

JOURNAL OF RESISTANCE STUDIES

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All contacts regarding the content of the journal: jorgen@resistance-journal.org.

All contacts regarding subscriptions: resist@umass.edu

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EDITORIAL

Digital Resistance: The Case for Everyday Activism

**Nora Madison, *Chestnut Hill College*
& Mathias Klang, *Fordham University***

In the years before the new millennium the hype spread by promoters of web based digital technology seemed to reach ever higher hyperbolic peaks. This technology would cure disease, support democracy, topple dictators, and bring peace. The bursting of the dot-com bubble in 2000 did have a chilling effect, but the allure of digital technology quickly resurrected the hype. By 2012 it was hailed as a mechanism of savior and digital technology was going to end the violence of the Lord's Resistance Army with a viral video and the #Kony2012 hashtag.

In the meantime, a wide array of mobile digital devices, social media platforms, and interconnected devices were becoming the fundamental communication technologies for a growing population of the world. These systems, represented by our personal mobile devices, have become the source of production, dissemination, and consumption of most of the world's information needs. This rapid but incremental change has influenced almost every facet of human life; therefore, it is unsurprising that they are responsible for changing the face of social movements, activism, and resistance.

The goal of this special edition on digital resistance is to go beyond the hyperbole to present ways in which digital technology has become a clear addition to the tools available to the activist and how, through the use of these tools, we are experiencing a challenge to the ways in which we traditionally understand acts of resistance. However, as this collection will show, this does not mean that technology creates resistance or leads to democracy.

In his classic work on resistance, James Scott (2008) explored subaltern resistance and listed foot-dragging, evasion, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, and sabotage as examples of forms

of resistance. Personal mobile digital devices are almost ubiquitous and have changed many of our everyday practices. It has become a mundane device, but this does not decrease its powerful reach. In their work on everyday resistance, Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) describe everyday resistance as a contextual practice entangled with power. By adding a digital reach to this, resistance is subtly shifted and the continuum on which resistance theory rests is made larger.

The Papers

In our attempt to illustrate the breadth of digital resistance we have selected four papers for inclusion in this volume. The goal is not only to present a range of scenarios where digital technology has been vital for the acts of resistance, but also to use these cases as illustrations for the wide range of ways in which technology is the tool of resistance. This volume contains cases of the issues of trust in social media use among Black Lives Matter, governmental resistance to digitization and openness in Mexico, the use of a Facebook feature in acts of defiance and protest in the Dakota Access Pipeline protests, and artists' approach to resisting facial recognition systems.

As this volume shows, digital tools have unbalanced power structures and allowed new voices to be heard. Similarly, the tools are not solely used as the 'weapons of the weak', as we see government and counter-protesters using similar tools in attempting to control the resistance narratives. Digital resistance is not about the tools we use but is about the ways in which these tools enable new modes of resistance and counter resistance.

In *RESIST: Examining Black Lives Matter in the changing landscape of social trust* Shauna A. Morimoto and Diana Cascante explore the ways in which a networked social movement is faced with new challenges and requires systems of trust to overcome concerns of unverified information within the movement. Their work explores how social trust is built through an online resistance movement. Through their study of social media usage within the Black Lives Matter network they have identified how a range of media and digital tools are used to share facts and build trust. While social media is an important tool since it offers advantages over older forms of broadcast media, it does require users to invest time

in fact checking and extend trust to sources over the network.

Thus, for Black Lives Matter, the reliance on a wider horizontal communication and information sharing is in itself a form of resistance. Its communication practices address important aspects of democracy while levelling the playing field for communication and allowing groups traditionally excluded from power to make themselves heard. In this paper, Morimoto and Cascante present valuable insights into how the technology supports democratic communication, but also requires the building of networked trust in order to become a vital tool for communication within and from groups whose voices would normally struggle to be heard.

In the study of the Facebook check-in feature, Tyler DeAtley explores the ways in which the tool can be used to create hybrid protest spaces through digital interactions surrounding the protest. In his paper *Mobile Ambivalence at Standing Rock: Surveillance, antagonism, and mobility at the Dakota Access Pipeline protests*, he argues that the check-in is a site for the ambivalence of protest. While sympathizers across the globe used it to sign-in into standing rock in order to jam police surveillance, counter protesters used the same feature to harass protesters.

DeAtley argues that digital media creates a hybrid space of resistance and protest. Where the efficiency of the tool enabled a wider scope of interest in the protests, it also brought about interest and harassment from trolls whose goal was to harass and engage in forms of counter resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline Protests. By using the Facebook check-in, the protesters and counter protesters created a messy hybrid space for resistance. The use of this tool illustrates the ways in which a local protest can be opened up for participants globally; however, the case also illustrates the downside of this increased global participation in the form of messy surveillance, doxing, and other antagonisms.

In *Institutional Resistance to Transparency: The quest for public sector Information in Mexico*, Guillén Torres presents an interesting juxtaposition of resistance and counterresistance. Here the government is attempting to resist the drive towards transparency through classic foot dragging techniques. In a manner of speaking the powerful are using the 'weapons of the weak' in order to not submit to the requests of the weak. At the same time, information activists are using digital technology to

demand that government not only fulfills its obligations but does so in a timeframe and manner that is useful to the population.

The institutional resistance in this case is the resistance by the institution and not to the institution. Torres argues that digital technology has allowed citizens to use transparency mechanisms to make the state more legible, controllable, and accountable. This is resisted by the state in “everyday, subtle, seemingly non-political strategies implemented by the state’s institutions, which reduce citizens’ ability to produce and/or process data regarding governmental action.” In this case we see the ways in which the technology has empowered the weak and allowed them to demand transparency. This has led the state to react with unusually soft forms of resistance in order to resist compliance without necessarily and openly denying it.

In *Recognizing Everyday Activism: Understanding Resistance to Facial Recognition*, we explore the uses and abuses of facial recognition systems. These systems are being increasingly implemented and used as a form of severe population surveillance. In our paper, we describe the ways in which these facial recognition systems operate, and in particular, how they differ from earlier forms of camera surveillance. As an increasingly pervasive and harmful form of privacy invading technology it is not surprising that these systems evoke resistance.

Attempts to resist camera surveillance are refreshingly low tech. Individuals quickly understand that masks or clothing can be used to render cameras useless without causing property damage. It is therefore perhaps unsurprising that the state reacts to their surveillance being so easily thwarted and the paper explores the ways in which several jurisdictions have created laws prohibiting individuals from covering their faces in order to prevent identification.

The desire to resist facial recognition systems has not disappeared and methods for resisting this surveillance are being shared online. Some examples of this resistance take the form of art projects, some are technologists, and others are created by hobbyists. They are all illustrative of the desire for privacy and the will to resist. This paper explores this desire to resist pervasive surveillance and attempt to maintain privacy in the face of increasing surveillance in everyday life.

Conclusion

Our special edition focuses on platforms and practices. The smartphone is probably the most ubiquitous and iconic artefact of the digital age, but the breadth of the digital in digital resistance must be understood as wider than this. There is an increasing growth in creative uses of new technologies (such as mesh networks and deep fakes) as well as innovative uses of established practices. In order to provide the reader with an illustrative array of useful examples, we have chosen to focus on average, mundane everyday uses of widely available technologies and platforms. This volume is, after all, not about the technology - but about the resistance practices that arise from it. It is also important to state that this contribution is not intended to be (and cannot be) exhaustive but is an important illustration of the uses of technology in resistance.

The Digital: An everyday activism within everyday resistance

Vinthagen and Johansson's (2013) critical work outlining everyday resistance provide us with a framework for understanding the development of resistance studies as well as its theoretical contributions. They succinctly write:

“Everyday resistance is about how people act in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power... As such, everyday resistance is “typically hidden or disguised, individual and not politically articulated” (p. 2)... and is “*quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible*” (p.4; italics original).

How then should we understand digital everyday resistance? While the technology is powerful and has a global reach, our uses of it are most definitely mundane and everyday. Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) propose a definition of everyday resistance as “such resistance that is done routinely, but which is not politically articulated or formally organized (yet or in that situation). It is a form of activity that often avoids being detected as resistance. But it might also be made invisible by society, by not being recognized as resistance” (p. 10).

Resistance when mediated through digital platforms faces a wide array of challenges (Klang & Madison, 2016; Gillespie, 2018); however,

it has become an everyday practice. As such certain digital resistance practices need to be analyzed and understood as the acts of everyday activism which they are. Through digital technology acts of resistance can be carried out from safer spaces, with little effort, and without a deeper understanding of the complexity of the political realities on the ground. Through this, digital activism has been criticized for being of no or little value (Dennis, 2018). The act of dismissing new technology practices may be a knee-jerk reaction. But in doing so we are failing to see the value of digital resistance. As the authors have illustrated, digital resistance is a varied and established practice.

This volume presents the ways in which digital resistance challenges our notions of everyday resistance. Where everyday resistance is invisible, digital resistance is often intended to be visible, and when it is not the technology often makes it traceable. Technologies of anonymity and pseudonymity can, given enough time and effort, be penetrated. The check-ins in the DeAtley paper and the artists in Madison and Klang show individual acts whose aim it is to become visible. Indeed, one could argue that in these cases it is less about resisting and more about the act of being seen to be resisting. In Morimoto and Cascante the acts of resisting consist of building information networks, to be seen as being political. Arguably the state, as described in Torres work, is working in a mode of everyday resistance while the resistance of the Mexican information activists is highly visible to the state.

We offer, therefore, a distinction between digital everyday resistance and digital everyday activism. While both are dispersed and mundane, everyday resistance is quiet, disguised or seemingly invisible, and not politically articulated, whereas everyday activism aims to be political, heard, seen, and strives to be recognized. Within these digital practices some lean more towards notions of resistance (cf Torres) and some lean more towards active, seen, political practices but done in mundane, everyday ways (cf deAtley).

Digital everyday activism is mundane, politically-motivated, public, online acts, with the aim of frustrating power strategies or marking one's resistance to them. It is made up of individual acts, often fitting a schema or model, that may be seemingly invisible yet speak volumes to the intended audience. It may be undertaken anonymously, under

a pseudonym, or publicly and, when successful, may need little or no formal coordination or organization beyond a hashtag. Each of these choices depend on the culture of the hybrid spaces where the resistance is being carried out. These acts may entail the risk of online censor, attack, offline legal responses, or may pose no risk at all. Digital everyday activism is neither spectacular nor hidden. This distinction contributes to the continuum of resistance studies.

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RESIST: Examining Black Lives Matter in the Changing Landscape of Social Trust

Shauna A. Morimoto, *University of Arkansas*

Diana Cascante, *University of Arkansas*

Abstract

#BlackLivesMatter represents a quintessential example of digital resistance. The tenants of democratic change, however, rely on building social capital and social trust to sustain democratic action. This article, therefore, examines whether and how social trust is built through an online resistance movement. Using qualitative interview data pertaining to Black Lives Matter, we consider whether the bonds of social trust and social capital so central to face-to-face social movement are also fostered through online mobilization. Moreover, we examine how movement leadership and participants establish the trust that is sufficient for successful resistance. We find that individuals involved in BLM use social media as a resource to share factual events, and they trust social media because it lacks the modifications that occur through traditional media. At the same time, however, they invest in fact checking and research as part of their resistance activism. The result is the growth of a form of networked social trust that exists over a virtual civic sphere. Accordingly, social media are tools to make local issues global, build trust, connect people, and bring about progressive social attitudes and social activism. We discuss the implication of these findings with regard to social media as a forum for resistance and democratic action more generally.

Introduction

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement represents a quintessential example of digital resistance. Organized under the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter, the movement evokes emotional responses and serves as a call to resist power and take action. As a testament to its reach, the Black Lives Matter hashtag was used almost 16,000 times daily from July,

2016-May 2018 (Anderson et al. 2018). BLM's power extends beyond the United States and into the U.K. and Canada, creating a forum for participation, mobilizing resistance and demanding oversight of racial and social injustice (Anderson et al. 2011). Moreover, BLM produces social capital by fostering civic and political participation among its followers and giving rise to local organizational chapters in cities throughout the United States (Paxton 1999).

In some ways, the surge in digital resistance seems like a natural outgrowth of the rapid and ubiquitous rise in social media use. Social media is not only an avenue to share and gather information, but it is also a platform with the potential to encourage social movements and promote social change. Pew Research revealed that two-thirds of Americans believe that mediated platforms help give a voice to underrepresented groups and elicit attention from elected officials (Anderson et al. 2018). Moreover, social media is a "networked public sphere" providing a platform for multiple perspectives and allowing for horizontal communication.

At the same time, however, current research suggests that social trust is at an all time low (Taylor et al. 2017; Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2018). Furthermore, research indicates that this decline in social trust is linked to social media use (Moy and Scheufele 2000). Indeed, practices like the promulgation of "astroturf" or illegitimate political websites would seem to make those who are most active on social media also the individuals who exhibit the lowest levels of social trust. In this article, therefore, we examine the relationship between social media as a powerful source of digital resistance and low levels of social trust in general and social media in particular. Theoretically, we situate our investigation in literature on social trust that argues that social trust is vital for building the social bonds and social capital necessary for social action (Raine 2018; Putnam 1995; Sztompka 1999). Trust can be understood as "a positive attitude towards the partner and confidence that the partner will perform," encompassing interpersonal relationships as well as attitudes towards groups and institutions (Nguyen and Rose 167:2009). As such, a lack of social trust would seem to indicate a limited ability to mobilize individuals for resistance.

In this contemporary era, therefore, where on-line activism can provide broad reach, but levels of social trust are quite low, we examine

how activists establish BLM as a social movement that serves as a site of social change. After providing some background on Black Lives Matter, we discuss the importance of social trust and social capital as a cornerstone for democratic action and social change. We then explain our qualitative methodological approach of using in-depth interviews with membership and leadership in the Black Lives Matter movement to explore how trust emerges in virtual civic space. We show that activists establish what we term “networked social trust” over virtual civic space that serves as the basis for effective movement goals. Networked social trust does not replace face-to-face relationships, but operates in conjunction with interpersonal interactions. We also consider various strategies activists use to manage views of those who counter the movement. Through these processes, we show that the networked social trust that emerges through on-line resistance is central to ensuring the continued effectiveness of BLM and resistance movements more broadly, with a discussion of the implications of this form of trust for longstanding social change in a social media era.

#BlackLivesMatter: Building a Resistance Movement Over Social Media

The Black Lives Matter Global Network started in 2013 after George Zimmerman was acquitted of murder charges in the death of Trayvon Martin. Its founders, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi created #BlackLivesMatter as a platform to express dismay over police violence against the black community. In 2014, following the death of Michael Brown and mobilization against police brutality in Ferguson, Mo., Black Lives Matter moved from virtual presence into an activist one, with supporters spilling out into the streets to work against racial injustice. Catalyzed by black protest against systemic police violence, the movement grew into a decentralized, diverse and sustained effort to seek human rights and far reaching social justice (Rickford 2016). Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political member-led campaign organized over social media in a way that propels conversations and aids in developing plans of action.

The hashtag, #BlackLivesMatter, has been used to not only share stories, but also to empower people to act against violence on Black

communities. Currently there are more than 40 chapters in countries including the U.S., Canada, and the UK (Anderson et al 2011). Black Lives Matter is decidedly democratic. Unlike traditional social movements in which charismatic leadership frames the problem and organizes a specific strategy for envisioning movement goals, Black Lives Matter is primarily a grassroots effort with few full time organizers (Rickford 2016). The array of activists involved in Black Lives Matter includes those from diverse racial, economic and social backgrounds, including members of LGBTQ, working class, black feminist and other marginalized populations (Rickford 2016). Importantly, Black Lives Matter is a particularly important space for social media savvy youth of color to voice their experiences in public space (Carney 2016).

Lebron (2017) describes Black Lives Matter as a “force demanding change in America.” His discussion traces the history of slavery, the Jim Crow era and the uncertainty of the civil rights movement with the sustained question of whether blacks will ever achieve equality. The fight is one of resistance and social justice which Lebron (2017) describes as a battle against people’s identity being weighed down by oppression, it’s the history people taking control of their own authority to protect their lives, their self-respect and, and their potential for flourishing (Lebron 2017).

BLM is one in a series of powerful resistance movements to emerge online in recent years. The goal of BLM is to have a world where blacks have the power to thrive socially, economically and politically; connecting black people to social action in their communities (Anderson et al 2011; Carney 2016). At the same time, however, Black Lives Matter, like other online movements, is decentralized and relies on membership to organize, lead and articulate movement activities. As with other hashtags related to events or political causes emerging in recent years, such as the Occupy Movement, #MeToo and #Resist, BLM faces challenges specific to building resistance online, including how to create the social trust necessary to sustain the movement’s goals.

Social Trust, Social Capital, and Social Media

Trust can be defined as a “psychological state, a positive attitude toward the partner and confidence that the partner will perform,” and it is affected by expectations, hopes, and previous anticipations being

consistently and reliably met (Nguyen and Rose 2009:167; Yap and Lim 2017). But trust is not limited to an individual attribute or attitude. While trust can be placed in specific individuals, it is also applied to abstract people, institutions and systems. In a democratic state, trust is a necessary cornerstone for government to be effective (Paxton 1999). There are many benefits to having higher levels of trust in society, including strong social bonds and increased social action. Indeed, when groups of individuals work together, it is social trust that encourages communication and links people in moving towards a common goal (Yi Wu et al. 2012; Sztompka 1999). Trust also propels cooperation and builds community (Sztompka 1999). In this sense, social trust is critical to successful democracy because it both legitimates institutions and allows for resistance against those institutions.

Social Capital and its Effects

It is the process of community building, or associating with one another that people generate social capital. Social trust is both a component and a result of social capital. According to Putnam (1995), social capital is composed of social networks, norms of reciprocity, and trust. Putnam argued that face-to-face interactions create the avenue to build norms of reciprocity, such as voting, reading the news, and being involved in the community. These norms generate interpersonal trust, which then generates trust in institutions, such as the government (Coleman 1988; Putman 1995). Trust is also an outcome of social capital, creating a cycle that enhances democracy. At an aggregate level, once social capital is established, it increases trust because people are continually interacting with one another (Paxton 1999). Additionally, social capital helps maintain democracy by influencing the quantity and quality of political participation, allowing for protest, resistance and demands for social change. General social trust is also key, since taking action relies on both knowing others and having confidence and trust in those relationships (Paxton 2002).

Trust in the Context of Social Media

Thus, trust is an important component of social capital since it affects social networks and the creation of norms of reciprocity. However, research on the democratic implications of social trust and social capital

is situated in the context of face-to-face interactions. Current research has shown that social media positively affects social capital, but social trust is declining (Bouchillon 2014; Anon 2014). The General Social Survey (GSS) shows a decline in trust in the United States, not only towards the government but also towards individuals (Anon 2017; Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2018). The General Social Survey (GSS) administered in the U.S. shows that people trust each other less now than they did 40 years ago (Anon 2017; Ortiz-Ospina and Roser 2018). Importantly, declines in social trust coincide with the rise in social media use. Indeed, when discussing social trust, people often point to social media a source of misinformation and mistrust (Moy and Scheufele 2000). Moreover, the Internet is often used as a space to fortify, promulgate or manipulate opinions through false information (Cho et al. 2011, Daniels 2009, Mackie 2009). “Astroturfing” or the process of crafting and releasing false information that appears to be written by spontaneous contributors is widespread (Zhang et al 2013). Astroturfing often appears in the form of grassroots support, contributing to an atmosphere of distrust and the spread of misinformation online (McNutt 2010).

