceptualization of everyday resistance to make his analysis (p. 15). His explanation of why Scott's framework fits his study is appropriate, though he would improve his analysis by at times adopting ideas from Asef Bayat, especially to examine the dynamic relationship between power and resistance.

Black Men on the Blacktop builds a case based on Scott's framework. Mohamed writes that the acts of everyday resistance in pickup basketball are 'ritualistic' (p. 15), which aligns with Scott's assertion that everyday resistance is a 'pattern' (Scott, 1989, p. 36). Mohamed also specifically likens contemporary Black men in America to a peasant class (p. 11), a direct reference to Scott (1985). As Mohamed applies everyday resistance to the context of pickup basketball, most of his arguments stay close to Scott's. Notably, Mohamed (2017) shows that pickup basketball is at once a public and 'hidden transcript' (pp. 13, 71; Scott, 1989, p. 59); argues that resistance happens through pickup basketball because it is one of the only places where Black men can assert themselves (pp. 45, 158-162; Scott, 1989, p.35); demonstrates that acts of everyday resistance on the court are invoked with 'tactical wisdom' (Scott, 1989, p. 36; Mohamed, 2017, pp. 79, 83); and recognizes that the victories on the court may at most lead to de facto equality advances (Mohamed**,** p. 56, Scott, 1989). Evidently, Scott's framework is critical to Mohamed's analysis.

Limitations

Mohamed might have enhanced his analysis by using Bayat's work to explain the dynamic negotiation of power between the Ballers and the white locals as described. In Chapter 4, Mohamed chronicles the variety of ways that white, upper-class suburbia tries to maintain their position of power in response to the Black-dominated pickup games happening at the local park. From increased police patrols that include stop-the-game-and-frisk (p. 93), to the conspicuous absence of lights at only the basketball courts (p. 94), to affixing a metal bracket atop the baskets after 5pm on weekends (p. 94), white, wealthy neighborhood residents used municipal resources to push back against the vibrant Black pickup basketball culture. Still, the Ballers played

into the weaning hours of light and continue to show up at other regular play times. Subsequently when they played, they would take out these injustices on the white players who showed up to play (p. 97)—resulting in many white players relocating to other spaces (pp. 98-100). This cycle of resistance and power is not one that Scott addresses, but is central to the work of Bayat (2000). Accordingly, Mohamed's allegiance to Scott's framework limited Mohamed's analysis of the 'basketball element' (p. 91) to which white locals responded with force.

Black Men on the Blacktop would have been enhanced further by a more meaningful exploration of the role of gender in these men's acts of resistance. Despite claiming a gendered lens (p. 17) and a brief explanation about the invisibility of women in his ethnography (they largely do not participate in the pickup games he studied, p. 27), Mohamed does not fully explore or articulate the role of masculinity in his book. In doing so, *Black Men on the Blacktop* paradoxically becomes yet another book in which '[men's] experiences in sport *as men* have been obscured' (p.17, italics in original). This is most obvious by Mohamed's assertion that 'Blackness is, for most intents and purposes, as master status […] Before anything else, African Americans are seen as black' (p. 81). This perspective plays out throughout the book. Readers only must ask themselves, 'How likely is it that a Black woman on the blacktop would be treated with the same deference (p. 102) as the Black men in the ethnography?' to see that using an intersectional approach is critical, not merely convenient. It's not *just* the Ballers' race that underpins their everyday resistance—but their gender, too. This explicit recognition is missing from Mohamed's analysis, rendering his ethnography to be limited in its understanding of race (missing the experiences of Black non-men) and of gender (missing the exploration of these Black men's *manhoods*). As gender hegemony and heterosexism work together, the absence of a single mention about sexuality is similarly limiting.

Conclusion

Its limitations notwithstanding, *Black Men on the Blacktop* makes a compelling case for how Black men enact everyday resistance through pickup basketball. In doing so, Mohamed makes a significant contribution to the understanding of sport in America and of everyday resistance.

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The UMass Amherst Resistance Studies Initiative

The Initiative seeks to Develop "resistance studies," and support the efforts of activists worldwide that are employing direct action, civil disobedience, everyday resistance, digital activism, mass protest, and other kinds of nonviolent resistance. Its essential goals are to help create a more humane world by fostering social change and human liberation in its fullest sense. It will study how resistance can undermine repression, injustices, and domination of all kinds, and how it can nurture such creative responses as constructive work, alternative communities, and oppositional ways of thinking.

