Book Reviews

L.A. Kauffman: How to Read a Protest: The Art of Organizing and Resistance

University of California Press 2018

Reviewed by *Sarah Freeman-Woolpert*, JRS

On a freezing January morning, I joined a group of activists and organizers to distribute fictional copies of the Washington Post in front of the White House. Leading our group was activist and organizer L.A. Kauffman, an experienced historian and participant of radical protest in the United States. As she handed newspapers to shuffling passersby on their way to work, she cried, "Extra! Extra! Read all about it! Trump flees White House!" The newspaper, a collaborative effort between Kauffman, the Yes Men and organizer Onnesha Roychoudhuri, was dated four months into the future and laid out a colorful, rich set of stories for how grassroots women-led mobilization around the United States forced Trump to flee the White House in disgrace. Accompanied by an impressively-researched Action Guide on how to turn this hypothetical scenario into reality, the paper presented a vision and provided the tools to make it a reality.

After meeting Kauffman at the newspaper action, and thoroughly impressed as I was by the paper's content, I decided to read her book. In this short, illustrated text, Kauffman explores the power of mass demonstrations and marches as a force of social change. She examines the role marches play both in influencing policy and transforming participants themselves. Kauffman does this largely by contrasting two of the most iconic marches in the history of the United States: the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and the 2017 Women's March on Washington. She mentions additional examples, like the 1993 March on Washington for Lesbian, Gay and Bi Equal Rights and Liberation, and numerous demonstrations against the Iraq and Vietnam wars, but these examples play a supporting role to the overarching comparison. By examining the difference between the March on Washington's top-down control and coordination, particularly around uniformity of messaging

and all-male leadership, and the diverse, women-led multiplicity of messaging and expression at the Women's March, Kauffman shows how marches have evolved over time and provides insights for movement leaders using marches as a tactic within a larger strategy.

Loosely organized into three sections, How to Read a Protest begins by examining the 1963 March on Washington as the first mass march on the nation's capital. Among other indicators of the march as tightly controlled by a central – and all-male – leadership, Kauffman highlights that all the signs carried at the March on Washington had to be approved by the organizers and affirmed the same message. She details the ways this march was planned in collaboration with government officials, how it alienated many Civil Rights leaders with its moderate, toned-down nature — contrasted against the surge of grassroots organizing taking place around the country — and how the crowd was not engaged in singing or other forms of participation as the lead organizers, or "Big Ten," made their speeches to the crowd.

The book then pivots to 2017, detailing how the Women's March came about through spontaneous, digital organizing; how ideas for a march came together on social media, ultimately led by women of color with a wide variance in the issues, messages, contributions, participatory elements and off-shoot events that folded together into a massive day of action and, most importantly, a significant launching pad for subsequent grassroots organizing efforts as part of a national and global resistance to the Trump presidency.

Kauffman expresses a strong affinity for the latter organizing model, although she affirms the importance of the 1963 March as a trailblazer of future mass demonstrations to come. Nevertheless, the book's structure certainly emphasizes the shortcomings of the top-down organizing model with which the March on Washington was planned, saying Malcolm X "had a point" in his critiques of the march as overly-controlled, which ultimately led him to boycott the march. Kauffman does not so much compare the advantages and challenges of two organizing models for protests – one horizontal and multi-issue, and the other more centrally-coordinated around a single issue. Rather, she presents the Women's March as an evolution of the protest to include more diverse voices and intersectional issues. This is a valuable perspective, given Kauffman's

decades of experience as a movement leader. Still, it can certainly be argued that centrally-coordinated actions have many strengths, and making one clear demand on a particular issue is often more effective in achieving a particular campaign goal. The Women's March has faced its fair share of critique for achieving measurable outcomes, which Kauffman does not cover in great detail.

Ultimately, Kauffman's book is a timely response to those who, in the wake of the Trump election, disparage mass demonstrations as futile one-off events – but she also addresses those who would claim that a historic turnout is sufficient to achieve a movement's aims. Speaking to both groups simultaneously, Kauffman manages to highlight the shortcomings of marches as a tactic: how organizers often experience burnout, neglect to follow up with action steps for participants, and as a result fail to affect meaningful policy change. Yet she also provides a hopeful view of how marches can support a movement's aims, by elevating an issue on the public agenda and catalyzing future organizing efforts. How to Read a Protest is an important contribution to a larger, ongoing conversation among scholar-activists about tactics and strategy, movement leadership, and measurements of an action's success. Kauffman provides an artistic, compelling narrative to complement deeper research studies and statistical accounts. Activists and researchers alike should add How to Read a Protest to their toolkits for understanding the art of mass organizing and resistance through the lenses of history, gender, and race. This is an important undertaking not just for building strong grassroots resistance to Trump, but for shaping and sustaining a more just and equitable future in the wake of the Trump presidency.