Thus, while the Internet creates a democratic and participatory space, and is increasingly a site for social movement and social change, it also allows for false information to circulate and generate mistrust (see “Understanding and Addressing the Disinformation Ecosystem” 2017). These seemingly paradoxical forces of social media increasing social capital but decreasing social trust guide this exploratory research. Black Lives Matter, for example, generates social media attention and allows for widespread participation in demands for social change, but also permits the spread of false information and can amplify detractors (see Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2018). Moreover, since social media – as the motor of the movement – are accessible to all, messages can be framed and shaped outside of the hands of resistance movement leadership as well (Cox 2017). We examine Black Lives Matter as a resistance movement that seeks to increase social justice, but exists in an online space replete with contradictions concerning social trust. We ask how Black Lives Matter builds social capital and social trust that are necessary for democratic action.

Data and Methods

In order to understand how trust is built over social media, we use qualitative grounded theory techniques in conducting open-ended, semi-structured interviews of people who are actively involved in Black Lives Matter. An individual who is actively involved is someone who is part of the local chapter of the state in which they reside, has been posting or following content online, and has attended events as a result of online participation. We also sought out leadership within various chapters of Black Lives Matter, since they could address questions about social media use as well as movement goals. Since the emphasis is to understand the process of building trust through mediated sources, we employ a convenience purposive selection of participants. In addition, since BLM is a movement that uses mediated sources to share stories and spread news across the United States and other countries including Canada and the UK, we situate this study in an online virtual setting. An online virtual setting is not composed of the physical space that personal interviews fall into, yet it includes components like interacting, observing, interviewing and, participating (Bailey 2018).

Research for this study was conducted from the spring of 2018 through the spring of 2019. Preliminary contact with participants took place through the BLM website and Facebook page. Introductory emails and Facebook messages were sent to chapters in major cities, including Los Angeles, Little Rock, Tulsa, Kansas City, etc. describing the purpose of the research and inviting members to participate. Initial access proved be challenging since no personal relationships previously existed, but once contact with participants was made, we relied on snowball sampling until we reached saturation with our interview subjects.

In total, we conducted 7 interviews with Black Lives Matter participants, four of whom identified as men and the remainder identifying as women. Participants identified as either African American or black and ranged in age from 22-46 years old, with most participants being in their early 40s. Interviewees were located in Atlanta (n=2), Memphis (n=2), with one each residing in New York, Tulsa and Denver. As a result of location and convenience, interviews are conducted through the phone and last between 30-60 minutes. Seidman (2019) acknowledges

that phone interviews can be less personal, therefore the researcher is conscious of developing equitable relationships by being respectful about participant's time and priorities throughout our interactions. Moreover, even though Skype was a viable option, the phone gave participants flexibility to interview from different settings, including their work office or from their car.

Interviews were semi-structured, such that a prepared list of questions allowed us to ensure that specific topics we wished to cover were asked of the subjects. At the same time, they were open ended to permit for the flow of the interview was based on active listening and to allow the conversations to build upon what the participant shared (Siedman 2013; Bailey 2018). In addition, questions were modified during the research process to allow for the development of additional questions as interviews are conducted and themes emerged. Preliminary questions are asked about participants' initial involvement with BLM, their use of social media and its reliability. Further questions are asked to leaders of the movement regarding the formation of new chapters and how mediated sources have played a role in this process.

All interviews were recorded and manually transcribed in order to aid in the process of analysis. NVivo software was used to assist in conducting both open and focused coding. Once codes were assigned, we compared interviews and assign categories, such as "reliability", "social media as a social network" and "social media use". Throughout the process, subcategories were created as themes emerged. Interviews were then reanalyzed in the context of the categories and themes that emerged to trace these back to the overall research question. All interview subjects were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and provide confidentiality with regard to their responses.

Discussion and Analysis

Online Resistance: Social Capital and Social Trust

Because social media is not limited to a specific location, it allows for far-reaching resistance movements, encouraging horizontal communication. Social media is an important tool for social movements, increasing users connection to one another and facilitating their participation in

resistance movements (Hwang & Kim 2015). Indeed, for BLM, social media use is central to the genesis of the movement because it allows for communication with large groups of people effectively and efficiently. Francis, a Black Live Matter participant and avid poster explains:

[Social media] was very effective for communicating as far as connecting, especially starting the chapter because in social media [platforms] you have groups, so you can talk....Let's say Facebook you have like 5000 friends and Instagram and other things, so you can talk to a big audience of people at one time instead of through the phone or emailing someone.

Social media facilitates interactions and encourages people to become engaged. This is particularly important for young people, who may be more reluctant to pursue other forms of civic or political involvement because social media allows for relationships to be built in a forum that youth are quite comfortable (Shah et al. 2002). As Owen, a member of Black Lives Matter in a large city indicates, 90-100% of BLM communication happens over social media because, "that is what we use, the tool of the millennials. The BLM movement is the movement of the millennials. We are in a digital era and we are utilizing social media."

Yet despite being comfortable establishing social movement over mediated sources, movement leaders still rely on face-to-face communication as critical to establishing social media relationships. Thomas, who is a founder and leader of his chapter of BLM, indicates that:

A lot of it happens on social media but a lot happens face to face. It's a way to meet people who are interested in the same cause and eventually it becomes face to face meetings. Sometimes its Twitter and Instagram, sometimes its Groupme or other platforms and eventually it is face to face.

Thus, Thomas explains that some BLM activities may begin in virtual space, but at the individual chapter level, they eventually want to interact with people face-to-face. Although conversing with other BLM members or leaders over Facebook or Twitter offers a broad reach, interacting in person is also important. Francis agrees, indicating that he always tries to meet people in person as well as on line:

Well when I meet someone online, I eventually meet the person for the most part....Off the top you can get more of a feeling of that person.... On social media you can say I am the president of this company, but you don't know if that's true. That is one of the differences. A person can be anyone they want on social media but when you meet someone in person you can kind of make a judgment of what the person is saying, who they are and who they present themselves to be at that moment and at that time, and what they say.

Francis goes on to explain that only through face-to-face connection can you build a trusting relationship. "That is why I personally try to connect with the people I connect with. If we connect on social media first, I like to try to make some in person connection." As both Thomas and Francis say, while they can connect virtually, they also seek to know people personally in order to establish trust. It is through this process that Black Lives Matter produces evidence of high social capital through political participation (Paxton 1999). The loose organization of the BLM structure allows for investment by leaders in both virtual and face-to-face communities.

However, at the same time, Black Lives Matter exists as an on-line activist space and not all people who participate in that virtual space can have a face-to-face connection. As such, the social capital that comes through the movement has qualities quite unlike the social capital built through prior social movements that have a formal social movement organization and leadership that articulates the movement's agenda (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2018).

Virtual Platforms for Democratic Action

One aspect that differentiates online movements, therefore, is building social capital and social trust over virtual space. Indeed, because virtual space is free of gatekeepers and open and available for all, one of the primary functions of the movement is to provide information that the public can trust. For Black Lives Matter, this means offering information that is consistent with the experiences of BLM participants and resonates with the lived reality of being black in the United States (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2016). Existing as a social movement over social

media is partly what accounts for BLM's success. Research indicates that social media is impactful because people are more open to reading news that comes from friends and family than from news organizations (Sveningsson 2015). Indeed, numerous leaders explained, as does Thomas, that BLM provides the truth, in contrast with the news media, which offers biased and limited perspectives:

Media tries to craft a narrative that keeps the status quo, the movement crafts a story that tells the truth. Perfect example, after there is a law enforcement killing they always have the standard speech that the officer is going to be on paid administrative leave....Well, BLM's narrative is that the officer was unjustified in killing the person, here is his name, his title, here is the video of the incident, here is how we are going to occupy the space until we get a conviction.

Black Lives Matter, therefore, is also concerned with exposing an alternative to mainstream news and narrative. As prior research indicates, BLM looks to social media to get out information that is not filtered; social media has become an avenue for "un-edited" experiences to be shared (Warren 2014). Participants and leaders see it as an avenue for more real and honest political and social discourse (Choi 1994; Grieco 2017). It is this sense that social media helped propel BLM into a mainstream resistance movement (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2016). Owen indicates that this provides unification and a way forward for social change:

All the movements – it just helps because you get to see individuals' stories and the anecdotal evidence that exists and that is what is actually what is going to make a change. When you hear it straight from the source and so many people are saying the same thing - if you are an honest person it will challenge your own views and challenge the dynamics that we experience in America.

Similarly, Thomas indicates that Black Lives Matter fueled by social media allows for the growth of resistance movements more generally:

Then you had the birthing of the women's movement and then you had it birthing the resistance....Now it is bringing more groups to

understand the power of the people. Now there is movement for the polls and people voting.

Black Lives Matter mobilizes and brings people together – both in person and online. By using the hashtag people are able to share their personal stories, but also people are exposed to first-hand accounts of their experiences without being filtered through the lens of television or the newspaper. The movement has provided an avenue for people to meet, to get to know each other, and to act upon their beliefs. This creates a space for democratic action, albeit in a virtual space and with new parameters that take into account both the benefits and pitfalls of social action through social media.

Virtual Paradox: Providing truthful information and generating trust

Importantly, as indicated above, to participants in BLM, mainstream media fails to provide trustworthy reporting. Indeed, Sarah sums up this sense when she says that Black Lives Matter reports from “the black perspective” and continues, “we are telling our stories while the news tells the stories in a manner in which a person of color is in a negative light.”

Yet it is exactly that same ability for all participants to be able to report what they see and provide a narrative that counters the mainstream that also allows for counter-mobilization and the potential to spread false information as well as the truth. Despite the reliance on social media for communication, in general, the percentage of those who trust the information they find through these sources is low; research shows that only 5% of social media users trust the information they gather through these sites “a lot” (Monica et al. 2018). Owen explains this paradox as follows:

Q: How do you know you can trust the online sources and how do you learn who you can trust and who you can't?

A: By looking at their work. Sometimes you can't trust just anybody but then the trick is that it is a public movement, so you can't hide certain information and important information. We need to be better and spreading messages and doing our work in spite of that.

When BLM member Selena is asked about how she knows if she can trust people over social media, she responds, “I don’t, I don’t know if I can trust them.” Because of this, leadership of the movement often mentions doing research as part of the process of on-line activism. Almost unilaterally, when asked about whether or not what people are posting is truthful, respondents sounded like Owen and indicated that verification of both the people and the messages was part of their responsibility:

You look at the history of the page. Look at the content and you have to do your own investigation. What kinds of friends do they have? What interactions do they have? What are the comments they receive? You have to look at all these things to see if this person is worth believing and following. Is this person trolling us? Is this person genuine concerned about the movement? Everyone is different and has their own different criteria.

Terrance further indicates that movement leadership not only tries to determine if on-line users are trustworthy, but also the validity of the events being reported:

We vet the information.....If it is tweeted out we go investigate. We send investigators out and send people out in the community to actually know what happened, we get the police narrative vetted to see if that’s what actually happened.

Of course, the other side of this investigation means that people who are not trustworthy can – and are – prevented from having access to the movement’s social media sites. Preventing the spread of false information is also a responsibility of the movement leadership. Indeed, blocking trolls is also something many respondents pointed to as central to their mission. Terrance explains:

We just try to get to people the truth and just kind of lay it out there for people....We just like to give people the facts...trying to get people a Black perspective. At the same time, we want to give people who are non-black, our allies, a view into what we think. The hardest thing is dealing with the trolls; I get great pleasure from denying and blocking people. Its liberating.

Blocking people, however, begs the question to what extent the movement is only engaging with those who already agree with their positions and, thereby, exacerbating divisions rather than creating a more just society. As Bakshy, Adamic, and Messing (2015) find, since people select whom to befriend and follow, it can create an “echo chamber” for like-minded individuals.

Importantly, there is limited empirical support that social media echo chambers limit individuals’ perspectives. Research indicates that people are not in complete control of what they see over social media and many times the act of engaging with news and information leads to a wider view rather than a more narrow one. Fletcher and Nielsen (2018) find that “social media use is significantly related to increased news use, even among those who come across news on social media while doing other things” (2462). Likewise, a recent study of Facebook showed that even though people befriend those with similar political ideologies, many have friends that cut across political affiliations, thus increasing a person’s exposure (Bakshy, Messing, and Adamic 2015).

Aware of this issue, some BLM participants also indicated how they make an effort to engage with those who have opposing views. Rather than just blocking those with whom they disagree. Forest, for example, focuses on listening to opposing views so he can engage others instead of just dismissing them:

I want to listen to this person, and that’s what a lot of people have a problem with because they are trying to get their point across, so they don’t know that the best way to get their point across is just listening. I will listen to a person and see how they think that or how they came to a conclusion.

By listening, Forest is able to focus on alternative perspectives and address them.

In a similar manner, Mark indicates that, even among those who disagree with him, his messages remain consistent. Because he is consistent, he is credible because there is accordance between who he is and what he says:

I think they think I am reliable. They trust my insight. I wouldn't even say they trust my insight; they trust my heart. Especially on Twitter, I usually get, "I don't agree with you, but I think your heart is in the right place." They think I am reliable and reasonable but strong at the same time.

Thus, Mark indicates that he can engage with people who disagree with him because he is being open and honest about his position and others respect that. Terrance speaks of a similar experience when he was invited to speak at a Trump rally where BLM went to protest. He explains that, in the process of his protest, he ended up addressing the audience rather than just acting against them:

We were protesting at a Trump rally and they invited us on stage. Instead of the visceral, polarizing approach, I spoke from a place of love, through love, and explained our commonality and where we should agree. I think [the video of that speech is] at 60 million views [on YouTube] right now and I got a lot of followers from there.

In trying to speak from a common sense of humanity, Terrance indicates that he was able to reach out to the opposition, instead of attacking them. And, while he may not have changed the minds of the people in the audience, doing so articulated his position more broadly and enabled him to reach a wider audience. Instead of engaging adversaries or being involved in shouting matches, Terrance works toward creating commonality. Although this cannot counter false information or perhaps even change the minds of those who are against the movement, it makes the movement more accessible to a broader audience. We find that it is this process of reaching a broad audience that creates the virtual civic sphere that is linked through networked social trust.

Networked social trust over a Virtual Civic Sphere

Indeed, forming and facilitating the network is both the purpose and impact of Black Lives Matter. Thomas explains it as follows:

What mainstream media fails to realize is that Black Lives Matter is not an organization, it's a network, so there are numerous organizations that comprise the movement, but there is not one real organization. When

you have different organizational leaders that are accountable to their organization, it doesn't really matter if some info under the term or the hashtag gets out there. We hold each other accountable.

Unlike a traditional organization, as a network, each leader can take a role in verifying and sending out information. Moreover, they are accountable to one another and to the network more broadly. This form of organization not only allows for broad based involvement in the movement, but also creates both individual within group autonomy and a loose structure that facilitates growth and communication. Terrance explains the structure:

There are thirty-four groups that march under the Black Lives Matter banner...it means more autonomy in the movement as a whole than being part of that particular structure. The movement is much bigger than the global network.

Spreading information out over this wider network also permits broad communication and increases the spread of the message for Black Lives Matter. At the same time, it allows the movement to continually adapt and respond to other movements under the wide umbrella of resistance and social justice. Terrance explains how this has happened:

On social media [the message of #BlackLivesMatter] gets sent out infinitely and it's just out there and it gets out in a hashtag. The message is continually being recycled and spread. That is what is important. We have a new campaign called: Re-juv-a-nation, where we will be talking through injustice, financial literacy, environmental injustice AND social media will go a long way in educating people. At the same time this is a hand on, in the community type of project.

Both networked and locally, therefore, the network continues to reach out to and connect with people connected through aspirations for equity. And, indeed, it is the ability to bring in people over social media with a wide influence that continues to fuel and grow the overarching movement. Owen talks, in particular, of the importance of celebrities to increasing the spread of Black Lives Matter:

Any kind of social movement is about influence. If we are able to be an influencer to the influencers like celebrities and the athletes and other

VIPs, that's an eye opener. That can only help our movement and our message. We have a following but that following is smaller than their following, so if we can get them to spread the message for us, then it is amplified....On social media you want to try to get that connection with as many people as possible.

Connection, therefore, is both the means and the end of the movement. It is through networking this civic space, through as many influencers as possible, that the movement sustains, amplifies and grows its message. This growth, in turn, increases its reach, strength and appeal, creating social, and in some cases political power.

Global reach, universal appeal

Unlike more traditional social movements that seek a specific legal remedy or equity goal, the Black Lives Matter sees its continued growth and awareness as the objective. Not limited by legal or state sanctioned boundaries, leadership facilitates the growth of this virtual civic space. When asked where the movement is going, Selena explains, "my hope is that it continues to grow. I want to see it in every state and every single country on earth." But it is not just the movement, but also the experiences behind the movement that activists hope will reach people and lead to more justice. Selena continues that, in addition to the growth of the movement, she also wants "for people to see these stories and understand. I really just want understanding from people. I don't want people to dismiss a certain group's experiences because they don't [...] experience it."

In this regard, virtual civic space belongs to everyone and is catalyzed not by traditional forms of print media, but also by visuals that are seamlessly incorporated into everyday lives. Because average citizens can not only serve as witnesses, but also produce filmed evidence, those who are oppressed can document their lived experiences. As Terrance explains:

Well, it's almost like the camera becomes a weapon now. If you have a gun you can shoot me and kill me because you have a gun. If you do and I film you doing that, you are going to be in jail. We start arming

ourselves with videos that all our phones have.... so it's changed the way we people even live. Everything is filmed, everything is filmed now.

Networked social trust, therefore, is an important web in building and expanding this virtual civic space. It is the truth of the experiences of those who are on the forefront of Black Lives Matter as a social movement, but also of those whose voices may have been overlooked, unheard or not believed in the past. This voice is what sustains the movement over media. Terrace sums this up by explaining, “we say what is true and when something is trying to be hidden we try to find what is being hidden and bring it to the light.” In this regard, “networked social trust” brings people together and continues to foster this movement over social media.

Resistance over Broad and Networked Space

Social media, therefore, is instrumental to building the networked social trust that fuels BLM and other online movements. As with social movement organizations, however, this social trust does not insulate the movement from problems and disagreements among the movement actors, nor does it ensure BLMs ultimate success. Indeed, the reach that a social network provides replaces the strength of being able to reach many people with having agreed upon, centralized objectives and surefire ways to measure successes. Terrace explains this as follows:

It's good but the problem is that since it's so segmented people don't necessarily share other chapters causes, which is problematic. There is a lot of strife in the activism world. It manifests itself on social media, they attack themselves on social media and that's not cool. I look forward to the day when folks can really come together. That's something I have not quite seen, but I look forward to it in Heaven. And in the future.

For Terrace, the networked civic space has trouble being cohesive. Because communication and organization is over social media, it is easier to both attack others and objectives of groups are not centralized. Thomas notes similar costs and benefits to online activism:

Social media is a gift and a curse. It spreads BLM as a hashtag and a movement, but it has also spread the fact that there was division within the movement. The things that were happening on social media, it

caused people in the community that were watching us to have a lack of faith in the movement.