The Initiative hopes to do all of this by:

- Working closely with the other members of the international Resistance Studies Network to encourage worldwide scholarly, pro-liberation collaboration
- Maintaining strong ties with activists worldwide, documenting their activities, and providing critical analysis upon request
- Offering academic courses in Resistance Studies at UMass Amherst
- Offering resistance-themed workshops, lecture series, and symposiums
- Publishing the international, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed **Journal of Resistance Studies.**

Rebecca W. B. Lund & Ann Christin E. Nilsen: Institutional Ethnography in the Nordic Region

Routledge, 2020

Reviewed by **Sarah Murru**, *UCLouvain & Université libre de Bruxelles*

Why Resistance Studies Should Pay Attention to Institutional Ethnography

Is there a scholar whose works forever changed your perspective on the world or about your own academic work? Dorothy E. Smith is one of those for me. As a PhD student, discovering her works on Institutional Ethnography (IE)—Inspired by Marx and ethnomethodology (see *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*, 1987; *The Conceptual Practices of Power: A Feminist Sociology of Knowledge*, 1990; *Institutional Ethnography: A Sociology for People*, 2005)—truly opened my eyes to new structural realities and ways of conducting academic research. Spoiler alert: this might also happen to you, if you read through to the end of this review. Throughout my work in Resistance Studies, IE has always been useful in designing research and making sense of realities and experiences observed in the field. Too often in Resistance Studies, we are provided with grand theories on conceptualizations of 'resistance' (Murru, 2020). However, we are rarely given practical tools to operationalize research, decipher meaning and enable understanding of the manifestations of resistance, especially those occurring in everyday life (for an exception, see Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019, and the special issue of the Journal of Resistance Studies on *Researching Resistance: Methodological Challenges, Ethical Concerns and the Future of Resistance Studies*).

In this review of Lund and Nilsen's collective volume, *Institutional Ethnography in the Nordic Region,* I argue that IE is a useful method of inquiry for scholars of Resistance Studies. In the 21st century, we are witnessing a resurgence of fascism and right-wing governments' promotion of nationalism in countries across the globe. Notably, the confrontation between the Trump administration and the Black Lives Matter and abolitionist movements, or the increasing popularity and electability of far-right political parties all over Europe. In this context, the connections between IE and Resistance Studies, and the many contributions made by Lund and Nilsen in this volume,

are incredibly timely. This book helps understand the interconnectedness of institutional domination and everyday life, encourages the discovery of resistance in these daily experiences, and provides many case studies exposing how to unveil relations of power. With this in mind, I will first describe the IE approach, as it has some foundational differences with core sociological thinking. I will then present the scope of the book under review and emphasize its interest both for scholars familiar with IE as well as for newcomers. I close with a discussion of the relevance of IE for studying resistance.

For those unfamiliar with IE, Lund and Nilsen (2020b) spell out the key elements : 'Institutional Ethnography (IE) is a methodology-of-inquiry […] designed to discover, unpack and challenge the social organization of everyday life and involves commitment to doing research *with* and *for* people, rather than *about* them (Smith, 1987, 2005) [original emphasis]' (Lund & Nilsen, 2020b, p.3). So far, you might say, there is nothing new here. Other feminist or post-colonial/anti-imperial research methods have this at heart (see for instance Strega and Brown's *Research as Resistance: Revisiting Critical, Indigenous, and Anti-Oppressive Approaches,* 2015). However, what is particular with IE is how the ontology is put into practice. In IE, 'people are understood as essentially social beings and the social, in turn, is understood as people coordinating activities' (Lund & Nilsen, 2020b, p.3). This involves a re-definition of some core concepts in sociology and tends to render IE somewhat unintelligible to someone who has not spent time reading the whole collection of Smith's works, or other's applications of IE into various research areas. However, Lund and Nilsen do a very good job in the introduction to the book of summarizing the core principles of IE in a very practical and clear way that is accessible to newcomers—whilst staying true to the original IE definitions and meaning.