Micah White: The End of Protest: A New Playbook for Revolution

Knopf 2106

Reviewed by *Matthew Johnson*

Micah White, part scholar and part military strategist, has written a remarkable book challenging many ineffectual orthodoxies among (predominately leftist) protesters. He does this through careful and precise analysis of history, his own experiences, and the milieu of the Information Age.

He establishes credibility through his role in spreading the Occupy meme from his editorial perch at Adbusters, the eminent culture-jamming publication based in Vancouver, Canada. White was not only responsible for giving Occupy its identity, he also gave it its paradoxically elusive one demand: the abolition of corporate, pay-for-play politics in the wake of the disastrous 2010 Citizens United Supreme Court decision. Speaking as an "Occupier" who was involved in both Washington, D.C. encampments, many aspects of the Occupy movement were either misunderstood or hidden by the mainstream media. White sheds light on its beginnings and the stickiness of its namesake tactic, which failed to evolve into other, unique tactics that in tandem could foment societal transformation to the extent of my own and White's liking.

While I agree with many of his praises of the movement—and the entirety of his criticisms—there are some elements of his scholarly, 259-page call to action that steer into the realm of propaganda. The first of which is his over-reliance on war metaphors. As much as it can be tempting to compare nonviolent activists and rioters to the mighty Roman army or the barbarian resistance, I am not so sure the metaphor holds. A general critique I have of North American activists—including the "Occupy" version of myself in 2012—is that they toe the line of grandiosity at best and jump headlong into it at worst. A major example of this grandiosity is to transform high-strung students and laid-off workers sleeping in a park into tried and true warriors marching in tight formation against the overwhelming might of the status quo. This war

metaphor may have applied in the context of Gandhi's Great Salt March or even the Revolutions of 1848, but it did not apply to any action I saw associated with Occupy Wall Street or any offshoot of it. Indeed, the lack of honest self-reflection and criticism might be just as responsible for the failure of progressive activism as the external reactionary forces deployed against it.

Another example is White's lionization of the spiritualist Starhawk, whose life-affirming philosophy he cleverly positions as contrary to the deleterious role of organized, reactionary religion in promoting ignorance, intolerance, and, ultimately, injustice. I am not so sure there is a clean line between a revolutionary spiritualism and the same revolutionary Constantinian Christianity that White refers to in order to promote theurgist—as opposed to strictly materialist—ideas in today's context. While I am certain he would not support an armed Christian movement in contemporary North America to depose the Wall Street banksters, he does not directly address the point that fanaticism is far from progressive and tolerant—even when it serves a revolutionary function. He should make his religious leanings clear and abstain from sprinkling them into an otherwise prescient and rational analysis the way a picky eater might sprinkle table salt onto an already tasty meal.

I do not mean to suggest that any part of this book was unenjoyable, however. It is a must-read for anyone lacking revolutionary animus. White has effectively shamed me for not doing more in recent years to change this world, given the simple but profound truth that in today's context a simple tweet can lead to a global uprising. I have little doubt that if this were to occur tomorrow, White would be one of the first to retweet—if not the original tweeter. I just hope he stays on to captain the new movement when it hits its most turbulent seas.

Alf Gunvald Nilsen: Dispossession and Resistance in India

Routledge 2013

Reviewed by *Nalanda Roy*, Georgia Southern University

The book Dispossession and Resistance in India, by Alf Gunvald Nilsen, is an engaging and endearing account of an important social movement that is rich both theoretically and empirically. The book deals with the controversial issue of building large dams in the name of development, and the Narmada Valley project in India narrates a story of oppressed communities and their zeal to overcome such atrocities.