Thomas goes on to note that these kinds of disagreements – about the objectives of the movement and whose priorities should be met – are also played out on social media, creating factions and taking attention away from the overall project of resistance and social justice. Thomas's concerns have not gone unnoticed. Critics have noted that leadership is often disorganized or disagree about a way forward (Cobb 2016). Moreover, despite the vast attention that BLM has brought to the use of excessive police force, there is limited success in prosecuting the individual officers who perpetrated this violence (Sands 2017). Despite these serious concerns, advocates point out that BLM has moved issues of police brutality and ongoing racial injustice into the mainstream. When measured in terms of its reach and contribution to democratic discourse BLM can be interpreted as quite successful (Freelon, McIlwain and Clark 2016; Jackson 2018).

Conclusion

Black Lives Matter began as a modest hashtag to create space to express outrage at the killing and lack of justice for Trayvon Martin. From a presence on Twitter to a far-reaching virtual movement, BLM moved into public space. Importantly, however, the loosely connected structure of the organization and its networked nature allows it to be both local and global. While it expands far beyond state and national boundaries, it also relies on grassroots participants and individuals who take on a leadership role. This structure allows BLM to continually expand and to mobilize when and where injustices arise.

Part of this expansion is building networked social trust over social media space. Doing so relies on bringing attention to the movement itself and amplifying messages of racial and social justice, while also responding to those who counter the movement. In this respect, social movements generated by and through social media also must continually respond to those who counter the movement while also being careful not to create sealed echo chambers that cannot reach beyond movement followers. Respondents in this study discussed this as an iterative and discursive process. Partly, this involves relying on researching participants who are

active and fostering dialogue that exposes events and truths that have not been reported by traditional media. But this also involves responding to those who are ideologically opposed to the messages of BLM. In this respect, many of those in the movement work to continually engage opposing perspectives and finding common ground, if not from a political or social justice perspective, at least in ways where they can respect one another. Our respondents emphasize being consistent in their posting over social media, and listening and engaging in conversation with those who are ideologically opposed to attempt to find common ground and common humanity. Thus, mediated platforms can be an avenue for people to have these conversations across “truths” online. Thus the notion of networked trust calls for subsequent research that can fully investigate various settings, ideologies, communication strategies and movement objectives, as well as our ability to converse across them.

But with the primary location of BLM being in virtual space rather than geographically located, the movement has and continues to take on and address a series of issues not confronted by traditional social movements. Among those issues is the way that BLM establishes the social trust and social capital that makes for an effective movement. In connecting via a network over virtual civic space, but building face-to-face relationships at a local level, BLM is able to continue to expand, raise awareness and grow the expanse of the personal reach of its leaders. Hooker (2016) calls for a movement that goes beyond the traditional norms of injustice since the law that was used in the civic rights movement has failed the black community on numerous other fronts. BLM has begun to address this by continually increasing its network and expanding its message to social justice on a large scale.

By providing a medium through which those who have historically been silenced can tell their own stories, the networked social trust that Black Lives Matter fosters is a blueprint and opportunity to build a powerful community based on the shared experiences of exclusion, suppression, and oppression (see Collins 2000). As such, it is an important example of resistance activism and useful way to understand online movements. As the respondents to this study indicated, they see racial justice as their immediate cause, but also the ways BLM is connected to environmental justice, financial literacy and as a way to expand into

other forms of social justice. In addition, #BlackLivesMatter paved the way for #Resist, #MeToo and many other movements that seek to talk back to power. Black Lives Matter, therefore, addresses important aspects of democracy such as asking for the rights and freedoms of all people to be respected, giving everyone equal opportunity for success, asking the government to be open and transparent, respecting the views of those not in the majority, and having the freedom to peacefully protest (Pew Research 2018). For those generally excluded from power or social status, social media can be a powerful tool to make themselves heard. In doing so, networked social trust like that which is the basis for the success of Black Lives Matter can also be the basis by which to understand other mediated resistance movements. To be sure, BLM is not an unlimited story of success. As with many movements, there are disagreements and disputes about its goals and effectiveness. These concerns have been exacerbated in a political climate that is increasingly entrenched and polarized along racial lines. However, while BLM is an imperfect and iterative resistance movement, it does continue to create a new kind of virtual civic sphere that carves the way for networked social trust where long silenced voices can be heard.

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Mobile Ambivalence at Standing Rock: surveillance, antagonism, and mobility at the Dakota Access Pipeline protests

Tyler DeAtley, *North Carolina State University*

Abstract

The protests surrounding the Dakota Access Pipeline were marked by ambivalence, both in the blurring of protest spaces and in the interactions in digital spaces surrounding the protest. The Facebook check-in meme that began circulating on Halloween 2016 was a key site for the ambivalence of the protests. The meme prompted sympathizers to sign-in into standing rock through the locational Facebook check-in feature to jam police surveillance. The meme capitalized on the hybridized nature of the protests space(s) in an attempt to create safety for the physical protesters. However, the meme amplified attention paid to the protests leading to trolls wandering into the digital spaces of the protest. Protesters and trolls engaged in mutual surveillance, doxxing, and other antagonisms. I argue that the Facebook Check-in meme constitutes a useful site of digital activism that is effective through its use of the messiness of hybrid spaces and tactical engagement, and one that also exemplifies the potential of tactical media in hybrid space to oppose power structures of surveillance. With that though the discourse and actions surrounding the protest highlight the ambivalence of digital political activism coming from multiple collations. The focus on the intersections of ambivalence, hybridized space, and tactical engagement provides a fruitful lens not present in the literature of digital political protest.

Introduction

Over the course of 2016 and 2017, a continuous protest movement (#noDAPL) formed in opposition to a planned pipeline that would run through Indigenous American land. The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) has attracted controversy, and resistance from environmental

groups (Snow, 2017), Black Lives Matter (Donella, 2016), numerous social media activists, and most importantly, a coalition of Indigenous American groups (Donella, 2016). On Halloween of 2016 a meme (see figure 1, a sample of the meme from a Facebook search) began circulating on Facebook that implored people to use the Facebook check-in feature regardless of their location to throw off alleged police surveillance of activist/protester social media (Snopes, 2016). The meme called on people not physically present at the protests to check-in at Standing Rock via the 'check-in' function in an attempt to counter alleged police surveillance of activists who were using the feature to show they were there, a claim the police department denied (Ohlheiser, 2016). Fascinatingly none of the Indigenous American protest groups claimed responsibility for starting the meme, but did thank people for the solidarity and visibility it brought for the cause (Meyer and Waddell, 2016) and do credit the meme in part for the amount attention that came to the protest (Garfield, 2016). Several weeks later violent confrontations occurred between police and protesters where a woman, Sophia Wilansky, received a gruesome arm injury. The image of Sophia's injury began circulating widely on social media (Sottile and Medina, 2016). These two major moments highlight how people used social media through the affordances of digital and mobile communication technologies to communicate conditions on the ground. This emphasizes the hybridity of space in an age of proliferated digital, mobile technologies. Mobile technologies allow for the easier coordination and facilitation of political protest (Diamond, 2010; Lievrouw, 2011; Castells, 2012; Zeitzoff, 2017), while mobile/digital affordances enable activists to quickly create and disseminate information/images about the conditions they face (Castells et al, 2009; Lievrouw, 2011). However, social and digital media messages do not have neat boundaries when trying to reach intended audiences. When one makes public posts on Facebook those who are a part of the extended network or are just crafty searchers can see and engage with those public posts. It is in this dynamic where surveillance, privacy, and ambivalence collide. I utilize Phillips and Milner's conceptualization of ambivalence in digital media and culture: that content and interactions are 'simultaneously antagonistic and social, creative and disruptive, humorous and barbed...too variable across cases, to be essentialized as *this* or *that*. Nor can it be pinned to one singular

purpose' (authors emphasis, 2017, p. 10). Although the literature above have discussed the use of mobile technologies in political protests, they do not specifically investigate the blurring of boundaries so evocative in much of digital protest environments now. These blurred boundaries become potentially productive spaces for activists to engage in subversive and impactful activities or be antagonized by bad faith actors (i.e. trolls¹). The check-in meme also is vital to understanding the hybridity of space and its subversive potential at the Standing Rock Protests, as the meme helped to relentlessly blur the digital and physical spaces of the protest. The Facebook check-in meme acts as the prime site and instigator of where ambivalence, surveillance, and spatial hybridity take place and lead to the collapse of space(s) and contexts.

To make a distinction in the argument early and clarify the use of meme in relation to the check-in, I am using 'Facebook check-in meme' in two ways: first to describe the actual memetic flow of a piece of content which made a call-to-action and was spread by Facebook users (descriptive), and secondly to more easily locate an amplified site that fostered ambivalence, surveillance, and hybridity (functional). I argue that the Facebook Check-in in this instance should be understood as a meme because internet memes can be defined as nodes of public discourse that are socially constructed; that they are products of user agency; are intertextual, and aware of other internet memes; and that they are parts participatory, humorous, and playful (Levinson, 2012; Tay, 2012; Shifman, 2014; Milne, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2013; Gaby and Caren, 2012). Under that rubric is clear that the call-to-action message propagated on Facebook was a meme. From there users of Facebook used the intended function/affordance articulated in the meme's content to engage in an interesting use of hybrid space that amplified the attention given to the protests. That amplification then led to troublesome and ambivalent interactions between allies/protesters and trolls. Here I also would like to strike a reflexive note. As a cis hetero white man with not

¹ Trolls can be defined as those who engage in malicious behaviors as a way to antagonize and aggravate other users, or simply annoy and disrupt online life; whose behavior can be as minor as making fake Amazon product reviews to doxxing and harassing other internet users (Phillips and Milner, 2017; Coles and West, 2016; Binns, 2012).

enough blood relation to Indigenous America to claim it as a part of my identity, I recognize how the markers of my identity are outright responsible for the plight of Indigenous Americans. I do not wish to speak for the tribes making a stand for their bodies and the bodies of their land. My goal in this chapter is to further theorize the space(s) around this protest and distill insight into resistance practices from it: how the tools of this digital era can help to creatively subvert asymmetrical power practices imposed upon those spaces and bodies, but also understand the sheer ambivalence that happens when amplification puts allies and harmful actors into complicated spaces and interactions.

I will begin with historically situating the construction and protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline and its aftermath. From there I will discuss the importance of amplification and digital/mobile media affordances in the environment around the protests. I then close with my analysis of the ambivalent digital life of the #noDAPL protests and what conclusions can be drawn from it. I argue that while the Facebook check meme constituted a useful site of digital activism that was effective through its use of the messiness of hybrid spaces and tactical engagement, the discourse and actions that surrounded it highlighted the ambivalence of digital political activism generally now. Zizi Papacharissi (2019) mentioned in a recent talk at North Carolina State University that protesters in Egypt during the Arab Spring would post fake meeting locations on Twitter to confuse potential police and military surveillance of the protest activities. Their goal was to occlude state surveillance and intervention in the physical spaces that protesters were meeting in. Likewise Occupy Wall Street engaged in highly mediated physical and digital interactions with US police during their assorted protests and occupations. I say this to point towards recent historical precedent to highlight that leveraging hybrid space to confound and subvert surveillance has been gestured towards by protest groups. Based on the tactics of those at Standing Rock as well as this historical precedent in the political movements of the early 2010's, I argue the focus on the intersections of ambivalence, hybridized space, and tactical engagement provides a fruitful lens not present in the literature of digital political protest. Using ambivalence as a lens into some of the activities during the protest, and leveraging notions of hybridity, digital activism, and surveillance together allows us to examine the messy

collapsing space(s) of hybridized activism while dispensing of qualitative judgments of good/bad behaviors and outcomes. Instead we can find complicated relationships between typically ‘good’ and ‘bad’ actors, and creative tactics with ambivalent outcomes. It is my claim that these intersections (ambivalence, hybridized space, and tactical engagement) potentially allow for subversion of power structures by using a sort of inversion of hybrid space.

Contextualizing the Standing Rock Protests

The protests centered around the construction of a pipeline through the Standing Rock Reservation in both North and South Dakota. These lands are considered by the Indigenous groups who inhabit these lands, prominently the Standing Rock Sioux, to be sacred and that they also contain burial sites (Miller, 2016). Outside the sacred lands at risk from the pipeline were the clean waters of the locals. The groups that gathered around these sites called themselves the Water Protectors (Elbein, 2017). The colonial projects of numerous imperial states have a long history of attempting to control and subdue the bodies of Indigenous peoples through the control of their bodies of water (Öhman, 2016). Öhman argues as bodies of water fundamentally make up the materiality of our own bodies, altering and controlling those waters does the same to our bodies (2016). The danger of oil spills into these rivers and waters in Standing Rock, not only could destroy the rivers themselves, but through that destruction the Standing Rock Sioux people likewise. But the claiming of Indigenous American land by both private and public entities through coercion is not a new story in American history, nor is the resistance that Indigenous groups have mounted against projects of questionable environmental and ethical practices (Donnella, 2016). As Whyte (2017) articulates, #NoDAPL is not ‘about a breakdown in consultative relations or an isolated disagreement over safety’ (p. 10), it is a testament to the United States government and corporations continual and constant violation of treaties and agreements throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and the knowing inattention to how global climate change affects Indigenous Americans particularly. The lands that make up the trajectory of the pipeline have watched and felt numerous violent imperialistic atrocities including the mass slaughter of buffalo, the

damming and colonization of native waters, and the violent imposition through military removal of Indigenous peoples from their lands (Estes, 2017). The use of treaty and legality/legal doctrine has long been one strategy used by colonial powers over Indigenous peoples, Indigenous Americans especially (Churchill, 2002). This is evident in the case of the Dakota Access Pipeline, where Energy Transfer Partners LP and the various levels of US government have appealed to legal recourse to build the pipeline in spite of objections and protest of the peoples who inhabit those lands and know them to be sacred. This is a constant strategy by those who colonize to subvert and dissolve Indigenous sovereignty (Churchill, 2002). However in these numerous struggles against American colonialism, as Estes (2017) argues, an important lesson was gained: that through the various different tribes coming together, resistance could occur. In the 1960's and 1970, occurring along the counterculture movements, radical Indigenous Americans formed the American Indian Movement (AIM) to fight for their sovereign rights (Estes, 2019). In the following decades numerous other pan-Native organizations and coalitions formed and took actions such as occupying lands and organizing protests such as when AIM occupied Wounded Knee in 1973 (Estes, 2019). In the vein of pan coalitions, Lane highlights how the Standing Rock protests also provided Indigenous women ground to be 'warriors of wellness in the face of violence', especially the Water Protectors, in a space of non-stop encroachment of colonial violence upon Indigenous lands and bodies (2017, p. 197). It is this backdrop of colonialization through violence, colonizer appeal to their own legal sovereignty, the will to control the waters/lands bodies of Indigenous peoples, and those Indigenous peoples' every vigilant and persistent resistance that set the stage for the #NoDAPL protests at Standing Rock.

The beginning of the Dakota Access Pipeline and the protests/opposition trace back to September 2014 when Standing Rock was given no say in a potential reroute in the pipeline as the Army Corps of Engineers claimed they had sole sovereignty in deciding the matter (Estes, 2017). In early April 2016, members of the various Indigenous groups rode out to the site to protest the project (Miller, 2016). Over the next several months Energy Transfer Partners LP (the group behind the pipeline), government entities, and protesters began to battle both

in and outside the courtroom to forward/block the construction of the pipeline resulting in an October 9 decision by a federal court denying the Indigenous group's injunction to have the construction on private land stopped (Miller, 2016). However, during this struggle President Obama had been receptive to protester concerns and attempted to stall the pipeline by having Army Corp of Engineers examine the issue (Hersher, 2016). Following the ironic Columbus Day federal court ruling, protesters and police confrontation began escalating resulting in several instances of mass arrests as police attempted to forcefully vacate the protesters off privately held land (Thorbecke, 2016). Then on October 31 the viral Facebook check-in call to action meme began circulating, and quickly amassed more than 1 million shares (Kennedy, 2016). On November 20-21, protesters and police violently clashed with reports of bean-bag launchers, tear gas, rubber bullets, and water cannons used on protesters which resulted in the viral image of the gruesome injury suffered by protester Sophia Wilansky (Domonoske, 2016). This violent clash represented the apex of the protests at Standing Rock. Beginning in late December 2016, coupled with the incoming change from Obama to Trump administrations, progress made to prevent the pipeline began to dissipate. President Trump shortly thereafter signed an executive order to resume pipeline progress on January 24; on February 23 remaining protest camps were cleared out by authorities, and on March 18 a US Court of Appeals refused to grant an order halting constructing effectively clearing the way for Energy Transfer Partners LP to complete the pipeline (Associated Press, 2017). Oil began flowing through the pipeline in early June of 2017 (Meyer, 2017). Since then there have been numerous leaks and impacts on the landscape that the pipeline tears across (Knowles, 2019). Likewise, the Indigenous peoples fighting to protect their bodies and the land's body have not ceased protesting and fighting. Energy Transfer Partners LP are beginning to make plans to expand the pipeline as the writing of this chapter, and the Standing Rock Sioux are once more taking this potentiality to affect their waters to court (MacPherson, 2019). The Standing Rock Sioux and their allies have kept the pressure on to keep intervening in the ongoing abuse of their lands, as well as supporting other protest movements of Indigenous Americans (Associated Press, 2019). There are also protesters who are still in jail

or facing charges for their involvement and actions during the protests (Brown, 2019). Even if the amplified moment of the protests in 2016 has passed, the issue is ongoing and is a reminder that the efforts of colonial/neocolonialism do not cease once eyes are no longer focused on them, they usually intensify; same with the energies of Indigenous populations in their resistance of those colonial machinations. With that though we must examine what happens in those moments of amplification in this era of digitality.

Standing Rock and Amplification: Send in the trolls!

To examine the ambivalence that was present on the digital, online side of the Standing Rock protests, several important occurrences need to be discussed. The Facebook check-in meme constitutes the key catalyst for this article as it created a massive amount amplification which in turn led to Facebook users engaging with each other in complicated ways. The meme drew millions of eyes to the protest and the issues it looked to intervene in. However, this amplification acted as a double-edged blade. The million plus people who signed in at Standing Rock created an impetus for mainstream news outlets like ABC and NPR to cover the story more in depth (Ohlheiser, 2016). Likewise, the meme diffused through the various distributed friend networks of those who posted it. However, with increased visibility came trolls. As Phillips and Milner (2016) argue, amplification of stories by the media and the spreading of those stories in our networks increases the chances of harm for the subjects of the stories, as well as for those who share stories themselves as trolls look for new targets to harass and ‘play’ with. Trolls thrive on the inscrutability and ambivalence of digital culture and communication especially thanks to Poe’s Law² and context collapse. One’s inability to decipher the true intent of other users allows trolls to capitalize, causing harm or sowing confusion. It becomes exceptionally difficult to make clear conclusions while engaged in digital culture and communication

² Poe’s Law is the internet law that essentially says without some sort of signifying element such as a wink face emoticon or emoji, it is nearly impossible to discern the different between honest belief and satire/parodic belief (Ellis, 2017). Also as Ellis points out this non-clarity helps folk to evade responsibility for harmful and ignorant interactions.

because play, antagonism, indifference, and flippancy all may or may not be present within the content of any given message or interaction. Inability to understand an original poster's intentions which could possess an 'all of the above' or a 'none of the above' sentiment makes it even more difficult to understand how to react. This contextual confusion can lead to intense arguments, which fuel trolls who enjoy sowing discord for their own personal entertainment and the lolz of other onlookers (Bishop, 2014). Lol is short for "laugh out loud", a common abbreviation in text. Lolz or lulz is lol taken to a more cynical and antagonistic level by trolls to 'celebrate the anguish of the laughed at victim... [to take] amusement from other people's distress' (Phillips, 27, 2015). Phillips (2015) goes on to say that there is a limit to a traditional definition of the term as it is deployed by trolls in numerous different contexts including punishment against/rewards for other trolls, or on individuals wider, and as the ultimate disavowal of personal responsibility: I did for the lulz. Poe's law is further exaggerated and taken to an extreme by context collapse. Context collapse being a flattened state where multiple distinct networks and audiences who may share different contexts receive a person's communicative messages (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012). Those trolls are able to search their extended networks for public Facebook pages to antagonize, harass, and disrupt other's digital messages of support, or mourning, etc. Users become enmeshed in networks and interactions of ambivalence finding it difficult to decipher intentions or to keep their messages contained to their desired/intended audiences.