The term 'social organization' in the above-mentioned quote is key. IE aims to start inquiry from the standpoint of people (in line with many feminist research perspectives) and seeks to problematize their everyday life experiences in order to understand *how* they happen the way they do. In other words:

> Through people's everyday embodied experience and *work-knowledge*, understood generously as *'everything people do, from they get up till they go to bed, that takes time, effort, and emotion, as they participate in or resist institutional orders'* (see Smith 2005), we may learn how institutions are

> made to work and shape people's lives in ways that are not necessarily in their own best interests [original emphasis] (Lund & Nilsen, 2020b, p.4).

In IE, the concept of *institution* is to be understood broadly, such as the functioning of heath care systems, family, education, capitalism, policy making and so forth (Smith, 2007). IE will thus start from the local site of people's embodied practices, which are considered to be coordinated by something beyond their own motivations and intentions, and will move to uncover, or connect these practices to, the *translocal* site of objectified social relations such as the discourses, ideologies, or rules that shape the local activity. In other words, IE does not consider discourse and concepts to be descriptive of experience; rather, it understands them as *organizers* of it. As such, IE presents itself as a critique of theory-driven research and defines as its purpose to understand and challenge processes of objectification (Lund & Nilsen, 2020b).

This 'organization of the social' happens and is practically studied through the unveiling of what Smith calls *ruling relations*. These ruling relations are analysed through the connection between what people know about their everyday lives and the *textual material* available. 'Texts' are to be understood here as any material object, sound or image that 'create as they are read, watched or listened to connections with others who are not present to us. Texts' capacity to replicate the same words, images or sounds in multiple settings is essential to the very existence of institutions' (Smith, 2007, p.412). Think, for example, how important schoolbooks are within the institution of education, and how they will organize students' everyday experiences of knowing what matters as, say, 'history'. IE emphasizes the idea that the capacity to rule depends upon carrying messages (texts) across sites, coordinating someone's action here with someone else's there (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). In the end, as Lund and Nilsen emphasize, 'speaking of the social as 'coordination', rather than 'structure', 'rules' or 'system' […] challenges structure-agency, micro-macro and individual-society distinctions and dualisms' (2020, p.3). This, as I will later demonstrate, is of interest for Resistance Studies.

Now, the originality of Lund and Nilsen's book is that they build on the foundational writings and research in IE, which are mostly produced in North America, and reflect on how conducting IEs in the Nordic Region impacts on the way the method is understood and mobilized. The Nordics,

as the authors stress, is a region characterized by its social-democratic regime, encouraging a universalistic system marked by social welfare, gender equality, employability and a high level of state intervention enabled through high taxations. If the system is far from the perfect image that is portrayed, as is made clear throughout many chapters of the book, it has nevertheless created a rather positive and reliable image of the State among its citizens and, consequently, a low level of civil society opposition. This is something that contrasts with other contexts, for example the North American one marked by popular suspicion of the State apparatus. Thus, this highlights the interest of observing the effects of regional contexts on the usages of IE.

For scholars already familiar with IE, the book will strike as a breath of fresh air, because it opens up a dialogue about how IE might be combined with other approaches and theories. This is somewhat controversial within the IE field, as proponents typically are not keen to include other theories and concepts in explanations. Although Smith often insists that IE is not a set of guidelines to be followed but more of an ontological re-framing of the social (Smith, 2007), I personally have often thought of IE research to be somewhat hermetic to the questioning of its fundamentals—discussing theory being one of them. With their volume, Lund and Nilsen encourage this debate, and the chapters serve as examples and avenues to do so. The book is organized into four different sections: (1) the effects of contextualizing IE within the Nordics and the questions that emerge from this; (2) how IE *can* dialogue with other theories (namely, Scandinavian Neo-Institutional Theory, Organization Theory, Actor Network Theory, Feminist Studies of Technoscience, Discourse and Interactionist approaches, or Nordic Postcolonial and Critical Race Studies); (3) actual case studies of IE in Nordic countries and the societal observations that the method enabled; and (4) the 'transformative potential' of IE in the Nordics.