Nilsen has provided an interesting account of a radical social movement against a major dam project in post-colonial India. With years of thoughtful research, he was able to successfully analyze and identify the evil claws of globalization and its impact in India. Dispossession and Resistance in India makes a significant contribution by communicating to the audience the brutality involved in the laws discriminating against the people, infringing on their rights as well as their freedom of movement and even employment. In the book, the author attempts to initiate a debate and provide a painstaking account of the oppressive nature of the regime in the twenty-first century. For scholars, who are eager to know more about 'land dispossession in India,' this book provides an excellent grounding and foundation for understanding the political perspectives of such minority groups, and their struggle to get recognized among others in the country.

The author has penned down in greater details the painful sufferings of the people and the act of brutality perpetrated by the government of India. In fact, the engagement of the international organizations has had the effect of accentuating local identities, which then gained leverage in negotiations with the state. The mantra of the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA) became "Hamara gaon mein hamara raj" (Our villages, our rule). Such strong local identities in combination with the environmental NGOs produced a powerful antidevelopment movement in India. The NBA is a composite organization and movement, composed of organizations

working with the stated purpose of bringing about social change and empowerment of the marginalized. Nilsen had divided the book into nine chapters. Each chapter adds something different in explaining the significance of the issue to the audience. The author gives a vivid account as to how the state responded in the name of social control against the people.

In the book Dispossession and Resistance in India, Nilsen explains the militant, particularist struggles for resettlement and rehabilitation. Such demands for resettlement and rehabilitation were gradually transformed into a radical anti-dam campaign linked to national and transnational movement networks. Nilsen has answered the question as to why the anti-dam campaign was initiated and how the people opposed against the brutal tactics of the government. He also clarifies the trajectory of the anti-dam campaign between 1990-2000 and analyses the constraints involved in the making of the Maheshwar anti-dam campaign. Overall, the book discusses the development and transition of this opposition as a Social Movement and adds a voice by discussing the pros and cons of resistance in India. Dispossession and Resistance in India helps us to understand the challenges involved in the political participation; the role of media and freedom of the press; human rights violations as well as the issue of corruption in the government. However, maintaining an internally cohesive movement was difficult in this case because even within the local communities, winners and losers emerged in the process of compensation and resettlement. In the case of the Narmada River valley, the majority of those threatened with submergence were tribal minorities.

Setting all such ironies aside, this case study illustrates the fact that a local movement with the ideal configuration of internal factors can gain leverage by linking into external groups and resources. This flexibility (blurring the line between domestic and international issues) enabled it to thrive in the post-Cold War globalized political environment. Perhaps the main reason for the longevity of the NBA is its international recognition. The NBA took off during the late 1980s when the global North-South conflict regarding environmental issues had sharpened. Protecting the environment in the global South became an agenda of international policy in the global North. This led to the recognition

and active support of the Narmada cause from governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) abroad.

Last but not least, Dispossession and Resistance is based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork and research. It is certainly a delight to read in every way. No doubt, this book is a must-read for anyone interested in the Narmada Valley movement in general or about contemporary popular resistance movements against dispossession in India or in other parts of the Global South. It will be invaluable to students across the social science disciplines that are eager to know more about the Narmada Bachao Movement in India. Nilsen's book is a truly special and unique work that will leave the audience awestruck with the harsh reality.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson: As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance

University of Minnesota Press 2017

Reviewed by Ryan Rybka, University of Massachusetts, Amherst

The Nishnaabeg became worried when the Waawaashkeheshiwag, Moozoo, and Adikwag (deer, moose, and caribou) were nowhere to be found. For about a year, the Nishnaabeg had not seen any trace of the Hoofed Clan, leading them to become anxious, hungry, and guilty. One day, the Nishnaabeg decided to try and stop this helpless cycle by coming together in prayer, song, and offerings. They sent their fastest runners to seek out members of the Hoofed clan to understand what had happened. One runner found and talked with a young deer who explained how her relatives had left due to feeling disrespected by the Nishnaabeg who had not been sharing their meat and killing without necessity. From this information, Nishnaabeg elders, diplomats, and mediators went to the Hoofed clan seeking resolution, culminating in a negotiated agreement that the Hoofed Clan and the Nishnaabeg would honor each other in

both life and death. This story demonstrates the core of Nishnaabeg teachings, closely adhering to responsibility, reciprocity, relationality, and reverence. Beyond these core teachings, Simpson shares this story to reflect upon the contemporary realities of settler-colonialism in Canada. The deer, like the Nishnaabeg people, have directly experienced years of injustice, violence, and exploitation. Simpson urges the Nishnaabeg people to similarly partake in this radical practice by turning away from the Canadian state towards Indigenous ways of being.