The discourse around Sophia Wilansky's arm injury during the violent November confrontation highlights how amplification can allow for the potential of trolls to act antagonistically. A quick scroll through the Facebook search function using the term 'Sophia Wilansky' yields results of support, conspiracy, and trolling. Figure 1 (though there were/are many more in the search) highlights one instance of a random troll posting to a pro-Protest Facebook group to antagonize and harass supporters of both the pipeline protests and Sophia Wilansky herself. Is the poster doing this simply to harass or because they find it funny, or because they seek to stimulate an alternative conversation within a group that unflinchingly supports Sophia? This is the ambivalent nature of amplification. This amplification and public disclosure invites

different varieties of surveillance from trolls, random onlookers, and the counter-surveillance practices that individuals who posted content then engage in. To make the point simpler and more outright: it is through the ambivalent tendencies of digital culture that antagonism is provided greater affordance to occur. Ambivalence, fostered by Poe's law and context collapse, certainly had a role to play in the digital protests surrounding Standing Rock and Dakota Access Pipeline and was fostered by the affordances of digital and mobile media.

Affordances of Mobile and Digital Media

Key to understanding online activism and digital ambivalence are the affordances that digital and mobile media offer users. Affordances are relational: they are what is allowable and unallowable by a certain object, platform or media (Gibson, 1985; Schrock, 2015). Mobile communication technology and digital media especially allow users to press against and play with various social, spatial, temporal, and physical boundaries (Schrock, 2015). dana boyd (2011) argues affordances allow:

Amplifying, recording, and spreading information and social acts. These affordances can shape publics and how people negotiate them. While such affordances do not determine social practice, they can destabilize core assumptions people make when engaging social life (p. 45-46)

Power is a key aspect in the discussion of affordances. Affordances set the boundaries of how different actors can exercise power and the ways in which those actors can express power relations in a particular medium. Manuel Castells (2009) defines power as:

The relational capacity that enables a social actor to influence asymmetrically the decisions of other social actor(s) in ways that favor the empowered actor's will, interest, and values...is exercised by means of coercion (or the possibility of it) and/or by the construction of meaning on the basis of the discourse through which social actors guide their action. (p. 10)

Power is infused in how actors engage with the affordances of mobile and digital media, and power structures determine what affordances a particular media can have. While boyd argued that affordances do not

absolutely determine social practice (2011) and Bar, Pisani and Weber (2016) reinforce that idea through their case study of technology appropriation in the global south, there are limits to what one can do with the features embedded in any particular device or media. Phillips and Milner (2017) argue that the key affordances of digital media are modularity, modifiability, archivability, and accessibility (2017, 45), while as stated above boyd posits persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability. Lievrouw highlights the interactivity of digital media (2011, 13), while Shifman, in their discussion of memes argues that remix and intertextuality are key features of digital media (2014, 2). What is concurrent in these conceptions of digital media affordances is the ability for communications through digital media to morph and move quickly through different networks, while also having a certain stability at their core. Castells' (2009) argument regarding the affordances of mobile communications technologies ability to disseminate information quickly via text messages, that can act as a catalyst for political participation, broadly mirrors the digital media affordances listed above. These media also share some of same material infrastructures (servers, cell towers, etc.) and logics of networked communication. The ability to quickly communicate, modify messages based on particular audiences and networks, and the high degree of interactivity enables users to potentially engage in discourses and activities of power relations more easily than at any time in history. We saw this in how quickly the Check-in meme moved through Facebook and other social media platforms. Different versions of the call to action had different text, but the force of the message was similar: for users to check-in at Standing Rock to disrupt police surveillance. The potential affordances of digital and mobile communication led to tech-utopians and techno-evangelists of web 2.0 to proclaim now was a time of great democratic potential and revolution especially in wake of the Arab Spring and Occupy. However, the affordances of mobile and digital media have been criticized as enabling of less than ideal modes of activism also.

Ambivalent Digital Activism at Standing Rock

One level of ambivalence that the Facebook check-in meme fostered was in digital activism. More specifically those activities that could be

deemed as slacktivism. Slacktivism represents a continued ambivalence with modes of digital activism, due to the messy and continuing negotiations on how useful online activism is to political engagement and outcomes. The specter of slacktivism was cast on the Standing Rock Facebook check-in meme (Kauffman, 2016) with some going as far as calling the meme a hoax (Griffin, 2016). Slacktivism has long been a pejorative term to characterize digital/online activism as lazy, harmful, or inauthentic (Morozov, 2012; Knibbs; 2013). The anxiety and distrust of online political engagement can be traced back to Putnam's (2000) landmark study that argued American civic engagement was in the deep throes of decline as interest and participation in classic civic institutions waned. The negative conception of digital activism can also arguably be dialectically related to the techo-utopians of web 2.0 heralding social media and digital activism as democratizing and emancipating due the affordances it provides only to see that democratization falter in the wake of some outcomes of the protest movements in the 2010's such the Arab Spring and Occupy (Shirky, 2009; Shirky, 2010; Castells 2012; Raddaoui, 2012; Jenkins et al, 2013). McCafferty (2011) and Christensen (2011) push back against both of these extremes taking more moderate approaches to slacktivism and online activism generally. This conception of slacktivism as neither an ill nor an overtly democratizing force, but an activity that requires nuance and discretion when evaluating a specific instance of online activism has continued in the later literature (Kristofferson et al, 2013; Glenn, 2015; Leyva, 2016; Kolowich, 2016; Cabrera et al, 2017).

This argument of what constitutes 'good' political engagement have generally revolved around arguments of authenticity or outcomes in democratic processes. Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi (2014) conceptualize engagement in political processes in a thick v thin distinction. Thin engagement can be when a citizen feels very strongly about the act of engagement (such as signing an online petition), but lacks a more interactive component, while thick engagement is more interactive and connects citizens to the institutions of government (Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi, 2014). This distinction helps rehabilitate online activism, not as lazy slacktivism, but better constituted as a potential activity of thin engagement. Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi's thin/thick

engagement builds on Garcia and Lovink's (1997), as well as Lievrouw's (2011), argument that certain media practices are tactical, with smaller interventions that look to disrupt dominant practices. This idea of thin-tactical engagement has a historical genealogy from de Certeau's notion of tactics. de Certeau (2008) argues that tactics are engaged with peoples not in power, 'It {the other} operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids' (p. 37). Thin tactical media practices, while not being Putnam-esc political engagement in classic civic institutions, serves useful momentary ends. Evaluating online activism under the thin v thick distinction, while observing that practices of activism have different scopes, we are given the tools to not merely dismiss online modes of activism. This reconceptualization also does not exclude more institutional-based action of political engagement. It simply pairs with it, and disrupts the more binary logic in Putnam and Morozov's arguments. Seen this way: the Facebook check-in meme is a thin, tactical moment of political engagement, that was paired with classic institutional modes of political engagement of the physical protest camps at Standing Rock as well as the legal battle to halt the pipeline. With this consideration in mind, the Facebook check-ins during the #noDAPL protests cannot not be dismissed as the pejorative slacktivism, but examined as a use of thin, tactical media. What enabled the Facebook check-in meme's potential to be a tactical form of activism was the way it complicated distinctions between and within digital and physical space(s). The Facebook Check-in meme helped foster the contextual collapse of various different digital spaces on Facebook. Likewise, the meme facilitated the blurring of the physical protest space along the pipeline and the digital space of Facebook. However, this tactical use of the Facebook check-in meme is complicated by surveillance that it sought to disrupt, resulting from the ambivalent and antagonistic interactions between users who were surveilling each other.

The most ambivalent portion of the digital life of the #noDAPL protest was the ways in which users dealt with privacy, mutual interaction, and how they surveilled each other. Dourish and Bell (2011) and de Souza e Silva and Frith (2012) argue that privacy is a socially contingent

and contextual term. Facebook users played with the contextual and contingent nature of privacy when they spoofed their locations to seem as if they were present at Standing Rock in an effort to jam police surveillance by blurring who actually was present at the protest and over burdening the system of surveillance. This is an interesting misuse of one of Facebook's basic interface tools, and creates an ambivalence for observers who are trying to actively discern where other users actually might be in the physical world. The digital protesters then were willing to reveal their support for the protests to their network, a public act in a privately mediated setting. But tensions were created in this show of solidarity as Facebook is a searchable network. This searchability facilitates context collapse. In a similar vein, this also highlights how I went to gather data for analysis. I searched 'Dakota access pipeline protest group' in the Facebook search bar, found the group Standing Rock Dakota Access Pipeline Opposition, and could readily go through old pictures and posts observing interactions in the comment sections. With individuals signaling affiliation with the #noDAPL protests through publicly checking-in to the protests, trolls likewise are also able to search, read, and comment on public statuses. Troll comments included wanting cannons to protect police from protesters punctuated with a lol, and reinforcing how safe police are (see Figure 2, a posting from the group Standing Rock Dakota Access Pipeline Opposition). These moments create uncertainty in individuals. As Phillips and Milner argue individuals are unable to comfortably curate their messages as they 'are not able to know exactly who is engaging with content posted online...{and} can't always know whether their audience is expecting their "public" and "professional" self or their "private" and "informal" self' (2017, p. 83). Digital sympathizers expressing their concerns and solidarity with the protesters at Standing Rock may then have to reconfigure their messages in light of potential troll provocation. However, an interesting moment of ambivalence happened in these instances of trolling. Other commenters associated with the #noDAPL protests shared one of the trolls Facebook profile and called for him to be fired.

Rights to privacy are further made ambivalent when rhetorically positioned 'good guys' or 'allies' engage in doxxing. Doxxing is the act of purposefully releasing and revealing sensitive information such as

name, personal address, phone number, etc. to wider audiences with malicious intent and to harass the individual being doxed (Phillips, 2015). Doxxing, while originally used mostly by hackers and other online vigilantes, as a practice has become a more mainstream method of enforcing social norms and values especially following the violence in Charlottesville and the resurgence of white supremacy (Bowles, 2017). The dissemination of private information of antagonistic individuals to enforce individual notions of justice exemplifies Deleuze's (1992) societies of control where surveillance is diffused throughout distributed networks. Using Doxxing as a method of retaliation and control for antagonistic acts in murky private-public space further muddies privacy, and demonstrates the ambivalence of privacy in digital spaces. The one troll who had his Facebook publicly shared is indicative of the ambivalent negotiation of privacy and surveillance typified in these protest spaces. While he purposefully antagonistically engaged protesters, a public act, he opened himself up to counteractions his audience may look to use. Further complicating this narrative and fueling the ambivalent nature of digital interactions and digital activism is Poe's Law. Deciphering if those trolls truly meant their antagonism in their messages was and is extremely difficult. They may be doing it for the lolz, just wanting to stir the pot, or engaging in some sort of identity play. While those unclear intentions do not excuse the harm they may have inflicted (Phillips and Milner, 2017, p. 87), it does complicate how we understand, react, and respond to individuals who may be engaging in 'playful' antagonism.

The messy ways that privacy, surveillance, and digital interaction intersect highlight how ambivalent digital spaces are and complicate our notions of who can be considered 'good' and 'bad' actors online. Both sides of the protest engaged in less than civil ways of engaging with each other. Face-value pro-police trolls antagonizing protest sympathizers, those same sympathizers wanting to doxx the antagonizers, and both sides engaging in surveillance practices to police social norms and 'appropriate' political positions. All of this enabled by the affordances of digital media, especially searchability and accessibility. Those affordances though did allow for the hybrid sense of space in the protests, especially facilitated by the mobile technologies present in the protests. Mobile technologies are the fundamental infrastructure necessary for the subversion of

surveillance in these spaces as they are the implied given. People must be present in these space, must be broadcasting their location, and therefore traceable. That happens through the locative functions of mobile devices now. Mobile technology becomes the way to surveil and the way to subvert said surveillance. They are the underlying logical lynchpin for both actives to occur.

Ambivalent Hybrid Resistance at Standing Rock

The Standing Rock protest bring the intersection of hybridity and mobilities to forefront. The physical protesting was augmented by digital calls to activism to join in, as well as the Facebook sign-in meme and its subsequent activity. The distinction between physical and digital space further collapsed due to the motivations of the various parties involved in the meme. What emerged then from the Standing Rock protests was an interesting collapse of space(s). The affordances and ubiquity of Wi-Fi/data enabled mobile devices, coupled with the prevalence of individuals connected to the internet lead to the creation of hybrid spaces. As de Souza e Silva (2006) argues hybrid spaces are the blurring of digital spaces and culture with physical, social spaces through the use of mobile technologies. The proliferation of mobile technologies has helped make much of materiality a potential hybrid space. Interestingly this notion of hybrid space bears some similarity with Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of *la mezcla*, the blurring distinctions between spaces that are American and Mexican, and the growing invisibility of these borders to those who grow up in that blurred space (1987). The hybrid spaces we inhabit today, and their growing normalcy has become normalized and invisible in their proliferation. The question then to ask, especially with the blurring of digital and physical protest spaces, is how does hybridity enable individuals to move or not move in particular spaces. Anzaldúa's text is also a reminder to the ways that nonhegemonic identities have more difficulty moving through space(s). This question of movement and mooring is central to the new mobilities paradigm (Adey, 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006). As Cresswell (2010) notes, movement is inherently political, and we must think through an individual's or group's ability (or inability) to move through a space. de Souza e Silva and Sheller (2015) and Sheller and Urry (2016) highlight the rising interest in interdisciplinary

literature for examining how mobile devices affect individuals' ability to navigate and negotiate space. One's ability to safely move through space, the speed which one moves from space to space, and under what pretense that movement (or lack) occurs matters greatly as well (Cresswell, 2010; Frith, 2012; Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, 2006; Mbembé, and Meintjes, 2003; Sheller, 2016).

Police were using social media (digital) to monitor conditions on the ground (physical). The explicit purposes of the meme by those who utilized it was to blur, confuse, and jam the ability of police to know who was physically present at the protest and to overburden the system with a multitude of new profiles to surveille. So, using the digital to undermine the physical monitoring of the digital movement of individuals in a physical place. This back-forth connection and blurring of digital-physical highlights how hybridized the space at Standing Rock was at the height of the protests. The protesters operated in a space that was made to not be their turf, and were the other, and utilized available tactics to them based on the capabilities they were afforded (de Certeau, 2008). This othered position allowed them to subversively utilize social media memes and hybrid space as a way to jam the strategies of police and state power. This then ties back to the use of mobile and digital media to engage in activism. The protesters were engaging in tactical media use (re: the thin tactical media uses envisioned in de Certeau, Gordon and Baldwin-Philippi, Garcia and Lovink, and Lievrouw) to disrupt asymmetrical power structures.

How protesters were able to move through the space at Standing Rock was mediated by state control and surveillance of activities. This mediation effectively allowed state agents to move more safely in comparison as well as become agents that controlled the protesters ability to live and move, reminding us once again that control over space means control over bodies. There essentially were different classes of citizens based around the movement of bodies within the space. The police and state agents had freer movements with no worry of restriction, while protesters and members of the various tribes were othered and restricted. This, though, opened-up the opportunity to subvert the control of space through tactically inverting notions of hybrid space and mobility. The Standing Rock Protest that formed thereafter falls nicely into the

theoretical and practical considerations of hybrid space, mobility, and locality. The Facebook check-in meme was based on the locative function of Facebook and its app, and sought to confuse who was actually in person at the event to throw police surveillance ideally making the physical protesters safer.

What is distinctly unclear, and where ambivalence once again emerges, is if the memetic check-in actually enabled protesters to navigate and experience the physical protest location in a safer way. As stated earlier, the Indigenous American activist groups and protesters who were present (specifically the Sacred Stone Camp, and Kandi Mossett a leading Ingenious Peoples activist present at the protest, respectively) were thankful for the solidarity that the mass sign of support showed, but said that it did not make the material conditions safer or successfully jam the efforts of the police to monitor the protests (Meyer and Waddell, 2016; Garfield, 2016). Law enforcement can engage in other means of monitoring social media through software such as Geofeedia, which was mentioned on the North Dakota state's website as a social media tool at the time of the protests (Meyer and Waddell, 2016). If the effectiveness of the Facebook check-in was truly to deter/confuse police surveillance is in question, can the meme be said to have aided the mobility of physical protesters or that the meme lived up to its tactical framing? This is another moment of ambivalence. A safer mobility was not necessarily achieved, yet meaningful attention was created. Representatives of the Indigenous American groups expressed gratefulness for the solidarity, that it raised their spirits, and emboldened them. Yet we saw weeks later even with the amplified attention brought on by the virality of the meme, police still used violence when clashing with protesters evident in the gruesome injury that protester Sophia Wilansky received during those violent clashes.

A pressing question that emerges from this research, and one I gestured towards earlier in this discussion, is can this messy and potentially productive use of hybrid spaces be used to legitimately subvert and contest the surveillance from state and harmful actors? This question is the subject of the dissertation project that I am beginning. While I feel the scope of such a question has the potential to be lengthy, requiring more research and theorization, I believe we can begin to see its potentiality from

this analysis. The dissemination of hybrid spaces has hyper accelerated in the last half decade with the diffusion of smart and locative devices worldwide. No more is it just small art collectives intervening into the blurring of space through mobile games (Farman, 2013), or the creation of art (Hjorth, 2015), but also in fully commodified applications through augmented reality apps such as Pokémon Go! and social networks (de Souza e Silva, 2017; Hjorth, and Richardson, 2017). Hybrid space has become somewhat of a common-place mode of interacting with both the physical and digital world around.