For scholars in Resistance Studies unfamiliar with IE, you will likely apprehend the book in one of two ways. Either you work on issues or themes that are similar or connected to some of the chapters and those will be helpful by showing the type of new information that can come out of an IE on this subject. This will be the case if you work on area studies such as social work, work inclusion, gender and family policy, or even development aid. Or, you might be seeking for ways to document resistance, to operationalize your research linked to resistance. In that case, the volume as a whole will be an inspiration. All of the chapters feature cases where relations of power

are challenged and present truly rich, comprehensive and detailed accounts of *how* this happens and what this tells us about institutional and social organizations. For instance, in chapter 8 entitled 'Exploring 'whiteness' as ideology and work knowledge. Thinking with institutional ethnography', Lund uses the tools of IE to re-examine interviews she had led for a previous research project with white feminist scholars. This time, she focused on these scholar's *work knowledge* of race, which was a theme that appeared in the interviews but was not the entry point of the previous project. The contradiction that sparks Lund's current analysis is the acknowledgement that these scholars had not been aware of race prior to engaging with the concept in scholarly work, and at the same time, her own quiet acceptance (a white scholar herself) of this information at the time of the interview. Through this problematic, she is able to unpack how whiteness operates; how the domination of whiteness happens the way it does by appearing as a non-subject, and through not claiming its own (dominant) place inside *the social relation of race*. This chapter highlights how, through an analysis of individual experience and the practice of the work of these white scholars, the textually mediated discourse of race becomes organized and connected to the dominant Nordic discourse of race blindness. This case, like many others in the book, demonstrates how a fine inquiry into work practices, and how these connect to other's practices elsewhere, reveals ruling and the organization of institutional dominance.

Cherry on the cake, the book ends with a chapter by Sørensen, Nilsen and Lund, 'Resisting the ruling relations: discovering everyday resistance with Institutional Ethnography'. It highlights the similarities between the concept of everyday resistance and the practice of IE. It engages in the discussion about how institutional ethnographers might understand some acts of 'oppositional or critical talk', or acts of non-compliance, as everyday forms of resistance. As stressed by the authors:

> 'The concept [of ruling relations] is relational, not functionalist or structuralist, and as such agency and ultimately the possibility of resistance, is central to IE discovery. Despite this, it seems to us that many empirical studies drawing on IE are good at meticulously unpacking how everyone—be they in the upper or lower echelons of institutional hierarchies—is caught up in webs of ruling, but they speak in less detail about how people challenge and resist the ruling relations in which they are entangled' (Sørensen, Nilsen & Lund, 2020, p.207).

Alongside other scholars (among which Baaz et al., 2018; Sørensen, 2016; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016), my work in Resistance Studies has led me to emphasize the need to depart from a conceptualization of resistance that is dualistic or dichotomous, such as, resister/dominant, active/passive, strong/weak, men/women. In that same vein, one can think of Scott's concepts of *infrapolitics* which is something that sits in-between hidden practices and overt, public dissent (Scott, 1990). IE uncovers this interstitial space. And it can be useful to document and understand resistance *as an experience* that happens along a continuum of practices throughout various spaces and times, rather than a moment to be analysed on its own (Murru, 2020; Murru & Polese, 2020).

If this book ends with an encouragement for proponents of IE to look into the concept of resistance, this review is aimed at throwing the ball the other way: inciting scholars in Resistance Studies to look into IE. Lund and Nilsen have provided a volume that is true to the foundational works of institutional ethnography, yet engages critically its current usages and contemporary importance. Most importantly, it addresses a difficult but important debate inside IE: the dialogue with context and various theories. In the end, if you are a scholar in Resistance Studies reflecting on how to make sense of a social reality, IE is a very useful avenue for this, and Lund and Nilsen's collective volume on *Institutional Ethnography in the Nordic Region* is a great place to start from—as it is, in my view, one of the most up to date, critical, and useful piece of work currently available.

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Liz Castro: Many Grains of Sand: A Sourcebook of Ideas for Changing the World, Tried and Tested in Catalonia

Catalonia Press, 2017

Reviewed by **Stellan Vinthagen**, ***University of Massachusetts, Amherst***

In the region of Catalonia, the Catalan people identify as a nation and are trying to obtain freedom from the state of Spain. Liz Castro documents the creativity of the multitude forms of protest adopted by Catalans in their struggle for Catalonian self-determination, especially during the recent surge of mobilizations since 2010. Castro herself is a key member of the national movement, and as such this is a book is from 'within', articulating an activist narrative. At the same time, it is a book that is of general interest, as an inspirational catalogue of creativity and activism. It is a book with a very appealing, accessible layout, with lots of photos, a clear structure, and inspirational short texts, outlining the different impressive actions of the Catalan movement. In it we learn about how the Catalan question in Spain emerged to become a mass movement, moving from being a non-issue to perhaps the top issue on the political agenda in Spain.