As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance (2017) by Dr. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Nishnaabeg scholar, is a critically engaging reflexive "manifesto" that seeks to highlight the realities of contemporary Nishnaabeg life. Simpson's central tenet is a call to action around indigenous nationhood, which she describes as "a radical and complete overturning of the nation-state's political formations" (10). This non-violent, direct rebut of settler-colonialism, which Wolfe (2006) describes as a structure of creating a new world atop of another in pursuit of land, the "irreducible element," is envisioned through radical resurgence movements.

This book is broken up into twelve chapters. The first two chapters serve to explain Grounded Normativity and Kwe. Chapter one focuses on defining Grounded Normativity, which is a Nishnaabeg, all-encompassing (emotional, physical, spiritual, etc.) world-view that is devoted to building and maintaining relationships. Grounded normativity guides all aspects of Nishnaabeg thought and action and is thus critical to adhere to in efforts of resurgence and radical resistance. Chapter two is centered around the understanding of kwe, a Nishnaabemowin word meaning woman that differs from a Western understanding by which it cannot be understood as capital or commodity. Furthermore, it exists within a spectrum of gender expressions and adheres to grounded normativity. Simpson explains how her positionality as kwe is, itself, a research method being that knowledge production comes from "combinations of emotion and intellectual knowledge" (29).

Chapter three focuses on settler-colonialism, which Simpson understands to be a structure bent on Indigenous dispossession and confinement by the state. Settler-colonialism has been practiced through the removal of Nishnaabeg bodies directly from the land by treaty,

violence, assimilation, and erasure. Chapter four is centered around Nishnaabeg internationalism which differs from Western versions through its adherence to grounded normativity being that one's nation is not confined to the protocols of the defined nation-state, but rather composed of "a series of radiating relationships" (58) that include all life forms- peoples, land, water, spirit, animals, etc. Chapter 5 is a reflection and critique of capitalism. Simpson makes a bold claim by positing that Indigenous peoples "have more expertise in anti-capitalism and how that system works than any other group of people on the planet" (72). She defends this position by expressing the thousands of years Indigenous Peoples have lived without capitalism and the more recent (hundreds of years) they have collectively resisted its ill-effects. Simpson argues that Nishnaabeg rejection of capitalism is not due to their lack of intelligence or technological incapability, but rather a decisive choice adhering to grounded normativity.

Chapter six is a reflection on stereotypes and how they are but one mechanism of settler-colonialism. Simpson recounts a classroom exercise with indigenous students in which she had them name stereotypes, thus highlighting immediate and individual forms of "personalized violence." Next, she had her class discuss the positive feelings that emerge from seeing someone through "Nishnaabeg eyes" as opposed to "settler-colonial eyes".

Chapter seven is a critique of Canada's deliberate historicization of settler-colonial gender violence. Simpson reflects on 19th century Methodist missions, in which white women missionaries sought out to dismantle and eradicate Nishnaabeg womanhood. Contemporary Canadian responses to historical wrongdoings are unfelt non sequiturs that speak to the fact that the majority of Canadians will do everything to preserve their nation state, regardless of its predication on violence. Chapter eight is a discussion of queer indigeneity. Simpson's resurgence project requires more than just bringing queer individuals into "straight indigenous spaces" (134). Instead, the colonially-inspired gender hierarchy that situates normative married straight, male-female, couples above all others must be eradicated to provide space for all forms of gender expressions.

Chapter nine engages with indigenous pedagogy. The land (Aki) is both research context and process. Nishnaabeg theory production is a "whole-body intelligence practice" (151) that is driven by and for the community. Being that Indigenous knowledge production is absolutely entrenched with the land, the greatest threat to indigenous pedagogy is land dispossession. Chapter ten is a reflection on Audra Simpson's (2014) mirror metaphor in which indigenous peoples view themselves through a colonizer's mirror, not unlike colonizer's eyes. What is seen by indigenous peoples is shame, leading to either inward consequences such as drugs, alcohol, and depression, or outward consequences manifesting in violence. Either result only serves to justify colonial preconceptions.