This common-placeness, coupled with the creative potentialities it entails and the ways that protesters must be creative to combat state power and oppression a la de Certeau (2008), could lead to productive methods of resistance for protesters and oppressed peoples. Technology and technologically mediated spaces have bugs and exploits (Galloway and Thacker, 2013), jamming surveillance through confusing GPS and location tracking software through properly leveraging hybrid space could be one of the exploits of those types of technological arrangements and technological spaces. This does not just have to be solely on Facebook. Platforms which utilize GPS and locational aware smart sensors can also be sites of engaging in this kind of subversive practice. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat all have location tracking/revealing features embedded either as a function of the platform for users or through types of data analysis (Twitter and location hashtags as well as their locational features) and are spaces that surveilling occurs. Attempting to spoof locations or attempting to overwhelm both manual surveillance and data scraping could be effectively utilized by oppositional groups and individuals. This is perhaps one of the potential resistance practices others could adopt in the ever-shifting dialectic of surveillance and countersurveillance resistance practices (Marx, 2003). The proliferations of location aware media and interfaces along with hybrid space(s) could serve as an exploit to the digital surveilling technologies and systems due to the incongruity that arises between digital spaces and physical, social spaces.

Important to note though, arriving at the ambivalence of the situation once more, is that state powers and economic interests (Google, other technology firms, etc.) are constantly devising alternatives and ways

around these types of bugs and exploits, as well as being the entities that control/own the various platforms that protesters use. Protest groups must be savvy of the types of technologies and software that state institutions are using to properly attempt to jam surveillance. Likewise, the goals that such tactics might have must be put in alignment with said knowledge and the context of the perceived surveillance. As previously mentioned, even the results in this case are somewhat unclear and ambivalent. For protesters to make good use of the subversive potential of inverting and playing with hybrid space, the tactics they engage in must be defined and have relationally situated goals.

Conclusion

The need to engage in tactics of resistance in ever diffusing hybrid spaces becomes the main takeaway from this article for use in resistance studies and those on the ground engaging in the praxis of resistance. As stated earlier I believe this needs further theorization, and I intend to do so in my dissertation and further research. We must examine and think through a particular space of resistance in terms of the arrangements of social practices, discursive elements, and the material construction/make-up of that space. How the digital is mapped onto the physical and then understood and deployed by both humans and non-humans (algorithms, databases, etc.) offers a potential exploit for resisters to take advantage of. Both humans and non-humans tire, they degrade, they are imperfect, they break, they are fragile. Likewise, the digital does not map perfectly onto the physical; there is the potential for incongruities. Using numbers to overwhelm and burden systems, as was attempted by the protesters and allies at Standing Rock, may cause momentary breakdowns in the physical infrastructures of surveillance and control (human eyes, servers, etc.). It is my belief that protesters, scholars of resistance studies and digital media broadly, can look for these incongruities and potential breakdowns in given protest spaces as a road into how surveillance might be countered and subverted in those blow-by-blow moments de Certeau described. That the potential fragility of surveillance elements coupled with technical knowledge, means of subversion (technology, plans, people, etc.), and knowledge of how the protest space is arranged can lead to gains in the ever-persistent dialectic of surveillance and countersurveillance

resistance practices. This case shows that those breakdowns and fragilities are possible and available but remain still quite an ambivalent opening.

Ambivalence defined the actions and interactions during the #noDAPL protests. Russian trolls supporting the protesters by creating pro-Indigenous American memes to destabilize democracy (Timmerberg and Room, 2018), #noDAPL activists attempting to doxx pipeline supporters, a young girl who was injured during clashes with police being portrayed both as martyr and saboteur, the line between digital and physical space blurring, and the general coverage by the mainstream news that failed to draw conclusions due the confusion and volume of narrative/counter narrative in the social media sphere. All of these different actions and occurrences express the ‘both, on both sides’ definition of ambivalence that Phillips and Milner use. While legitimate and meaningful political activism was fostered by the Facebook check-in meme, it did not successfully live up to its purpose of jamming police surveillance of the physical protest sites. Nor did it completely facilitate the creation of a safer physical space in which protesters could move. While it amplified the attention for the protests more broadly, that amplification lead to the ambivalent effects of antagonistic interactions between sympathizers and trolls who engaged in problematic surveillance of each other. All the while Russian trolling efforts that had been used to help Donald Trump get elected were creating social media memes in support of the protests which could undermine Trump’s economic connection to the pipeline. All to harm democracy. As Milner and Phillips (2016) say ‘Ambivalence all the way down. _(_)_’³ (p. 211). While this ambivalence does not eliminate the ability to engage in meaningful mobile and digital activism nor does it obscure the potential that leveraging hybrid space for political protest and resistance it offers, it certainly makes everything a bit trickier, much messier, and deeply complicated. Discerning intentions, navigating a maze of trolls whose goals may range from lolz to undermining American democratic institutions, activists surveilling and doxxing people as they try to fight surveillance; all of this complicates the matter. What I can say is the Facebook check-in meme was used in a meaningful activist way in an

³ This is the ‘shruggie’ emoticon, generally conferring the meaning of who knows, or who cares.

attempt increase the safety of protesters mobilizing on the ground and raise awareness. Was it truly successful? Well, both on both sides.

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Institutional resistance to transparency: the quest for Public Sector Information in Mexico

Guillén Torres, *University of Amsterdam*

Abstract

Despite the popularization of progressive Freedom of Information and Open Data policies, both transparency practitioners and academia have warned about an increase in attempts to control and reduce the information that flows from the state to citizens. Within the literature dedicated to investigate this phenomenon, the notion of resistance to transparency has been used often to characterize instances of problematic governmental information control. However, within this body of research, the concept of resistance has been stripped of its contentious elements and treated as a synonym of reluctance, unwillingness or foot-dragging, rather than a category with an inherent political dimension. As a result, what is institutional resistance to transparency and what are its political consequences remains vague. Drawing from the theoretical toolbox of the fields of Resistance Studies and Science and Technology Studies, this paper explores the politics of institutional resistance to transparency through a case study of Mexican information activists. By focusing on activists' experiences, I suggest that institutional resistance originates in how transparency mechanisms allow some citizens to make the state more legible, controllable, and accountable. Furthermore, I argue that institutional resistance is carried out mostly through everyday, subtle, seemingly non-political strategies implemented by the state's institutions, which reduce citizens' ability to produce and/or process data regarding governmental action.

Introduction

Although governmental transparency has become a core component of liberal democracies (Bennett 1997; Birchall 2011; Relly 2012), most countries around the world continue to struggle with varying degrees of institutional opacity (World Justice Project 2015). In fact, despite the

popularization of progressive Freedom of Information and Open Data policies (Zuiderwijk & Janssen 2014; Ackerman & Sandoval-Ballesteros 2006), both transparency practitioners and academia have warned about an increase in attempts to control and reduce the information that flows from the state to citizens (Rumbul 2016; Almanzar, et al. 2018). Arguably, the widespread concern with the surge in opacity originates in how novel forms of civic engagement, enabled by Public Sector Information (PSI) or Open Data (OD), have become crucial for the performance of modern democracy. Despite the uncertain connection between transparency and accountability (Fox 2007; Hood 2010; Gaventa & McGee 2013), ample evidence suggests that access to governmental information empowers citizens and strengthens democracies (Fox 2015; Fenster 2015). Thus, academics, investigative journalists, organized activists and individuals have found in the Right of Access to Information (RTI) a tool to fuel advocacy, anti-corruption work (Peisakhin & Pinto 2010) and academic research (Savage & Hyde 2014).

The increasing tension between progressive RTI legal frameworks and the historical institutional opacity of modern liberal democracies has inspired a substantial amount of academic literature. Researchers from the fields of Political Science, Law and Information Policy have dedicated considerable attention to the shortcomings of Freedom of Information (FOI) laws as well as the formal and informal institutional practices that hinder citizens' use of the RTI (Roberts 2006). Within this literature, the notion of resistance to transparency has been used often to characterize situations in which public officials refuse to enact transparency laws (Berliner & Elrich 2015), avoid complying with laws once they are in force (Darch & Underwood 2005; Gill & Hughes 2005), or boycott their everyday performance with the goal of preserving secrecy within institutions (Pasquier & Villeneuve 2007). However, despite resistance showing up continuously in transparency literature, the concept has been stripped of its contentious elements—except for few exceptions (i.e. Gentile 2010)—and treated as a synonym of reluctance, unwillingness or foot-dragging, rather than as a category with an inherent political dimension. As a result, what is institutional resistance to transparency and what are its political consequences remains vague.

The notion of resistance to transparency is nevertheless worthy of careful analysis because it implies a reversal in how the concept of resistance is usually employed in academic literature. In contrast to other widely studied resistance practices, the resistance identified by transparency scholars is performed by the state's institutions rather than subordinate groups or individuals. Thus, the aim of this paper is to shed light over such conceptual inversion, to foreground the political dimension of resistance to transparency. To do so, I draw from the theoretical toolbox of the fields of Resistance Studies and Science and Technology Studies, to explore whether the resistance that transparency scholars talk about is similar to what is the object of study for resistance scholars. As a case study, I focus on how Mexican information activists experience, make sense of and counteract institutional resistance to transparency while gathering and processing data produced by the state.

The main argument of the paper is that, at least in the Mexican case, resistance to transparency consists of sociotechnical practices that produce institutional opacity as a reaction to civic attempts to exercise the RTI. I suggest that institutional resistance originates in how transparency mechanisms can be leveraged by skilled individuals to make the state more legible (Scott 2018), controllable, and accountable, in a context of increasingly more restrictive information policies (Braman 2006). Furthermore, I argue that institutional resistance to transparency is chiefly carried out through everyday, subtle and seemingly non-political actions implemented by institutional actors, rather than official policies that would be controversial in the age of open government. Since the effect of these institutional practices is a reduction in citizens' ability to produce and/or process data regarding governmental action, and thus, a decrease in their power and agency, I suggest that they share features with what Resistance Studies has called Everyday Forms of Resistance (Scott 1989; Vinthagen & Johansson 2013).

Although research has located instances of resistance to transparency in many countries around the world,¹ in this paper I focus specifically

¹ For example, see (Roberts 2006; Bertot et al 2010) for the U.S., (Gingras 2012) for Canada, (Brobbey et. al. 2013) for Uganda, (Calland & Bentley 2013) for India, (Eom 2014) for Korea, and (Darch & Underwood 2005) for South Africa, among others.

on the experiences of Mexican information activists: citizens who have found in FOI a key input for their political projects. The case of Mexico is worth approaching given the discrepancy between the high quality of its transparency and open government legal frameworks², and their less than satisfactory performance³. Furthermore, Mexico's status as a consolidating democracy with an advanced but underperforming legal framework makes the insights of this case study relevant for strong institutional contexts, in which resistance to transparency is made possible mainly by the over-technification of bureaucratic procedures, such as North America and Western Europe, as well as weak institutional contexts, where institutional resistance seems to be engendered by corruption and/or lack of capacities and funding, such as in most of Africa and Latin America.

The paper is divided into four sections. The first presents the research methodology and the theoretical framework that guides it. The second contrasts the concepts of resistance as they are used in Resistance Studies and literature on transparency. In section three I dive into the Mexican case study, showing how institutional resistance is a reaction to PSI potential to increase citizens' agency. Finally, section four summarizes the findings and indicates areas of further research.

Methodology

The empirical material used for this paper originates from face to face interviews with 15 Mexican information activists who make extensive use of the Freedom of Information process as input for their political activities. One in-depth, semi-structured interview was carried out with each informant during March and November, 2018. The resulting data was anonymized and processed through a security protocol detailed

² Despite its multiple reforms, the Mexican Law has been consistently ranked amongst the best since its inception in the early 2000s. Currently, it holds the second place in the Right To Information Index built by Access Info Europe and the Centre for Law and Democracy (Access Info 2017).

³ Mexico is consistently ranked amongst the most opaque and corrupt countries around the world, according to international organization Transparency International (Transparency International 2017).

in Kazansky & Milan (forthcoming). The professional backgrounds of the interviewees are varied. Some of them work on the defense of the rights to water and sanitation, others develop advocacy projects related to sexual and reproductive rights. Their social backgrounds are also diverse, including highly educated professionals as well as activists without higher education qualifications. Although less varied, the political spectrum of the interviewees is not homogeneous: at least two organizations represented in the material could be described as located in the center rather than left side of the activist spectrum. Rather than being a haphazard collection of interviewees, this diversity of activities, backgrounds and political orientations is intended to show that the institutional resistance experienced by activists is not the consequence of their specific politics or topical interests, but a common phenomenon in Mexico.

The analysis of the empirical material, as well as my engagement with activists, was inspired by Annemarie Mol's anthropological work. Mol's approach, representative of the branch of ontological-turn-influenced STS (Mol 1999; Law 2002), often rejects a priori definitions of the objects of study, privileging instead attention over how multiple local enactments may result from the different practices in which the object is manipulated (Mol 1999). Thus, although in this paper I start with an academic definition of resistance, I privilege activists' descriptions of their experiences interacting with institutions. What emerges from such analysis of activists' accounts does not exhaust the state and resistance as abstract phenomena, but rather refers to the specific assemblage (Carroll 2012) activists experience during their everyday life. By analyzing the experiences of a variety of activists, I attempt to show how aggregated local instances of institutional resistance paint a picture that may be relevant at more macroscopic levels.

In writing this paper I also take advantage of my own experience as an information activist working for a Mexican Civil Society Organization for three years. Such insider view allows me to remain faithful to activists' embodied accounts (Haraway 1988), and provide a closer reading of their experiences, rather than the distant one that is more common to the FOI literature. In that sense, this is an exercise of sociology written from the standpoint of those who are the protagonists of the research (Smith 2005).

Resistance to transparency

Resistance's conceptual fuzziness and popularity as an analytical tool has sparked various efforts, particularly from scholars within the emerging field of Resistance Studies, to clarify its meaning (Baaz et al. 2018; Johansson & Vinthagen 2015; Hollander & Einwohner 2004). Within this literature, the considerable diversity of resistance practices and the importance of their varying contexts has been of particular interest. However, despite a conscious theoretical attunement to conceptual and contextual diversity, studies of resistance tend to focus on the practices of subordinated actors, on the basis of an assumption that they interact with power within a preconfigured structure in which the roles of the powerful and the powerless are clearly defined and stable (Miller 1997). Therefore, even if what counts as resistance can vary considerably, scholars seem to agree in that practices of resistance are those through which subordinate actors achieve social change (Baaz et al. 2018).

Resistance scholars' preference for structural power asymmetries and progressive social change thus results in a reduced curiosity for actions that, although also effecting social change, do not bring about a progressive state of affairs. As a consequence, whereas practices of talking back to power (hooks 1989) performed by subordinated groups are easily regarded as resistance, the practices of powerful actors to oppose empowered subordinates are not understood as such, but as "reaction" or "counter-resistance". While such distinction allows for a productive differentiation between the way dominators and resisters act, it also runs the risk of stabilizing both positions as if they permeated every social interaction in which either actor is embedded. Resistance scholars are aware of such problem, (cfr Hollander & Einwohner 2004), but to this date few examples exist that focus on occasions in which resistance is exerted by actors who appear to be structurally more powerful from the perspective of the researcher.

Whereas the distinction between dominators and subordinates is easy to employ in contexts where there is little doubt about what actors exert power over others, the interaction between citizens and governmental institutions of modern liberal democratic states is more difficult to characterize in stable terms. Public officials can, and indeed often do,

abuse their access to the state apparatus to achieve dominance or private gains, but they are also subjected to increasingly more citizen scrutiny, accountability and control. Thus, in the interaction between empowered citizens and public officials, and particularly in the current context of Open Government reforms, it may not always be immediately clear what actor is more powerful than the other. The institutional resistance identified by transparency scholars is a case in point. Unfortunately, reflections around resistance within the transparency literature have not approached this complexity.

The way in which transparency scholars have engaged with the idea of resistance varies widely across the body of research I consulted for this paper,⁴ but it is possible to group the discussion under three main types of arguments. In the first, resistance is understood as a reaction to how FOI alters the relationship between citizens and institutions (Fox 2015; Worthy 2010; Darch & Underwood 2010; 2005; Terrill

⁴ The selection of the literature was carried out in the following way: both Google Scholar and Web of Science were queried for scholarly articles and books containing both the terms “resistance” (and variances) and “transparency”. The initial results were filtered to produce a set in which “resistance” and “transparency” both referred in some way to the Right to Information. A further selection was performed by locating those texts in which the references to resistance were more substantial, resulting in 29 texts. The literature reviewed here is that which makes more than superficial references to the topic. I have intentionally left out the literature produced within Organizational Studies, which has mainly focused on organizational resistance to change when FOI laws are enacted. Although this is one of the most productive approaches in terms of the amount of studies produced, I have decided not to discuss them given that they look exclusively at what happens when FOI laws are implemented for the first time. In contrast, my focus in this paper is on the resistance to consolidated FOI frameworks. I also have chosen not to comment on widely cited research into institutional reactions to transparency initiatives which do not explicitly mention resistance. For example, *What happens when transparency meets blame avoidance?*, by Christopher Hood (2007) is not discussed, despite its exploration of ways in which institutions manage to remain opaque. The reason is that my interest here is to engage with research that labels problematic institutional behavior as resistance, which is, perhaps unwillingly, a political declaration whose political effects should be considered.

2000). Researchers reflect around the effects that access to information legislation has over the power dynamics of liberal democracies, and FOI related laws and mechanisms are described as reconfiguring and even subverting citizen-state relationships. Therefore, resistance is considered a rational response from public officials to the possibility of FOI radically changing the power configuration of decision-making processes.

The second type of argument presents resistance as a predictable reaction originating from obdurate cultural traits within public administration (Meijer 2013, Brobbey et al. 2013, Bauhr & Nasiritousi 2012, Pasquier & Villeneuve 2007, Gill & Hughes 2005). Here, researchers tend to focus on how transparency collides with a deeply rooted culture of secrecy and opacity, and argue that access to PSI may produce adverse reactions because public officials have traditionally thought of files and archives as their property, or because secrecy allows for a feeling of independence within decision-making processes.

A third take on resistance to transparency understands it as a problematic, but seldom illegal, practice within public administration through which officials may use regulatory frameworks in an opportunistic fashion to avoid accountability. Alasdair Roberts work is the best example of this type of research (2006), although he chooses to go with the concept of non-compliance rather than resistance, which suggests that, within his framework, what officials resist are the laws forcing them to disclose, and not the citizens who set them in motion to access PSI. Resistance is indeed mentioned in his extensive study *Blacked Out* (2006), albeit only a handful of times, and as a synonym of non-compliance. As a consequence, the political dimension of public officials' resistance is dislocated and de-politicized, since their struggle is not primarily with citizens but with legal norms.

Either of these three takes on institutional resistance to transparency seem to approach the concept less as it is used within the social sciences –always in relation to power- and more as it is understood in physics: an opposition exerted by an object or flow to the flow of an electrical current (Diantith & Martin 2005). In consequence, there is hardly any consideration within the broader transparency literature about how institutional resistance affects the FOI-backed political engagement of citizens. Although Michener and Ritter, two influential

transparency researchers, have argued that “it is difficult to distinguish between political resistance and resistance as an indirect effect of limited capacities” (Michener & Ritter 2017, p.11), I argue that this difficulty can be surmounted by approaching resistance to transparency through the conceptual tools of Resistance Studies.