The Catalan movement for a self-governed society has existed for a long time, sometimes focused on gaining more of an autonomous region, sometimes, like now, on gaining an independent nation state. A key historical event is the military invasion and occupation in 1714 that forced Catalonia to join Spain. Today the Catalan economy is growing and is among the strongest in Spain. The national identity has grown politically due much to a combination of the increase of Catalan language learning among the population, and when several proposals for increased autonomy for Catalonia were met with repression and perceived humiliation of Catalonia by Madrid (pp. 9, 11).

The many examples of activism Castro outlines also give the history of the Catalan 'process' (not struggle), and how nationalism in Catalonia has grown. In the book it becomes clear that the movement has many of the key elements of a successful mobilization: creativity, energy, unity, and mass participation, and it is organized, disciplined and nonviolent. Still, I think there are fundamental problems, something I will return to.

Key to the Catalan national awareness and collective identity has been the Catalan language. Here it is important that Catalan immersion schooling was adopted already in the 1980s (p. 36). Today the language is very established and a common part of everyday interactions. In one of the early protests, 10,000 participants marched in Brussels in 2009 to try to influence the EU to support Catalan freedom. That was also the year when the people's assembly was created: the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) (p. 40), which since then has been a key organizer of much of the activism. An important turning point was when the Constitutional Court in 2010 rejected the negotiated Catalan Statue of Autonomy from 2006. This rejection of autonomy became the starting point of a more mass based movement and the demand for independence. A sign of this has been the annual mass demonstrations, which for example in 2012 gathered 1.5 million out of 7 million Catalans (pp. 56-58). Many demonstrations have also been held on particular issues, as for example in 2014 when about 100,000 participated in favor of maintaining the Catalonian form of schooling.

A key part of 'the process' has been to vote. The first popular referendum on independence was held in the Arenys de Munt district of Barcelona in 2009. It was organized in a private space by a citizens' group, not by the city government, due to pressures from Madrid. That inspirational example started a two-year wave of referendums or 'Arenys-style 'consultations' in more than 500 towns all over Catalonia' (pp. 25, 22-29). Thus, the Catalan national movement begins from below, via language immersion and local referendums. Since then, Catalans have voted in many different ways to show their resolve. A breakthrough happened when the politicians took the lead with the Declaration of Sovereignty by the Catalan parliament in 2013, which declared that the Catalan people had the right to decide their own future themselves, something that clearly upset Madrid. Subsequently, 750,000 petitioned the Catalan parliament to take the next step and hold a referendum, then in 2014 nearly all city halls in the region (as many as 96% of them) also voted in favor of holding a national referendum. When the Catalan parliament then decided on having a referendum in 2014, it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, so they changed it into a 'consultation'. When the consultation led to protests from Madrid, and yet another declaration from the Supreme Court of Spain saying it was unconstitutional, the Catalan Parliament decided to go ahead anyhow. 2.3 million voted on the decisive day of November 9 ('N9'), 40% of all voters. 80% of them voted yes to independence. Since the consultation

was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, 6,000 persons signed papers of their 'guilt' to vote, and turned themselves in to the police (p. 170). The following Catalan election in 2015 was then declared as a plebiscite on independence, an election that confirmed the consultation with 48% voting for independence parties (and 39% for those against). It resulted in the Catalan parliament having close to a majority of pro-independence seats (p. 195). This parliament then decided to have a binding referendum in 2017, which once again confirmed the results. About 43% voted, with 90% of these voting for independence. During that referendum, which of course again was declared unconstitutional, Spanish police intervened and tried to stop the voting. The situation was very tense and confrontational, a full-blown political conflict between Madrid and Catalonia. It led to politicians being arrested, with the leader of the independence movement in the Catalan parliament, president Puigdemont, fleeing to Belgium to enter a life in exile in Brussels. In the fall of 2019 tensions flared again, when several of the leading independence-promoting politicians were sentenced to between 9 and 13 years in prison. At the time of writing, nine politicians are in prison, while president Puigdemont continues to live in exile.