The last two chapters, eleven and twelve culminate all of this rich theory driven reflection with examples of everyday acts of resurgence. Simpson explores artists such as Jarrett Martineau, Monique Mojica, and Robert Houle's work in various mediums to explore how they all engage with colonial violence, indigenous refusal, and resurgence. Simpson concludes with the hope that this book will be just a part of much larger indigenous mobilizing efforts seeking liberation from all forms of colonialism.

Simpson's work is theoretically dense, yet very much accessible. It is most certainly written with an indigenous audience in mind, but also appropriate for non-indigenous individuals who are cognizant that Indigenous communities are the ones leading resistance movements. Beyond Simpson's ardent research as seen through the countless examples and personal reflections, the greatest strength of this text is her unapologetic use of indigenous language. Many words are defined into English for general understanding, yet many go undefined and contain context, cultural meanings and significance that are purposefully or inadequately fleshed out. These word choices make this work not just a "manifesto" of indigenous resistance but a physical exemplar of decolonization.

Mitchell (2018) and Alfred (2009) both describe the necessity of warriors in indigenous rejuvenation, resistance, and decolonizing efforts. A warrior is rooted in community, and instilled with values and ethics, the same that Simpson defines as grounded normativity. Mitchell (2018) argues that the lack of Indigenous warriors today is due to communities

not investing in their children through land-based teachings; instead, indigenous youth are being trained "by those operating and maintaining the broken systems that are brokering our death" (155). A central purpose for Simpson's text is to engage with these "broken systems" to which Mitchell alludes, such as capitalism, heteropatriarchy, extraction, and settler-colonialism. All of these systems are absolutely enmeshed within one another and it is difficult to separate and isolate one from the rest. Mining efforts however have caught the attention by many around the world, particularly during the crisis at Standing Rock last year.

In an interview with the social activist and filmmaker Naomi Klein, Simpson describes resource extraction (mining) as being more than just a process of taking material from the earth, but as a mindset that has direct impact on how people understand their relationship with the earth. Mining encompasses all of these "broken systems" such as its reliance on capitalism in which life becomes, exploited, commoditized, and profit producing (Dokis 2015), or assimilation in which life is removed from its pre-colonial state and forcefully incorporated into a colonial one.

This understanding leads Simpson to posit that "the largest attack on Indigenous Knowledge systems right now is land dispossession" (170). Simpson goes on to argue that those doing the most to protect the land are not academics at conferences, but Indigenous members physically on the land. Dr. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) builds on this academic critique by asserting how academics researching indigenous culture are so entrenched in their work that they come to believe that it serves a greater good. Tuck (2009) argues that indigenous focused academic research only serves the academics themselves through their focus on documenting and interpreting Indigenous life-ways as being "broken." Simpson presents this brokenness in a different way by examining contemporary indigenous poverty. She explains how Canada divorces the effect of poverty from the cause, the cause being centuries of settler-colonialism, which opens space for "a never-ending cycle of self-congratulatory saviorhood" (80).

As We have always done culminates with a discussion about constellations that Simpson defines as networks of people or communities that are centered around grounded normativity. Simpson beautifully explains how "constellations in relationship with other constellations form flight paths out of settler colonial realities into Indigeneity" (217).

Based on the previous discussion about resource and academic extraction, it is critical to reflect on the appropriateness of particular communities with whom to "constellate." Simpson shares a repeated anecdote in which at every talk she delivers, a well-meaning white person asks how he or she can be part of resurgent projects. After much thought, Simpson states that "there is virtually no room for white people in resurgence" (228). In the entirety of this text, Simpson has made it clear that her audience is not liberal white academics. This work is a manifesto calling for Indigenous nationhood and so she writes to build connection and constellations with like-minded and experienced communities- Indigenous, Black, and brown. However, if indigenous efforts are made that "refuse" to center whiteness, "real" allies regardless of race will show up.

As We Have Always done by Leanne Simpson is a thoroughly engaging text filled with rich examples, stories, and personal anecdotes that provide a strong understanding of Nishnaabeg culture, past and present. This text is relevant to anyone WHO is interested in the deep complexities of Canadian settler-colonialism, which may also be applicable for any contemporary post-colonial context. The use of Nishnaabeg language, critique of heteropatriarchy, neoliberalism, and the Western academic industrial complex is a form in of itself a decolonizing effort that make it absolutely relevant as a tool to better address our contemporary world.

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Ramnarayan S. Rawat: Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India

Indiana University Press, 2011

Reviewed by *Vaishali*, Department of History, University of Delhi.