In what follows I will depart from a generic definition of resistance as an act of opposition that undermines power in order to achieve social change (Baaz et al 2018; Lilja et al. 2017), but I will introduce two nuances. First, while much discussion in the field of Resistance Studies has been centered on whether it is intent or recognition what defines resistance (Shaw 2001), I will argue that the experience of the effect can also count as definitive; resistance is whatever is felt as such by any actor, regardless of the temporary place they hold within the power position when researchers open it up for analysis. Thus, individual’s perception of the power of others can also give the researcher an indicator of the presence of resistance (Miller 1997). Such “follow the actors” approach, characteristic of STS, avoids “dichotomiz[ing] resisters and dominators”, (Baaz et al. 2018, p 25) and highlights the relational (Wilhoit & Kisselburgh 2017) and interactional dimensions of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner 2004). The second nuance incorporated to my working definition of resistance is that I will not assume that the social change that resistance strives for is necessarily progressive. Instead, I argue that resistance can be oriented towards archiving any kind of social change.

Both nuances have the possibility of opening the field of Resistance Studies to the study of a plethora of resistance practices. However, in arguing for a widened scope I do not mean to suggest that there is a shortage of contentious practices to approach, but rather that the sharp tools that scholars of resistance have developed to analyze the production and maintenance of power asymmetries could productively be redirected to hitherto unaccounted phenomena to produce useful insights. In this paper, for example, I will look at how citizens experience the problematic behavior of the Mexican state, by mobilizing two concepts from the Resistance Studies literature: Everyday Forms of Resistance and Shatter Zones. My goal is to suggest that, by framing institutional practices as resistance and thus acknowledging its political dimension, we can move beyond considering institutional failure as an unintended and non-

political phenomenon, highlighting instead how certain actors benefit from institutional opacity to produce and enforce power inequalities.

Everyday Forms of Resistance are commonly defined as “invariably quiet, disguised, anonymous, often undeclared forms of resisting claims imposed by claimants who have superior access to force [...]” (Scott 1989, p.37), whereas Shatter Zones refers to rough geographical spaces that exert friction to the State’s attempts to exercise power, allowing for the subsistence of communities which refuse to be controlled (Scott, 2014). Adapting these two concepts to the context of transparency research, I will therefore speak of Everyday Forms of Institutional resistance; subtle institutional practices that undermine citizens’ agency, and Institutional Shatter Zones; rugged institutional (digital or physical) spaces created by state actors, where information is made public without necessarily being accessible, thus also reducing citizen agency. As I will show in the following sections, these institutional strategies have the effect to diminish citizens’ ability to gather information and data that allows them to act on (Milan 2019, Kubitschko 2018) data-based policies, governmental programs and in general, governmental action.

Resistance to transparency in Mexico

Although, by law, all the information produced or held by the state is public by default –with a few clear exceptions–, the RTI legal framework in Mexico has effectively created two types of PSI. On the one hand, there is information that every institution at the federal, local and municipal level is obliged to make proactively available to citizens. The General Transparency and Public Information Law includes various lists of transparency obligations: a general one, which applies to every institution of the state, and other lists of specific transparency obligations that are connected to different types of institutions. Articles 70 to 79 of the GTPIL outline close to 200 general and specific transparency obligations, as well as the criteria through which the “public utility” of other governmental information should be recognized to guarantee its publicity. On the other hand, there is PSI that, although not considered in any of the lists of transparency obligations, is also public because it does not fall under any of the exceptions stated in the law.

Institutions fulfill their transparency obligations regarding the first

type of information by making data available primarily through the National Transparency Platform (NTP) and their individual websites. The second type of PSI is made public by setting in motion the FOI process, which can be done by any person either through the NTP, a phone call or a visit to the transparency office of each institution. As outlined in the law, the Mexican FOI process is relatively simple: When an information officer receives an information request, their first task is to determine whether their institution is competent to reply. If that is not the case, they are obliged to direct the requester to the institution who may hold the information requested. Conversely, if their institution should indeed be in power of the information, they have 20 days to deliver it, unless it is deemed inexistent, classified or confidential. The decision to not deliver the information can only be taken by a transparency committee within each institution, and thorough legal substantiation is required. The document containing the legal reasoning that backs up the decision to not deliver the information is then provided as the answer to the information request.

Nevertheless, as it is, to a certain extent, a normal occurrence with any public policy, the progressive Mexican FOI legal framework is not always implemented as flawlessly as it is outlined in the laws. Regarding information requests in particular, researchers have conducted over the years various evaluations to determine the responsiveness of Mexican institutions (Cejudo and Zavala 2011; Fox et al. 2011; Berliner and Elrich 2015). Some of them were conducted very soon after the first transparency law was enacted in 2002 (Gill and Hughes 2005) and others as recently as 2019 (Pocasangre and Lagunes 2019; Berliner et al. 2019). Summarizing this body of research in very broad strokes, it is possible to say that Mexican institutions have a rate of responsiveness that fluctuates around 80%, although the percentage for sensitive topics such as procurement or national security drops dramatically –down to 30% in some cases (Lagunes and Pocasangre 2019). However, this relatively high percentage of responsiveness starkly contrast with the way in which experienced FOI users feel about the process of requesting information. This is not entirely surprising given that research has been mostly conducted on the basis of analyzing small representative samples of information requests or performing “simulated user” evaluations

(Cejudo and Zavala 2011). In contrast, the experience of everyday users has received little attention. One of my most experienced informants, the director of a CSO whose work is entirely based around information requests, summarized her own experience in the following way:

Whoever imagines that with a single information request you will get the information from the state, as it is written in the law, is lying. Whoever thinks that is possible, is outside of reality. Access to information is still a process that is more about being persistent and chasing institutions, than the simple and clear process of accessing information that is outlined in the law (Interview G1818).

In the descriptions of heavy PSI users, it is possible to locate practices of resistance to transparency that affect the flow of information resulting from both the proactive transparency obligations of Mexican institutions and the information request process. However, before delving directly into these instances of resistance, it is perhaps necessary to clarify what is it that is being resisted, by discussing what is the use that information activists make of the RTI.

Information requests as a tool to foster citizen engagement

Perhaps the defining feature of an information activists is that their ultimate goal is seldomly the requested information itself. What they care about is the use they will make of it: as evidence for strategic litigation, as a tool to demand that citizens' voices are heard within decision making process, as the basic input for campaigning against corruption, to evaluate public policies or as the basis for proposals of regulatory or public policy improvement. Activists think of the RTI as a vehicle for securing the enjoyment of other rights, as it is suggested in the following quote:

We think that using FOI generates information for advocacy. We think of transparency and access to information as “bridge” rights. That is, we think and structure our requests to obtain information that allows us to understand and tackle issues specific to our agenda. Thus, when we structure the requests with that goal, you're thinking not only in the information, but what you will do with it (Interview G2318)

Activists understand the RTI is a “bridge” right because, in their

experience, having the information to prove to the government that there is budget allocated for the construction and operation of public infrastructure can be the difference between enjoying a public service or not. Furthermore, whereas advocating for rights through the use of citizen generated data may trigger challenges coming from the state regarding the quality and objectivity of the data, PSI is unquestionable, since it is the “voice of the institutions” themselves (Interview G2218). But besides its use as a direct accountability tool, there is another way of using FOI that also increases citizens’ ability to supervise the functioning of institutions: FOI’s ability to reveal the inner workings of the state to miniature detail. Public officials in Mexico tend to be verbose when producing any official document. Thus, in the responses to information requests it is possible to find thorough descriptions of the networks of bureaucrats, technological systems and regulations implied by any single instance of governmental action, independently of whether the request is actually fulfilled or the information is denied. Therefore, what activists obtain from setting in motion the FOI process is always more than the specific budget, database, contract, etc., they asked for, as it is evident in the following quote:

The answers to our information requests reveal that public policies, public goods and services provided by the government are sets of chains of command that should lead to the good or service that they are supposed to provide. But our analysis of the documents reveals that, as it travels through those chains of command, public policy deviates, and what happens in the end is very different to what was planned or written in the law. If you only look at the performance data that is made public as Open Data, and how it shows the fulfilment of policy goals, it seems as if governmental action was a linear process that occurs once and that’s it; that the chains of command are clear: “A” leads to “B”, and “C” to “D”. But that is not how it goes. In reality, “A” leads to “pineapple” because a lot of actors intervene in the process: different public servants at different levels of government and from different institutions; budgetary [institutions], administrative [institutions], normative [institutions] and service providers (Interview G1818).

In the hands of activists, PSI becomes a blueprint containing the

roads taken by governmental action in practice rather than the ‘ideal’ paths prescribed in laws. Thus, these maps provide productive guidance when citizens want to make sure that institutions behave in accordance to what is stated in the law. For example, one of the CSO I contacted spent a full year making information requests to find the operating budget of a policy to fight teenage pregnancy. Due to the resistance to transparency they faced from institutions, the simple question “What is the budget of policy ‘x’” required more than 200 information requests to be answered. In the end, all the answers to these requests allowed the activists to trace the performance of the policy throughout the three levels of government, from its inception and regulation at the highest, to its everyday local performance at the lowest. Thus, their analysis of PSI gave them the possibility to oversee the performance of the policy by making visible every actor, regulation and technology constituting it. Another CSO contacted for this research conducted an evaluation of the state of the water treatment infrastructure in a rururban area close to Mexico City. The process of gathering the necessary PSI to inform the project took more than three years and 300 requests. With this information, the CSO was able to build a very detailed radiography of how water treatment policies operate in the region, allowing them to identify why the water treatment plants do not work –even at a technical level via the analysis of construction plans and logs-, as well as making visible what moments of the procurement process are more susceptible to corruption practices. In both cases, the RTI was not the endpoint of the activists’ strategies, but a tool to achieve other rights, namely sexual and reproductive rights in the first place, and the rights to water and sanitation in the second. Both organizations are now developing citizen oversight projects to exert ex ante control over governmental action rather than ex post.

It is precisely because the RTI has the potential to increase citizens’ abilities to hold institutions accountable or participate in public decision-making processes that friction during the FOI process is characterized as resistance. The crucial role that information requests have in activists’ projects is evident in the following quote:

When they [public officials] deny our requests, what happens is that we are prevented from continuing with our political activities: we don’t have tools or elements to sit with decision-makers and tell them

what part of the policy they are planning or implementing is deficient, because we are lacking the data that institutions refused to disclose [...] When you don't have that official information, you only have your own suppositions, which can be easily dismissed by authorities (Interview G2318).

Information activists' use of the RTI proves that PSI in particular can foster complex political engagements. My informants have developed projects fueled by information requests that go beyond accountability and try to secure citizens' involvement in governmental action in different areas: the construction of massive infrastructures –such as the heavily criticized new airport of Mexico City-, the provision of justice, fracking and mining concessions, and the everyday exercise of public budget, among others. In all these cases activists referred to have faced different practices of institutional resistance during the process of requesting information. Whether this resistance is intentional or the consequence of accidents, mistakes or incompetence is very difficult to determine. However, concern over the intentions of institutions deviates attention from something which is also extremely relevant: That these institutional practices reduce citizens' agency regardless of whether that is the goal of public officials or not. According to information activists, a denied or incomplete answer may be the difference between a successful or an unsuccessful project of advocacy or political intervention. In this sense, the state that information activists experience through their interactions with institutions is surprisingly schizophrenic. On the one hand it provides citizens with the tools to obtain information and the participation mechanisms to join decision-making processes. On the other hand, it is also a state that in many ways resists engagement by undermining citizens' agency.

Practices of institutional resistance

The instances of resistance to transparency described by my informants do not consist of organized or evidently politicized institutional action. They are subtle strategies that can always pass for accidents, such as when an email is required to receive information requested by phone –a mechanism specifically set up for citizens without access to computers-, misunderstandings, such as when officials interpret requests in a manner

that results in the provision of as little information as possible, and incompetence, such as when the information is provided in carelessly scanned PDFs which are unreadable. These and other acts are the norm rather than the exception during the FOI process, and requesters need to implement, every time, strategies to predict and counteract them. It is thus a type of resistance “that is done routinely, but which is not politically articulated or formally organized [...] a form of activity that often avoids being detected as resistance” (Vinthagen and Johansson 2013, p. 10).

The first challenge when using FOI is to draft the text of the information request itself. According to my informants this may take up to two days of work, since public officials will take advantage of any mistake, vagueness or inaccuracy in the request to dismiss it:

They [public officials] know every possible way of resisting, from A to Z. If you don't specify a year in your request, they will deny it. If you do not specify what particular document you want, they will deny it. If you do not back up your request with the relevant articles from the law, they will argue they are not obliged to provide the information, and deny it. Or they will give you other information. If your request is not clear enough, it will be considered vague and will not be answered. (Interview G0318)

Resistance during the initial stages of an information requests can be counteracted by having thorough knowledge of the inner workings of the state, the competencies and the scope of action of institutions, their internal hierarchies and their archival practices. Experienced activists who are aware of all these factors take pride in writing information requests which are impossible to dismiss or deny due to their detailed structure, and jokingly refer to instances in which even public officials have expressed surprise at the thoroughness of the requests. This knowledge may, however, not be enough to guarantee that an information request will be successful. Public officials will often resort to technological arguments to not disclose information, and to dislocate their responsibility over that decision, turning it into a technical rather than a political matter. For example, they may ask requesters to physically show up to their offices to pick up the information because it cannot be reproduced digitally. If there is indeed a digital version of the information, they may argue

that it cannot be sent over the internet because files are too big or their computers lack enough processing power to handle documents. In this examples institutional resistance is eminently sociotechnical –and thus, relational- in nature: to be exerted and justified, it requires the presence of technical means. In fact, technology is one of the main forms through which the contentious dimension of public officials’ actions remains hidden, as it is not the behavior of officials which prevents disclosure, but the non-political inadequacies of the technology.

Institutional Resistance to transparency can take the radical form of data destruction. Eight out of my 15 informants have received at least once as an official reply to their information requests that the data could not be provided because archives had been damaged, lost or data was never archived. As I write these lines in April 2019, one of the biggest Mexican newspapers showcases on its front page an article about the large amount of data lost to fires, floods or simply gone missing, including the court files related to the high-profile murder of an activist, the trial of a union leader accused of corruption, and part of the historic archive of a university, which was sent to a paper recycling company (Zavala 2019). In late March, 2019, three floors of the central offices of the National Waters Commission caught fire during a weekend, amidst rumors of a possible official audit. Two of my informants who work in matters related to water and sanitation expressed concern via e-mail about the affectations that the fire might have had over the data held by the institution. The fire initiated in the floor that houses the archives of water concessions, currently a controversial topic in Mexican politics.

All these cases have received considerable media attention. However, they have not been politicized beyond civil society circles. In fact, the routine destruction of official data is often portrayed as a matter of the everyday incompetence of public officials or as the consequence of a lack of proper funding that allows them to maintain appropriate archives, which is also undoubtedly true. Nevertheless, research on similar obfuscation practices performed by users of digital technologies has shown how it is possible to reduce the value of data by “adding noise to an existing collection of data in order to make the collection more ambiguous, confusing, harder to use” (Brunton & Nissenbaum 2011). In that sense, the seemingly non-political nature of routine data hampering should not

obscure that, in a time in which the assemblage of publics through data processing and analysis (Ruppert 2017) is increasingly becoming one of the most effective forms of political intervention, destroying, altering or making difficult access to data is an effective strategy to guarantee that publics cannot prosper (cfr. Marres 2005).

While it is during the process of requesting information that activists are the most exposed to institutional resistance to transparency, accessing the information described in the general and specific transparency obligations can also be extremely problematic. Data and information related to the budget and regulations of public policies and governmental programs are commonly scattered across legal documents produced and archived by offices from different levels of government, rather than being unitary entities that can be easily accessed and understood by citizens, as the law demands. These practices result in what could be called, in analogous fashion to Scott's argument in *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2014), institutional shatter zones. These rugged institutional landscapes make extremely difficult for interested parties to evaluate the performance of public policies or identifying opportunities for citizen involvement. In the best scenario, activists may have to divert human and economic resources they could invest in accompanying the implementation of the policy to first clarify its components and development. At worst, they may end up being completely excluded. And while a certain degree of complexity is to be expected in public administration, what is concerning is how many times institutional shatter zones have been used to avoid accountability and allow the flow of money to private hands in corruption scandals. A particularly controversial case came to light in 2017, when a group of journalists published a piece of research called *La estafa maestra* (The master con), showing how a complex network of institutions and service suppliers was assembled in order to steal around 400 million U.S. dollars (Castillo et al. 2017). The research was carried out chiefly through information requests, of which journalists made 517, to trace the flow of money through the state infrastructure. Just three years before, a similar journalistic research denounced how the intricate structure of the flows of money from the federation to the municipalities was used to funnel illegal economic resources to political parties during election time (Olvera 2017).

These two examples are, however, extraordinary cases of something that is experienced by information activist on a daily basis, since the text of information requests is the most common example of institutional shatter zones. In the opinion of activists, the language used by information officers to respond to requests is perennially obscure, complex and intricate. Responses usually include copious references to federal and local laws, internal regulations, and institutional documents which are not necessarily known to activists before they receive the answer to their request. Making sense of these replies requires a level of expertise that not every citizen can acquire. In fact, the intricateness of institutional responses is one of the main reasons why activists feel that the RTI in Mexico has not been appropriated by more actors apart from certain journalists and civil society groups. My informants described the language of the responses as “totally specialized” and “not a citizen language. They [public officials] constantly use the language of authority, creating labyrinths in the information they provide” (Interview G2318). Even the structure of the responses is difficult to navigate, particularly when requests are denied, appealed by activists, and then granted by a higher authority. In those cases, the file received by the requester may reach hundreds of pages, many of which consist of literal quotes of other parts of the same document. At least two of my informants expressed having trouble believing that the complexity of official responses is not a deliberate strategy to hinder their access to public information.

As the Mexican government incorporates new technologically mediated practices of open government, digital institutional Shatter Zones are also created. The best example is the National Transparency Platform, conceived as the main tool to manage transparency at all levels of government. Ideally, the PNT would allow citizens to file, track and manage information requests, as well as enable authorities to archive in a single place and make public all the information the law states should be made proactively transparent. Nevertheless, the platform is plagued by bugs that make it difficult to operate, and institutions make opportunistic use of the affordances of the software to derail the FOI process:

If you start filing a request, sometimes it will disappear. Even if the platform gave you an identification number. It's like it never existed. This is a way of avoiding giving you information [...] The most difficult

part is when you want to appeal an official response. You have to be constantly checking the platform to make sure they haven't tried to contact you, because if they did and you don't reply, the process may be discarded. (Interview G2218).

The platform also enforces different rules for citizens and authorities: whereas deadlines are fixed and final for citizens (i.e., not responding to an institutions' plea to clarify a request will automatically legitimize an information denial), they are flexible for authorities, who may take longer to respond than what is allowed by law, without consequences.

Something similar happens with the data repositories created by institutions to fulfill their transparency obligations. These repositories have intricate structures that restrict their usability and are often plagued with dead links given the frequency with which they are updated. Since each new administration may build its own data repositories, learning to navigate them will only be temporarily useful. To make things more complicated, these repositories are often referenced in answers to information requests, generating a sort of nesting of shatter zones. Requesters who manage to successfully take the FOI process to completion may find, somewhere within the legalistic language of the response, a statement informing that the data is already public and can be accessed by following a link to an official data repository contained in an attached password-protected Microsoft Excel File... only to find that the link is broken. This cartoonish scenario is not an exaggeration.