During the last decade of increased activism, the creativity the Catalan people have shown is impressive. Still, the protests have been mostly symbolic articulations, although there have been things like refusing to pay highway tolls, yet this also seems to have been a largely symbolic gesture (see p. 45). This symbolic protest movement has shown much fantasy in creating all their action forms. Singing has been important as it was in the Baltic states (p. 48), with for example a mass movement of 'lib dubs'; videos with a large group of people singing along to a famous song. People have, like the Icelandic protesters that ousted their government, been banging pots in coordinated actions, and they have used 'flashmobs'; coordinated activity by people who appear suddenly in a crowd on a given signal, and after doing their thing, quickly disappear into the crowd again (p. 54). The Catalans have used social media as a tool of course (p. 66-73), as well as selling merchandise for the cause (p. 75). The matches of the world-famous Barcelona soccer team (FC Barça) have also been drawn into this nationalism. At the exact time of 17:14 into a match, the audience make a large noise, since it was in 1714 that Madrid used military force to compel Catalonia to join Spain.

Obviously, the Catalan independence flag is key in many of these examples. The flag is, like in most nationalist struggles, an important symbol,

and it celebrated 100 years in 2008, in the midst of growing nationalism. The flag comes in two versions: one red starred and one blue starred, but both with the prominence of yellow color and red stripes. One popular form has been to have a mass lighting of thousands of candles in the shape of the flag (p. 50). There have been big flags displayed all over Spain, bike tours inside Catalonia with the flag displayed, and tours in all US states. Some got inspiration for this after 'a city councilperson was being fined for having a Catalonia sticker [with the flag] on their license plate' (p. 78). Athletes have celebrated their wins by displaying the flag (p. 80), while farmers have festooned their hay and displayed their apples at markets with the colors of the flag (p. 98). The flag has taken the shape of lighted bubble cubes (p. 126), and one sail boat, with the flag on display, has been named 'the Independence One' and carried out sailing tours. The colors of the flag have also been used in other actions (with yellow color paintings of walls and crosses, and heaps of yellow shoes on display in town squares). In 2011, the city San Pere de Torelló became the first to take down the Spanish flag and only fly the Catalan independence flag (p. 42).

People have formed human chains up to 400 km long (p. 104), similar to the protest movement in the Baltic states in the 1990s. They have formed human towers (p. 116) and V-formed mass figures for victory. They have painted murals (p. 92), which is a popular form of political messaging in Northern Ireland. Moreover, like so many others, they have used concerts and music for their cause. They have carried out bicycling tours for the cause, as well as motor cycle parades, as well as calling the attention of world leaders via super large banners. They have developed slogans for 9N (the voting day of November 9) and declared 'no matter what,' implying that Catalans are prepared to take on the vote no matter what Madrid threatens them with. Again like so many other movements, they have used books in the struggle (p. 86), drawings and cartoons, as well as folklore sayings for the cause.

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Thus, we can see an impressive amount of protests and creative fantasy in designing popular participation and variation of protests. It is consistent, nonviolent, mass based and persuasive. Nevertheless, it is fundamentally symbolic and fully focused on the demand for independence (or self-governance). The question is whether this is enough? It is already clear that the Catalans have an ethical case; like all people in the world they have the right of self-determination, as is stated in the principles of international law and

the UN. However, the more difficult question is whether the Catalans have a political case, which is to say, such a powerful proposal that it can make other people and institutions compelled to change their relations with the Catalans and treat them as independent. Another way to say this is: The Catalans have already won the discussion, yet will they get the decision they want? Every movement needs a strategy; a plan of how they are going to succeed and achieve their goal. The obvious challenge for the Catalan liberation struggle is to create sufficient acceptance for their demand among the Spanish state and population (and the European Union and its populations), to make a self-governed Catalonia possible. Any state, particularly Spain and the EU, is worried about a domino effect following the permission of self-governance for one people. There are about 200 nation states in the world, and at least 2,000 nations, people with their own language and culture. Canada, Russia, France, Germany, China, India, Brazil and the US are just some of the main examples of states that live with multiple and severe tensions from different peoples, who could break out and create new states. How will the world manage all these demands without ending up in endless civil wars? How will the Catalan people make all these non-Catalans either so supportive or so coerced that they will grant their permission or accept the de-facto situation that Catalonia is independent? If the strategy is one of maximum creativity, joy and colorful protests and mass-based demands on Madrid (and Brussels), as it seems from this book, I see two problems; not with the book necessarily, rather with the movement that the book presents.