In *Reconsidering Untouchability: Chamars and Dalit History in North India*, the historian Ramnarayan Rawat rewrites the history of *Chamars*, an untouchable community in the northern Indian state Uttar Pradesh. The book has two major parts. In the first part, Rawat sets out to question the political economy imposed on Dalits. In India, the Dalit caste is identified with supposedly impure or filthy ancestral jobs that provide the basis for their untouchability. Rawat examines how the *Chamar* caste came to be related with their supposed ancestral job, i.e. "leatherwork". In the second part, Rawat tries to recover Dalit agency in historical chronicles of resistance, the political and identity movement of Dalits who emerged as a politically conscious collective, while confronting and resisting religious and occupational identities imposed on them by foreign colonialists and Indian nationalists.

Rawat begins the book by referring to a case of five *Chamar* caste individuals who were stoned to death for supposedly poisoning cattle to make a profit out of marketing their hides. In India, the leather business depends on fallen cattles whose hides are sold to a broker at nominal

price, who in turn sell it at high prices to factories. The association in Indian culture between the *Chamars*, leatherwork, and criminality has a long history, which Rawat digs out in his work, with the end goal of challenging the dominant framework of understanding and retelling Dalit history. According to him the dominant framework for understanding Dalit life is to equate caste with the ancestor's occupation, and this explanatory structure has misguided many scholars. It has only served to ignore or completely overlook Dalit agency in their own histories (p. 6). He retrospectively looks at how colonial and post-colonial leaders, historians, sociologist and other scholars came to assume that *Chamars* only served as leatherworkers and landless peasants. However, when Rawat investigates this prevalent assumption of leatherwork as exclusive and the only occupational identity of *Chamars*, he finds how it is created in colonial India when *Chamars* were accused of killing cattle by injecting arsenic into their bodies (p. 46). Through his extensive research, Rawat makes clear that *Chamars* were frequently accused on the basis of non-existing evidence and constructed as a criminal entity by colonial officials with consent of Hindus in white collar jobs. In these cases, stereotypes around professional identity played a significant role, which have evolved over time and become frozen. Rawat emphasises that stereotypes around the professions of Dalits are one of the major causes of the discrimination, exclusion, and untouchability they suffer in daily life today. The silence on these stereotypes in archival documents is puzzling and needs to be resolved (p. 5). Until we find out how these stereotypes were formed and sustained over decades, there will be no solution to the continued exploitation and oppression faced by Dalits in Indian society (p. 5-6).

The question of investigating the origin of the assumption that Dalits were serving in urban leather factories never crossed the mind of many scholars. Rawat has condemned most of the colonial ethnographic accounts such as that of Briggs, who depicts Dalits as dirty and brute (barbarian) tribes of Indian society. Delving into colonial accounts and an extensive variety of local archives on settlements and land records, Rawat concludes that the *Chamars* who worked in the British leather industries were actually cultivators and agriculturalists. According to him, the problem is that while colonial bureaucrats discussed the transformation of Dalits into an urban community from a rural

background, they restricted their freedom and occupational mobility to stereotypes associated with occupation (p. 11). Rawat argues that both the colonialists and nationalists shared the same perceptions about the position of Dalits in Indian communities. While the British considered the *Chamars* to have normally been cowhide laborers since ancient times, so did the nationalists (p. 86).

Rawat elaborates on the significant role played by *Chamars* in the rural economy of British India. According to him, *Chamars* were the primary cultivators and many were not landless peasants. Though the colonial state categorised them as primarily non-proprietary and non-agriculturalist, the presence of *Chamars* in the agrarian history of Uttar Pradesh is an outstanding feature of 19th century India (p .56). Rawat mentions several examples of gradual growth in Dalits' land-holding, despite various laws trying to prevent Dalit purchase of land (p. 63-70). One can also observe wide occupational mobility among *Chamars*. The most important point is that the *Chamars* were engaged in many other jobs , like peon, driver, or shopkeeper, to supplement their income and enhance their occupational mobility, something that is well known in their close-kin communities (p. 74). The 1911 census recorded about 80 percent of Uttar Pradesh *Chamars* as primarily cultivators and agriculturalists. Only 4 percent of them were recorded to be engaged in leatherwork, although that was projected as their sole traditional or ancestral job (p. 55-56). The huge numbers of *Chamars* as cultivators came as a surprise to colonialists who, prior to the start of the decennial census in 1871, largely saw them as leatherworkers and tenant farmworkers of *zamindars* (Indian landowners) (p. 55-56). He suggests that the association of *Chamars* with leather-work is a colonial construction which was mainly formed with the opening of leather work training schools. These schools were exclusively opened for *Chamars* with a promise of providing them jobs and making them independent. It's colonial ethnographies that associate *Chamar* with leatherwork and then transformed this textual category to an administrative and social category (p. 55).