Institutional shatter zones hinder citizens' access to information in the same seemingly non-political way that characterizes the everyday forms of resistance approached before. Here again, the difficulty of distinguishing malice from incompetence makes talking about resistance problematic. For example, shattered institutional landscapes often result from legitimate attempts to improve the Mexican legal framework and its technological tools. However, taking the perspective of activists highlights how the mere existence of these obstacles, regardless of whether they are intentionally set to hinder citizens' endeavors or not, decreases the legibility of the state, in whose rugged landscape thrive corruption, nepotism, and inefficient public management. Therefore, just like the rugged spaces in Zomia allow peasants to avoid control (Scott 2014),

institutional shatter zones may allow governmental action to happen far from citizen's watchful eyes.

Despite how disempowering the aforementioned strategies of resistance can be, activists often manage to gain agency through various countermeasures. In fact, activists' research methodologies have been adapted to accommodate the resistance strategies of the state and mitigate their impact. Institutional resistance has triggered a capacity-building process through which citizens get increasingly better at making sense of state action, forecasting the possible outcomes of institutional procedures –and FOI responses- and ultimately, strengthening their claims to join decision-making processes. Seasoned requesters organize their activities with the goal of reducing the effect that the expected institutional resistance will have over their work. Within this process of thinking the state from outside the state, activists' experience of institutional resistance becomes a heuristic device to make sense of governmental action, and more importantly, to understand power flows to improve their relative power position vis a vis institutions. Institutional resistance has therefore a surprisingly productive role: Used as a heuristic device, it turns information activists into pragmatic actors who, through their enquiries about how power relations are determined by regulations and officials' behaviour, attempt to change them. Here, resistance is more than a practice and becomes a certain sensibility, a way of looking at the organization of collective life with a focus on how allocations of power are enacted, contested and justified (cfr. Foucault 1982).

Conclusions

In this paper I have suggested that information activists' use of transparency mechanisms sometimes triggers adverse institutional reactions. I have argued that, since these institutional responses diminish activists' agency, they can be understood as practices of resistance despite being enacted by the, *prima facie*, structurally more powerful actor. In order to clarify the notion of resistance to transparency and tackle the difficulty of distinguishing between political resistance and resistance as an unintended product of incompetence, I approached the problematic practices of the Mexican state through two concepts commonly used in the study of resistance: Everyday forms of resistance and shatter zones.

Both concepts allowed me to suggest that institutions can practice questionable, although not illegal, resistance to transparency through seemingly non-political strategies that nevertheless have very political effects according to the activists who experience them. By focusing on how institutional behavior affects the agency of heavy FOI users and implementing a Resistance Studies-inspired approach, I foregrounded the politics of institutional resistance to transparency, something that previous literature had trouble doing.

Throughout my analysis, information and communication technologies have appeared as objects of contention structuring the actions of citizens and institutions. It is data and information, the practices of producing, distributing and analyzing them, and the technologies that make these practices possible, what are used to resist or strengthen citizen agency. Surprisingly, both citizens and institutions are enabled by almost the same tools and resources. Although the latter have a much more privileged access to PSI, the means to process it and, arguably, a higher dominion of the legal frameworks that determines how it can be used, information activists are not far behind. Their data practices and demands for information resources suggest that their understanding of transparency is connected to the possibility of tracing, without deviations or disconnections, the flow of power that results in a particular governmental act. In that sense, the transparency that information activists pursue goes beyond the bare making of PSI available, and calls for deeper institutional care and concern for the context in which data is produced, communicated and used, since it affects citizens' possibilities for political engagement.

The discrepancy between RTI's progressive regulation in Mexico and its abysmal performance signals a clash between two different ways of understanding the role of data and PSI in modern democracies. This is of course not exclusive to Mexico. Whereas the state gathers, processes and produces data under the rationale of ruling, much in the fashion that James C. Scott described in *Seeing Like a State* (2018), information activists strive for a form of governance in which processing data not only legitimizes their inclusion as experts in decision making processes, but also allows them to scrutinize, politicize and, ultimately, control state action. This paper has been an attempt to shed light over the conflict

between these two rationales by focusing on the experiences of skilled information activists in one country. However, further attention is needed over how citizens with a less privileged access to technology make use of PSI, as well as over how they develop strategies to deal with institutional resistance.

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Recognizing Everyday Activism: Understanding Resistance to Facial Recognition

Nora Madison, *Chestnut Hill College*
& Mathias Klang, *Fordham University*

ABSTRACT

The widespread implementation of facial recognition systems as a tool for live surveillance is challenging the ability of individuals to be anonymous in public, and through this, addressing the level of privacy one has the right to expect in a public space. Among those attempting to draw attention to this discussion is a group of artists and designers, whose contribution involves the creation of anti-surveillance practices and artefacts. Given that these have been viewed as ingenious and often entertaining, but hardly as viable solutions to surveillance, it may be tempting to ignore them as failed resistance. This, however, would miss the importance of, and contribution to, the larger discussion on everyday resistance and activism. This paper argues that these systems are examples of surveillance resistance, that their role is to form part of an online discourse on surveillance and as such become a form of digital resistance. Furthermore, this paper argues, that through the form and nature of their contribution they have the ability to further nuance the discussion of resistance in that they become an example of everyday activism. By recognizing their true contribution, we may move beyond mere trivialization of these anti-surveillance artefacts to be able to study digital resistance.

Introduction

In an attempt to avoid surveillance a man lowers his head and pulls up his collar. His behavior is deemed suspicious, he is stopped by the police and as he resists questioning, he is made to identify himself to the officers, his photo is taken, and he is fined (Dearden, 2019). This is not the plot of a dystopian science fiction but occurred in London in 2019. This attempt to avoid surveillance was not motivated by guilt, but simply the desire not

to be identified, paradoxically in a society where surveillance is the norm, the desire for privacy may be seen as suspicious. Hiding one's face in this manner is an act of everyday resistance: A quiet, disguised or seemingly invisible act, not politically articulated (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2013). It was the small-scale reaction from a member of a relatively powerless group; it required no formal coordination (Scott, 2008).

In his work on peasant resistance, Scott (1985) argues that: "most forms of everyday resistance are, after all, deployed precisely to thwart some appropriation by superior classes and/or the state. If the resistance succeeds at all, it of course confers a material benefit on the resister" (p 36). The man in London was attempting to thwart the state's attempts to appropriate his likeness and identity while he walked in his own neighborhood, and, while he ultimately failed, his attempt illustrates an important resistance to the growing encroachment of surveillance and its threat to public life.

Surveillance—and resistance to it—is not new, yet there has been an increasing public discomfort with the growth of next level surveillance systems. This discomfort stems from the increasing sophistication of surveillance systems, with little or no human intervention, to identify individual faces, store geographical data, and connect to external databases for access to additional data about the subject. This discomfort is increased with the threat of future additional features which will allow surveillance systems to identify individuals in massive crowds, through gestures or gait, and to reduce the need for human involvement altogether.

The man in London is also an illustration of the ways in which legal regulation and norms have made attempts from individuals to protect their identity either explicitly illegal or functionally useless. This paper will demonstrate the potential threats to open activism posed by these surveillance systems. Coupled with recent anti-masking ordinances, we argue that the ability of the populace to resist surveillance severely curtailed and attempts at resistance have the opposite effect. Left with little or no options, resistance to surveillance systems has become a creative practice where designers and artists have demonstrated personal anti-surveillance masks, clothing, jewelry, or styles of hair and makeup intended to frustrate surveillance.

These examples of design to thwart facial recognition can easily be

brushed aside as minor acts. Indeed, a general audience would probably view them more as curiosities rather than grand art or useful products. However, this focus on the product misses the true purpose. The designers and artists are using digital technology in order to communicate political messages that question the state of surveillance and its challenge to human agency. By making everyday objects and sharing their designs they are demonstrating a potential for resistance that underscores that there is a power that needs to be resisted.

Despite the analog nature of the designed artefacts these are really secondary. The truly activist product is the uncoordinated invitation to a wider digital audience to be part of a noisy online dialogue on the social effects of surveillance.

Live Facial Recognition Systems

Surveillance systems built with live facial recognition (LFR) are a combination of several forms of technologies. Most readily identifiable is the camera whose development as a surveillance tool has gone through multiple stages of evolution. The earliest cameras were unable to record events and therefore required the human operator to be watching the screens the entire time. The advantage here was the ability to watch several screens from a distance, the disadvantage was the ability of the operator to maintain focus on the screens.

Widespread use of camera surveillance begins with the development of cheaper recording systems of cassette tapes (Kruegle, 2011). These allowed the use of cameras to be independent of parts of the human operator's work. The advantage being that they were useful devices for reviewing what had happened in the past at a certain location. As such the deterrent effect was secondary. The goal of the tapes was to provide evidence of what had happened. The systems still required human intervention in deciding when to review the tapes, in the reviewing of the tapes, and in the identification of the recorded individual.

The second pillar of LFR is the ability of information systems to be able to be used in the identification of individuals. Among the early systems were the Bertillon system in the late 1800s which used a sophisticated system of bodily measurements and identifying marks to

create positive identification of individuals. Aside from the data gathered from the measurements of the suspect the main innovation was the organizational system of references and cross references that made this into a human searchable paper-based archive.

This use of biometric measurement was soon superseded by the use of fingerprints as a way of identifying individuals. These had the added feature of sometimes being able to connect the individual to the crime and therefore together with their uniqueness quickly became the preferred system. However, until the development and dissemination of computers, these systems remained cumbersome paper-based archives. Dealing with repetitive mundane tasks is the driving force behind the early development of computers and their ability to create higher levels of search and recovery efficiency in archives were instrumental to their early successes.

The next step in the development was to connect cameras to computers and begin to create systems that would enable them, through facial measurements, to identify individuals. Beginning with early pattern recognition these systems soon used large databases of facial images to “learn” how to differentiate between individuals. Once all these elements coalesce, together with networked communication, and access to databases of faces the groundwork was laid for LFR (Bowyer, 2004; Introna & Wood, 2004).

LFR is the ability of the surveillance system to, in real time, identify individuals appearing in front of the camera and connect their images to any and all databases the operators may have access to. The system has overcome the limitations of humans to watch screens, identify actions, or need breaks. The result of these interconnected cameras, recognition systems, and databases is that: “While passive camera surveillance focused on *acts* of the individual, and facial recognition focuses on *identity*, live facial recognition brings the *entire history of the surveilled* to the attention of the observer” (Klang & Madison, forthcoming, italics original).

Identification, Resistance, and State Reactions

There are a wide array of tactics that can be employed to either directly resist or engage with surveillance. The equipment itself can be attacked, information about camera locations can be shared, or attention can be

drawn to their prevalence (Monahan, 2006). Undoubtedly, the most readily available among these tactics is to obscure the face from the view of the camera. Clothes have always been used to cover the face for an array of different reasons; for warmth, modesty, or to prevent identification. From the perspective of the modern state we see two trajectories where some of these uses have been frowned upon.

The modern origins of prohibiting individuals from wearing clothes that cover the face and prevent identification stem from attempts to regulate the Klu Klux Klan in America, while in many European countries they arise from desire to control Muslim dress practices (Winet, 2012). As clothes, even those covering the face form part of the bearer's identity and are a form of expression, and they are often protected by various national and international legal instruments (Winet, 2012). However, legislators have carved out exceptions to these rights and we find a wide array of legislation that prohibits face covering outside certain accepted practices. There are carnival regulations in Belgian municipalities that prohibit masking the face in public with masks or make-up unless in designated spaces in specific public festivals (Winet, 2012).

Putting aside the origins and goals of legislation such as these, they have now become practical to the state surveillance apparatus. This legislation is used in order to ensure that surveillance systems are not impeded. A quick survey of laws around the world shows that there are municipal, regional, and national prohibitions against masking the face in order to prevent identification. Countries such as Australia, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Norway, Russia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and the United States. France, in an act that coincided with the 2019 *Mouvement des gilets jaunes* (Yellow Vest Movement) protests, added to their existing prohibitions on face covering to include a ban on masks at public demonstrations. The latest to react is Hong Kong, where a ban on face masks is a direct reaction to the ongoing protests.

The state fears masked protest and reacts by giving itself, via regulation, the privilege to take away the individual right to wear a mask in public. As Caillois (2001) points out, the mask “characterizes equivocally sensual intrigues and mysterious plots against the powers that be. It is the symbol of amorous or political intrigue. It is disturbing and somewhat of

a thrill. At the same time, it assures anonymity, protects, and liberates” (p 130). To this we can now add that the mask invalidates the systems of surveillance and makes investments into LFR less effective; therefore, in order for the system to be able to function, the human law enforcement must work to remove individuals’ freedom to be anonymous in public. The man in London—which began this article—was not stopped by the police for their direct interest, he was stopped to make the surveillance system function. The police become the arms of the surveillance machine, human actors within a sociotechnical system. The wearing of the mask is no longer allowed to be a form of expression but rather a symbol of transgression and is met with the force of the state, as represented by the uniform. Which, according to Caillois (2001) is juxtaposed to the mask:

The uniform is almost the exact opposite of the mask, and always symbolizes a type of authority founded on entirely opposing principles. The mask aimed to dissimulate and terrify. It signified the eruption of a fearful, capricious, intermittent, and inordinate power, which emerged to evoke pious terror in the profane masses and to punish them for their imprudence and their faults. The uniform is also a disguise, but it is official, permanent, regulated, and, above all, leaves the face exposed (p 131).

Once the mask is prohibited, the mandate of identification has a chilling effect on activism. The power imbalance is reinstated and the protester must stand identified in front of the state. As usual it is the less privileged and vulnerable in society that will suffer most. Those whose identification will lead them to harm will most certainly be deterred from participating and they will have no recourse other than the weapons of the weak.

The loss of these participants and the lack of masks in protest may also lead some to believe that there is no resistance and that there is an acceptance of the status quo of identification. The need for masks becomes invisible as you would need to have to drive political change for the right to conduct masked demonstration. Therefore, we must look elsewhere for the critique of the status quo.

Resistance by Design

As LFR systems become more sophisticated—and legislation expands to prohibit masks, hoods, and clothing obscuring faces—we see a rise in artists and designers creating innovative designs intended to frustrate LFR. These designs may, in certain jurisdictions, fall outside the language (but not the intention) of the law, but it is unlikely that they would be practically useful if they were used on a larger scale. We have included several examples below, but this is not an exhaustive list.

Several artists have created minimalist designs that do not cover the entire face; rather, through applying metals or makeup in strategic places on the face these designs accomplish the same result in obscuring personal identity. Adam Harvey created “CV Dazzle” (2010), a series of hair, facial paint and jewelry designs used to camouflage the individual from face detection technology. His designs were launched as a digital booklet available and spread online. Scott Urban launched his kickstarter in 2016 for “Reflectacles”, wearable glasses embedded with retroreflectors, which overwhelm many LFR systems’ abilities to make measurements and thus carry out identification. The glasses work against CCTV, LFR, and also retinal tracking systems. In 2019 Urban also announced “IRpair” and “Phantom”, both of which block 3D infrared facial mapping, obscure facial data on 2D infrared surveillance cameras in low light environments as well, and block infrared eye-tracking. Similarly, Polish designer Ewa Nowak created “Incognito” (2019) facial jewelry made of brass similar to the design of a pair of glasses. Instead of lenses that sit over the eyes, two brass circles are worn just under the eyes, connected to a rectangular brass shape that sits between the eyes and reaches up to the hairline, all connected to a lightweight frame that sits over the ears like glasses. Baccus-Clark et al. (2017) developed Hypeface, a collaborative design project of Hyphen Labs’ NeuroSpeculative AfroFeminism, which takes a different approach. Instead of trying to obscure the face, the objective of Hyperface is to minimize the difference between figure (an individual’s face) and ground (proximal information), and in doing so interferes with face detecting software.

Notably, these designs—and their designers—are neither apolitical nor quiet. Nowak says of her work: “The project touches on the subject of social surveillance and protection of one’s own image in public places.

The object is to protect the image against face recognition algorithms used in modern cameras installed in public space” (Nowak, 2019). Harvey explains CV Dazzle as:

Derived from a type of World War I naval camouflage called Dazzle, which used cubist-inspired designs to break apart the visual continuity of a battleship and conceal its orientation and size. Likewise, CV Dazzle uses avant-garde hairstyling and makeup designs to break apart the continuity of a face. Since facial-recognition algorithms rely on the identification and spatial relationship of key facial features, like symmetry and tonal contours, one can block detection by creating an ‘anti-face’ (Harvey, 2010).

On the website explaining their most recent prototype, NeuroSpeculative AfroFeminism claims that they are a:

Transmedia exploration of black women and the roles they play in technology, society and culture—including speculative products, immersive experiences and neurocognitive impact research. Using fashion, cosmetics and the economy of beauty as entry points, the project illuminates issues of privacy, transparency, identity and perception (Baccus-Clark et al., 2017).

As we will argue below, this consciously political stance removes these acts from the definition of everyday resistance, but as mundane, uncoordinated, and non-spectacular acts form part of everyday activism.

Interpretations

What are we to make of these projects, and others like them? Naturally we could discard them as trivial pieces of art, making some comment on the state of surveillance, or we could see them as artefacts attempting to reach audiences in a capitalist marketplace. But what if they are more than this? They are quite obviously not a central part of a large, coordinated, political campaign to protest the loss of anonymity and public privacy. Nor are they practical products intended for the large-scale marketplace. If they would succeed in the latter they would fall afoul of the anti-mask legislation; then what purpose do they serve? In our view these examples were never intended to become large-scale workable countermeasures to

surveillance. Therefore, they need to be understood in a different context than the plethora of other practical tips and devices recommended to protesters in order to help them keep warm, energized, and safe.

Like most things technical it is easy to focus on the uniqueness of the artefact and in this view, these examples seem outlandish and exotic; however, the concept of bricolage or improvisational creation provides a critical lens. As Levi-Strauss (1966) explains, “the ‘bricoleur’ is adept at performing a large number of diverse tasks; but, unlike the engineer, he does not subordinate each of them to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project” (p 17). This tinkering and improvisation (Ciborra, 2009) leads to the making of artefacts, which may be said to be “the creation of structure out of events” (Louridas, 1999, p 5). In the same way as the study of bricolage moves away from the artefact to study the art of the bricoleur, we want to focus less on the products of the anti-surveillance designers and look towards the practices of activism entailed in their work.

Like the bricoleur the designers above have taken their knowledge and the materials they have at hand to produce a resistance to surveillance. The point and purpose of their work is not so much the artefact but the communication of the message around their artefact. Indeed, in most of the examples of anti-surveillance designs, the ideas far supersede the artefact in interest and importance. By looking at the practices of resistance, for the designers it is bricolage, for the audience it is learning and maybe using or developing this knowledge further. We can see how the whole process of manifesting ideas into artefacts and spreading their designs via the Internet is a form of everyday communication of resistance to the power of the surveillance state. These are acts of mundane everyday activism performed over highly complex technologies.

In his analysis of antisurveillance camouflage and fashion, Monahan (2015) presents the surveillance studies perspective on the meaning of these phenomena. His focus is on the impact that they may have: “anti-surveillance camouflage and fashion ultimately fails to address the exclusionary logics of contemporary state and corporate surveillance” (p 160). This perspective fails to take into consideration whether, in order to be of importance, the exclusionary logic needs to be the focus of their work. In his conclusion he argues that projects such as these are:

Narrow forms of resistance that are unlikely to challenge current regimes of visibility. The reason for that has to do with how the artworks frame problems with surveillance as universally experienced or as needing individualized and product-based solutions to manage—rather than correct—systemic social problems (p 173).