Firstly, there is a contradiction to demanding self-governance, asking the authority of the state for permission to be free. Autonomy cannot be given from the dominant power, it can only be gained through practicing autonomy, in other words by creating a de facto situation which the dominant power has to accommodate to, negotiate or accept. This would mean: practicing self-governance long before it is accepted by the dominant power; managing self-governance in politics by creating Catalan laws and ignoring Spanish ones; withholding Spanish taxes and creating a functional Catalan tax system; marking and managing borders with Catalan border security and rules; practicing a Catalan school and health system, as well as creating new passports, identity cards and so forth. In all kinds of ways, Catalans must institutionalize and act as-if Catalonia was already free and do this irrespective of what Spain or the EU think about it. This would mean turning the table around and instead of protesting against Madrid, letting Madrid come and protest what the Catalans are doing. Even if this

would lead to imprisonments, military occupation and repressive measures, such an autonomy movement would have to continue their practice of self-governance. Such a movement would include Catalan political, economic, cultural and social institutions, on all levels, not just formal decisions about independence by Catalan parliamentarians. If the Catalan movement was practicing self-determination in this manner, Madrid would in principle have to choose between imprisoning, killing, or permanently occupying and forcing its governance on millions of people—or they would have to concede and let Catalonia be free.

It might sound more 'realistic' and a 'quicker' way to (firmly and consistently) 'demand' independence, yet this does not work even when it seems to be effective. If 'sovereignty' could be given to a people, it would not actually be 'sovereignty'; it could always be rescinded. Ask the Native Americans; they know this. Repeatedly they have been given self-rule and been recognized as independent nations that form international agreements with Washington, yet this has been repeatedly ignored, violated, changed and withdrawn when it has suited Washington. Recognized nations have become unrecognized, while designated 'self-governed' reservation territories have been redesigned, diminished, cancelled or moved when profitable natural resources have been found, or when infrastructure and new territory were 'needed' by the non-Native population. Virtually every single negotiated treaty between Washington and Native American nations has been violated by the US state.

Secondly, the demand for self-governance is empty in itself, if it is not filled with practiced political, social, economic and cultural content. Where is the content of this demanded new society? What will it look like? Besides the fact that all people want to be free, what will this freedom be used for? The only really different type of resistance I can see in the book is the practice of the Catalan language, since it is a practice of self-determination within a Spanish speaking nation. Yet Catalan is not forbidden to be used by Spain. Thus, it can be practiced without permission from Madrid. If the Catalan nation gets their freedom, in what way will the state of Catalonia be different to Spain? What exactly is it the Catalans will do with their freedom? Why is it necessary? These questions are important since it seems untenable to advocate thousands of new nation states in the world, while 'self-determination' does not necessarily mean the creation of a 'nation state.' Autonomy can take many different and negotiated forms. Furthermore, if the Spanish and European populations are supposed to support this (which

seems necessary for it to function), it is simply not enough to claim the right of self-determination, as this does not necessarily make non-Catalans impressed, enthusiastic or supportive.

However, if the Catalans did in fact practice de-facto self-governance, instead of just making the demand for it, the content of an autonomous Catalonia would at the same time become visible, since however limited it would be in the face of Spanish repression, it would be a prefigurative example of an autonomous Catalonia. Then there is a chance that non-Catalans could be engaged, supportive and even enthusiastic. That is what has happened with, for example, the Kurdish experiment in Rojava (until it was crushed by a combination of acts by the US, Turkey, Syria, and Russia), or the Zapatistas in Chiapas, Mexico, or the landless workers movement MST in Brazil. Since these people experiment with, develop and show alternative ways of organizing a society, with a different economy, politics and culture, they make outsiders compelled to act in solidarity and lend them support politically.

Therefore, it seems to me that either the book is misrepresenting the movement, or the movement still has a very long way to go before their demand can become reality. However, the ingredients are there; besides the fundamentals of creativity, energy and mass participation, there are also the immersion schools that promote the Catalan language, the locally self-organized referenda in hundreds of towns, the defiant decisions of the Catalan parliament, the boycott of Spanish highway tolls and so forth. Yet much is lacking, perhaps most importantly a strategy of de facto self-governance.