Rawat also gives a significant account of the Dalit resistance movement. With the political awakening and help of caste associations, Dalits began to confront and challenge the colonial and nationalist

perceptions of caste. Rawat emphasises that Indian History written in the 19th century was only concerned with celebrating the myth of a glorious Hindu past. In this history, there were no *Chamars* or other Dalit castes, since they were not yet considered Hindus. There were no discussions on Dalits in national histories produced by either the Hindu or Muslim middle class intellectuals (p.121). But by the 20th century, Dalits began to produce their own histories and through their writings, political gatherings, and protests they began to challenge stereotypes, occupational identities, oppressive forms of begari (unpaid labour imposed on Dalits by *Zamindars*), and untouchability.

In the chapter '*The Struggle for Identities: Chamar Histories and Politics*', Rwat argues that in the early 20th century *Chamars* and other Dalit groups struggled to articulate a new identity for themselves and were prepared for socio-political action. Rawat argues that the creation or securing of a positive self-image and respectable identity was at the heart of Dalit politics. In the Dalit identity movement, Rawat identifies two phases or strategies chosen by Dalits to reclaim their agency. In the first phase, they claimed origins in the *Kshatriyas*, a high rank in Hindu Varna or caste system. This strategy was chosen by Dalits under the influence of activism launched by *Arya Samajist*, a monotheistic Indian Hindu reform movement that aimed to bring back Dalits within a "pan-Hindu community" and end their conversion to Islam and Christianity. The second phase came when *Chamars* began to claim *Adi-Hindu* status as original inhabitants of India. During this time, *Chamars* continuously sought to confront the Hindu narratives of untouchables by re-writing and validating their own history and forming their own political agendas. However, Rawat also points out that Dalits' own construction of their past neither remained aloof of the influence of that era nor was produced in isolation; instead, it became a part of the practice of writing the larger caste-based history. He found a commonality of themes and methodology between history produced by *Chamars* and Dalit history produced by caste Hindus. Both Dalits and caste Hindus claimed *Kshatriya* origin. Colonial masters, caste Hindus, as wella s Dalit writers constructed their narratives of the past by delving into *Puranic* (ancient Hindu) texts. At first, Dalits started taking knowledge from the *Puranic* texts to claim immaculate *Khastriya* status and situate themselves

as equal to the Hindu castes. This had become a part of their political movement around 1920, when they tried to negotiate their position in Hindu religion as propagated by the *Arya Samaists*. Conversion into other religions with egalitarian principles, such as Islam and Christianity, was a way for Dalits to protest against Hindu caste domination and free themselves from the stigma of untouchability. With the emergence of communal politics of representation, these conversions threatened to transform electoral politics in India. Hence the inclusion of Dalits into the Hindu community became a prime aim of Hindu reforming bodies like *Arya Samaj*. *Chamars* got attracted or trapped into their movements as they strengthened Dalits claim to superior status (p. 142). Rawat also argues that the political consciousness among Dalits facilitated by Congressmen often was manipulated and ultimately aimed to add to the latter's electoral success (p. 156). In the early stages of their political awakening, therefore, Dalit or *Chamar* historians fell short of critiquing the Hindu Brahminical order of caste and tried to locate their origin within high caste hierarchy (p. 123).

Rawat suggests that we can hardly understand Dalit history without taking this intrinsic and complex relationship with the Hindu caste system into consideration (p. 124). He observes that due to such complexity, Dalit writers did not help advance Indian history or clarify how colonialism related to nationalism. He says that the "Dalit perspectives have typically been rewritten to conform to nationalist agendas" (p. 12). Both Dalits and caste Hindus occupy diverse worlds with different agendas, but with deeper understanding of the Dalit history of first half of 20th century, one realises that Dalit writers were barely concerned with questions of economic inequality, lands distribution, and anti-colonial struggle of Dalits. Instead, through their writings they wanted to reclaim the dignity of their community and challenged the dominant Brahminical thought about Dalit origins (p. 12-14, 121). On the one hand, there were upper caste historians who were used to writing on socio-economic contradictions and anti-colonial class struggles, without paying attention to the humiliations done to Dalits (p. 122). On the other hand, Dalit writers were preoccupied with the humiliation faced by their own communities, but their energies were mostly utilized in denouncing the social and economic status fixed on them by both colonialists and nationalists (p. 121).

Here, Rawat wants to draw our attention towards an alternative vision for rewriting and rethinking the Indian past by underscoring the crucial association between dominance and identity within the Dalits' ongoing struggles for liberation (p. 9). He considers the rewriting of Dalit history as a fundamental need for the awakening of Dalit consciousness and for the emergence of a Dalit political movement. Rawat suggests that the major shift in Dalit historiography, as a part of their movement, comes in 1928 when scholars began to produce exclusive narratives of each Dalit category, like *Balmiki, Chura, and Khatic*. This was a radical departure from first stage of the Dalit identity movement. These histories were written to enlighten Dalit communities about their glorious but forgotten past. They showed that when Dalits raised their voice for equality in these exclusive narratives, they were actually questioning the imposed untouchable identity and their categorisation as '*begar*' (free labour), (p. 122). They challenged the traditional occupational categorization of Dalits, fixed by the colonialists and nationalists.

In the chapter '*From Chamars to Dalits: The Making of an Achhut Identity and Politics*, 1927-56', Rawat gives a detailed account of the *Adi-Hindu* movement that claimed Dalits as the original inhabitants of India. This movement is taken by Dalits as part of their movement and historical narrative by the 1930s. He adds that *Adi-Hindu Mahasabha* in 1923 (later replaced as the Caste Federation in 1940, and then by the Republican Party of India (RPI) in 1956) should be credited for challenging and refashioning the traditionally stigmatized Achhut identity under the leadership of *Achhutanand*. This is a term which contributed to the rise of a new political struggle for the liberation of Dalits since it aimed to put caste and class under one umbrella (p. 158). It evolved to represent the higher social status of Dalits and to highlight their resistance to social indignities, disgrace and humiliation. The *Adi-Hindu* movement emerged with important ideological strands. It reconstructed history by claiming Dalits as descendants of the *Dasas, Asurs*, and *Dasyus*, royal lineages mentioned in Hindu texts (p. 160). This movement showed Congress its dual face and claimed that unless caste Hindus treat them equally in social-religious and political matters, *swaraj* (independence) would mean nothing but tightening the bonds of their slavery (p. 160). And finally, it favoured protecting Dalit rights

in legislative institutions through separate electorates as Dalits had identified the manipulative politics of Congress and lost their faith in Congress or Hindu leadership (p. 161). After Independence, *Chamars* in Uttar Pradesh tried to intervene in the political alliance with other social groups, but without diluting their commitment to an Achhut identity (p. 178). Thereby, the *Achhut* identity has denied bowing to the more powerful and dominant identities of nation and nationalism, as well as to the politics of Hindutva (p. 184).

Rawat's significant contribution is that he offers a new vision of Dalit history. He identifies Dalits as historical actors in Indian history and offers an alternative way of writing Dalit history as 'history from below,' a method still not explored much in Indian academic circles. He unravels the relationship between domination, imagined or imposed identities, and actual reality in ongoing Dalit liberation movements. Rawat shows how the history produced under the leadership of Adi-Hindu movement exposed the limitations of history produced by colonial and nationalist authors who fixed 'untouchable' as one single category for Dalits. To achieve this goal, he reads the local archives, as well as Dalits' own Hindi literature and pamphlets against the empirical knowledge produced by colonialists. With this approach, he is able to reconfigure the identity of *Chamars*, freeing them from the stigmatized and stereotyped leatherworker identity. One could criticise Rawat for depicting the Dalit movement as solely fighting for social mobility and struggling to seek parity with upper castes through rewriting their own history. But his work is important for all the emerging Dalit scholars who need to be conscious of singular, meta-narratives about Dalits. His work underlines the urgency of formulating new perspectives against the dominant methodological paradigms and the need to give Dalits new voice as they continue to pursue struggles toward removing the structures of domination, inequity, and oppression.