The flaw with this approach is the way in which it seems to present these designs as having no value in relation to surveillance, because they are unable to either address the entirety of the logic of surveillance, or that they are unable to act as a corrective to a powerful hegemonic system. Monahan's approach does not take into consideration these acts as being forms of resistance carried out by those who have little or no power to change the system, and that they should not be judged by their failure to undo the system to which they are subjected. We feel that these examples fall within the larger discourse on resistance (cf Scott, 1985; Abu-Lughod, 1990; Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013), but do not conform to the criteria set out for everyday resistance.

Our argument is that these designs present us with useful illustrations of the concept of everyday activism which we see as a part of the wider continuum between full blown resistance and *everyday resistance* (Scott, 1985; Vinthagen and Johansson, 2013). They point to the need for a bridge concept within resistance studies that addresses the mundane acts of activism.

Everyday Resistance

Abu-Lughod inverts Foucault's (1978) adage of "where there is power there is resistance" (p 95), and turns it into "where there is resistance there is power" (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p 42), which is to move away from abstract theories of power in order to better study power in particular situations. She writes:

We could continue to look for and consider nontrivial all sorts of resistance, but instead of taking these as signs of human freedom we will use them strategically to tell us more about forms of power and how people are caught up in them" (1990, p 42).

Trivial acts of resistance may provide rich interpretations and understanding of the dynamics of power in the given situation (Abu-Lughod, 1990).

In Scott's (1985) study on peasant resistance to hegemonic power, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of resistance*, he opens up the study of resistance by arguing that acts of resistance are as critical as the organized, political, large-scale events such as protests or revolutions. He advocates for the study of the techniques of resistance employed by relatively powerless groups, such as "foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth" (Scott, 1985, p 29). History and political science tend to focus on and teach about the large events because they are spectacular; however, that focus may fail to understand the underlying causes of these events, or, even more seriously, may fail to comprehend the impact of small-scale, persistent resistance. In a salient passage Scott likens this to a ship being wrecked on a reef:

Just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of individual acts of insubordination and evasion create a political or economic barrier reef of their own. There is rarely any dramatic confrontation, any moment that is particularly newsworthy. And whenever, to pursue the simile, the ship of state runs aground on such a reef, attention is typically directed to the shipwreck itself and not to the vast aggregation of petty acts that made it possible (Scott, 1985, p 36).

Beyond the examples above, Scott discusses resistance as a subtle form of countering public norms through the use of:

Rumor, gossip, disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, anonymity. For good reason, nothing is entirely straightforward here; the realities of power for subordinate groups mean that much of their political action requires interpretation precisely because it is intended to be cryptic and opaque (Scott, 1990, p 137).

The goal for Scott is not to deny the role of large overt political action but rather to shine a light on the everyday acts of resistance as a form of strategy without coordination.

In his attempt to include the mundane into the study of resistance, Scott allows a wide range of acts to be interpreted as resistance. This recognition of the importance of small acts brings with it a challenge—what is, and is not, to be understood as resistance? Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) recognize this in their work to form a theoretical framework in the understanding of everyday resistance. They begin their work by addressing that resistance may cover a wide range of acts that exist on “a continuum between public confrontations and hidden subversion” (p 3), but also emphasize that “all expressions of difference, deviation, or individuality should not, we think, be labeled ‘resistance’” (p 3). In addition to this it is often not fruitful to question the intent of the actor, as they themselves may not define what they do as resistance. Vinthagen and Johansson further argue that: “It becomes almost unthinkable for subalterns to define what they do as ‘resistance’ if their practices are made invisible and marginalized in public debates, mass-media and scientific discourses” (p 38). Not only is intent not always conscious in the mind of the actor, it also all but impossible for the researcher to gauge the true intent of the actor, in particular when studying past events where the actors may no longer be with us. Vinthagen and Johansson similarly note that: “intent is irrelevant for the definition of a type of action, but relevant for understanding the ideas, strategic thinking, plans, psychology or cultural meaning that actors articulate when they resist” (p 21, italics original).

Resistance should also not be interpreted through its results. Individual acts of resistance do not need to have a tangible effect. In line with Scott’s reef, each individual organism does nothing. For Vinthagen and Johansson it is the potential for undermining power that is the defining characteristic of resistance. This approach dovetails nicely with the work of Abu-Lughod, who reminds us that resistance is more than its outcome:

The problem has been that those of us who have sensed that there is something admirable about resistance have tended to look to it for hopeful confirmation of the failure – or partial failure – of systems of oppression. Yet it seems to me that we respect everyday resistance not just by arguing for the dignity of heroism for the resisters but by letting

their practices teach us about the complex interworkings of historically changing structures of power (1990, p 53).

Building on these fundamental points, Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) put forward a coherent set of criteria of everyday resistance:

- done in a regular way, occasionally politically intended but typically habitual or semi-conscious;
- in a non-dramatic, non-confrontational or non-recognized way that (has the potential to) undermine some power, without revealing itself (concealing or disguising either the actor or the act), or by being defined by hegemonic discourse as “non-political” or otherwise not relevant to resistance; and is
- done by individuals or small groupings without a formal leadership or organization, but typically encouraged by some subcultural attitude or “hidden transcript”.

This everyday resistance is connected to power in a complex messy way. Large-scale, organized, political resistance is easier to identify and understand, while everyday resistance has a relationship to power which is “both subordinate and rebellious at the same time” (p 37).

Countering Surveillance as Everyday Activism

Given these criteria, how shall we view the actions of the artists and designers of the anti-surveillance systems? From the descriptions of their intent of these works they have taken a clear political stance against the surveillance apparatus. Their motivation is to challenge the lack of public privacy and anonymity as they believe the surveillance systems are fundamentally harmful. While they are not facing any risks through their openness and visibility, their intention is to be noisy and to purposely interrupt the quiet acquiescence of surveillance and our limited ability to challenge this growing legal norm.

It could be argued that their acts are not mundane enough to fall into the categories of acts usually discussed in the study of everyday resistance. We disagree. Very few of these projects are overly complex, they are communicated openly, and intended to be shared widely. The artists and designers have frequently placed their design specifications freely online and, to a large extent, the materials and systems can be

easily and affordably replicated or copied in lesser versions without any loss of their effect. This last factor must not be overlooked as it plays an important communicative act: it enables the larger scale sharing of their ideas and their technological practices as a form of everyday resistance in itself. Furthermore, it spreads awareness about surveillance systems and state power. As any use of these artifacts would still run afoul of the legal prohibitions discussed above, they are not necessarily viable instruments of resisting surveillance; therefore, they become representations of the performance of activism. Their goal is not necessarily to singularly upend the status quo but rather to loudly question the black boxed nature of a system that allows for less and less human agency. The knowledge sharing and invitation to challenge the status quo central to the aims of these designs aligns these projects within everyday activism. Therefore, we claim these are mundane acts carried out with a political intent.

Thus, we see the acts of the designers as being made up of individual acts, often fitting a schema or model, that may be seemingly invisible yet speak volumes to the intended audience. They may be undertaken anonymously, under a pseudonym, or publicly and, when successful, may need little or no formal coordination or organization. Each of these choices depend on the culture of the hybrid spaces where the resistance is being carried out. These acts may entail the risk of online censor, attack, offline legal responses, or may pose no risk at all. Digital everyday activism is neither spectacular nor hidden.

Conclusion

The impetus for this paper was to better understand the role of artists and designers who created anti-surveillance practices and artefacts and to place them into the resistance context. As we have discussed, their work is a form of bricolage that results in physical artefacts or practices that they then present to a wider audience. While the physical results of their work inhabit the world in limited space, it could be argued that their real contribution is the encouraging of their audiences to think more deeply about the lack of agency when living in an increasingly surveilled society.

To those of us surrounded by digital technology, the artefacts stemming from their work are innovative but the broader product of

their work—the increase in awareness and discussion on the role of surveillance—is most definitely commonplace. Interpreted in this way, their work feels familiar in the study of activism and everyday resistance. Given its mundane nature it is tempting to fit this into the work of everyday resistance as defined by Scott (1985) and refined by Vinthagen and Johansson (2013); however, due to the loud, disruptive, and political nature of this communication, these examples do not fit neatly within the concept of everyday resistance. This therefore illustrates a need for a companion discussion on the need for everyday activism. Uncoordinated, mundane acts carried out with a political message, with the intent of creating noise, in order to reach an audience and perhaps provoke discussion.

As much of what we do over our digital technology would fail the criteria for everyday resistance it is important that the mundane digital acts are studied as forms of everyday activism and not ignored or derided (Klang & Madison, 2016). Therefore, we see the importance of the terminology in order to be able to study these commonplace acts of digitally located everyday activism.

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umass.edu/resistancestudies**

resist@umass.edu

CLASSICAL BOOK REVIEW

Bart de Ligt: The Conquest of Violence: An Essay on War and Revolution

George Routledge & Sons 1937; Pluto Press 1989

Reviewed by **Brian Martin**, *University of Wollongong*

Bart de Ligt was a Dutch pacifist and revolutionary socialist who lived from 1883 to 1938. The son of a pastor, de Ligt became extremely active in the European peace and revolutionary socialist movements. He was noted for his excellent and energetic activist efforts, especially in bringing together different movements to form a coordinated campaign.

De Ligt began his career as a pastor in the Netherlands Reformed Church, and became committed to Christian socialism. With the advent of World War I in 1914, he began speaking against war and conscription, as a result of which he was banned from parts of the Netherlands and served 15 days in prison. He continued his anti-war activism and eventually left the church. For health reasons, he moved to Switzerland, where he spent most of his time. He travelled regularly to the Netherlands and elsewhere in Europe to give lectures and teach courses, and met or corresponded with leading figures including Einstein, Gandhi, Nehru and Aldous Huxley. For 20 years after the end of World War I, he was an indefatigable organiser, speaker and writer. For more on de Ligt's life, see Dungan et al. (1988).

De Ligt was committed both to nonviolence and to revolutionary socialism, which is otherwise known as anarchist-communism, social anarchism or libertarian socialism. It is the kind of socialism based on workers organising work collectively without bosses or a state. He drew on the example of nonviolent struggles as the method for change and on a belief in the need to challenge ruling groups of all types, including governments and capitalists.

His major work was *Vrede als Daad* (Peace as Action), documenting the history of direct action against war. It was published in two large

volumes, in Dutch, in 1931 and 1933, and later in French. There is no English translation.

The focus here is on a shorter book, *The Conquest of Violence*. It was first published in Dutch in 1934, with a revised and enlarged version published in French the next year. In 1937, further revised and enlarged, an English edition was published. De Ligt died the following year, apparently in part due to exhaustion from his continual travel, talks and efforts to organise against war.

It is useful to remember that in the 1930s, world politics looked exceedingly grim. European imperialism was at its height. Britain had colonies across the globe, and France had numerous colonies, especially in Africa. The Dutch government was also a major imperialist power, with Indonesia as its prize possession. The Japanese regime was expansionist, launching a vicious war to take over parts of China. The fascist Italian government led by Mussolini attempted to conquer Ethiopia. The German government was rearming in preparation for war. In this context, to remain a committed pacifist and social revolutionary was an act of faith.

The book

The *Conquest of Violence* shows its origins as a patchwork of different writings. Much of the book reads as a polemic against militarism and its supports among churches, industry and governments. It is a product of its time, when militarism was rampant and a war was looming.

Early chapters include a devastating tirade against violence, a survey of war in history (in which de Ligt includes the benefits of war), an attack on imperialism, a critique of “bourgeois pacifism” (which refers to government attempts to prevent war) and a lucid discussion of the problems with revolutionary violence.

De Ligt often relies on long quotes from various authors, mostly those whose views he shares. Among those whose works he discusses and quotes with admiration are Isaak Steinberg, Clara Meijer-Wichmann, Henrietta Roland Holst and Miss M. P. Willcocks. *The Conquest of Violence* draws on a supportive intellectual culture.

The book comes into its own in Chapter VI, “The effectiveness of the non-violent struggle,” which contains a listing of numerous nonviolent campaigns, many of which are forgotten today, unmentioned even in contemporary writings on nonviolent action. De Ligt gives special attention to a few cases, for example a struggle in Western Samoa against the New Zealand government (pp. 147–153). Contemporary readers might well begin *The Conquest of Violence* with this long chapter.

De Ligt’s commitment to nonviolence and opposition to the military was strong and uncompromising. He reports his criticisms of Gandhi’s political opportunism; for example, in 1918 Gandhi recruited for the British army (Paxton, 2017).

Following chapters on nonviolent action, de Ligt addresses the role of violence in revolution, a theme that recurs throughout the book. His view is encapsulated in this passage:

For the social revolution means nothing if it is not a battle for humanity against all that is inhuman and unworthy of man. That is why we have always asserted that the more there is of real revolution, the less there is of violence: the more of violence, the less of revolution. At the very most, violence may be a secondary help in the course of a revolutionary movement. (p. 162)

The remaining chapters address a miscellany of topics that were current in the 1930s, including the Soviet Union, the war in Spain, military recruiting, the League of Nations, and defending against German and Japanese aggression.

In “Armed defence against Hitler?” de Ligt addresses the immediate issue of responding to an invasion of the Netherlands by Nazi Germany. He argues that military defence was bound to be unsuccessful and, even if it could be militarily effective, it would turn the Dutch people into militarists like those they were defending against. He instead recommends letting German troops to occupy the country and then using nonviolent methods to convert and resist them. In this advice, de Ligt provided a rudimentary picture of what later was articulated as social defence or civilian-based defence. In arguing that a key role in the defence is the “Dutch spirit” and Dutch traditions, he anticipated the central idea of Stephen King-Hall’s 1958 book *Defence in the Nuclear Age*. King-Hall,

in presenting a more developed picture of social defence, said the central thing to be defended was the British way of life.

In another chapter, titled “The Japanese danger,” de Ligt discusses the threat of the expansionist Japanese military to Indonesia, at the time a Dutch colony. De Ligt says the Dutch government should turn Indonesia over to the Indonesians, and only provide assistance — nonviolent, of course — if requested, as a free and equal partner in opposing aggression.

De Ligt calls for action by the masses against all rulers. To halt the progression towards war, or to halt wars in progress, he calls for the proletariat to act, with attention to some specifics, such as transport workers:

As very often happens when the workers are called upon to fulfil their historic mission and prevent collective murder, it is upon the transport workers that the duty falls first and foremost: for, by the nature of their function, they hold the keys of heaven and hell and can open or shut the hellish gates of war as they choose. (p. 261)

Few workers ever heard de Ligt’s call to action, much less heeded it. Nevertheless, it is a pity that he did not live long enough to hear about the waterside workers in Port Kembla, Australia, who refused to load pig iron destined for Japan because it would contribute to the Japanese war effort in China. Late in 1938, the workers, supported by the local community, put up a long struggle against both the Australian government, which favoured appeasement of Japanese militarism, and the local iron and steel company (White, 1979). This example of workers’ resistance to militarism continues to be celebrated in Wollongong today.

The Conquest of Violence includes a long appendix, “Plan of campaign against all war and all preparation for war,” which de Ligt presented at the 1934 conference of War Resisters’ International. This amazing document lists dozens of actions to be taken by a variety of groups. For example, as the first entry it includes “Refusal of military service” with subcategories of conscript, soldier or sailor, reservist, and citizen called to arms for (1) manoeuvres, (2) strike-breaking or (3) dealing with political conflicts. Then comes refusal of non-combatant military service, refusal to be involved in war-related manufacturing, banking and other services, and refusal to pay taxes. For each one of a long list of occupations and

roles — for example scientist, parent, teacher, journalist, politician and artist — de Ligt lists two main tasks: refusing to support war or national defence in any way, and promoting ideas of nonviolence and the making of a free and harmonious society. De Ligt's plan then includes collective action by a host of different groups to "prevent war and all preparation for war." A prime recommendation was "propaganda" for this goal. (The word propaganda in the 1930s was less pejorative and, in today's terms, might be called information campaigning or public education.) Collective actions include both "theoretical" tasks, such as propaganda, and practical tasks such as organising direct action movements against conscription, organising "peace crusades" (walks lasting weeks or months through several countries), and a general strike. So far, the suggested actions are to be taken in peacetime, to prevent war and preparation for war. A second half of the document addresses actions to be taken in wartime.

An anarchist perspective

De Ligt was both a pacifist and a revolutionary socialist. He opposed ruling classes, including capitalists and imperialists of all varieties. In the European tradition this orientation puts him in the camp of the anarchist movement, on the nonviolent wing. He was familiar with the works of classical anarchist thinkers such as Bakunin and Kropotkin, though these are not often cited in *The Conquest of Violence*.

De Ligt saw ruling classes as a central problem. In chapter 3, "Violence and the bourgeoisie," he refers to the "bourgeois revolutions," such as the French revolution, as serving a new ruling class — capitalists — that soon incorporated the old ruling classes, namely the clergy and nobility. Most of the chapter is about imperialism. He praises "Redskins," especially the Iroquois in North America, for having developed ways of living peacefully:

At the time of the White invasions, the Iroquois had already got beyond the war stage. This tribe which, in the social field, had organized itself in the freest possible manner according to the methods of self-government, had created a juridico-social unity through all their vast territory, in collaboration with the Mohawks, as far back as the fifteenth century,

not to mention the maintenance of a general peace unknown to the Christian Europe of that time. (p. 42)

De Ligt opposed fascism as a particularly toxic political system, providing a useful and insightful definition: “Fascism, that is, a politico-economic state where the ruling class of each country behaves towards its own people as for several centuries it has behaved to the colonial peoples under its heel” (p. 74).

He argued that governments were the problem, and the treaties they entered into were useless. He saw war as both obsolete and disastrous.

De Ligt recognised the emancipatory features of the Russian revolution, during which workers and soldiers managed their own affairs in what were soviets in the original sense. He condemned the invasion of the fledgling Soviet Union by militaries from eight countries, an invasion that contributed to the militarisation of the revolution and the rise of a dictatorial state. De Ligt’s condemnation of the Soviet government was fierce and uncompromising; unlike many Western socialists of the 1930s, he had no illusions about the nature of Soviet socialism, calling it a form of capitalism.

Overall, de Ligt’s rejection of anti-Semitism, militarism, imperialism, capitalism, fascism and Bolshevism has stood the test of time remarkably well, especially considering the support for these ideologies during the 1930s. This may reflect the durability of a pacifist-anarchist perspective.

De Ligt put his hope in action by the masses, especially the working class, though he was disappointed by the lack of action. *The Conquest of Violence* comes across as far too optimistic about the willingness of working people to oppose violence and to resist the calls to patriotism.

Implications today

Though *The Conquest of Violence* was written over 80 years ago, it remains possible to learn from it. Reading about nonviolent struggles from the point of view of the 1930s is valuable, providing a reminder that this option has been clearly visible, for those who care to recognise it, for well over a century.

More deeply, de Ligt shows the need for a clear-headed vision of revolutionary nonviolence. Much current research on civil resistance

addresses action taken within current social structures. Overthrowing dictators is worthwhile, of course, but does not address the underlying system of states and militaries, so the same problems of repression, war and genocide recur. De Ligt called for socialist revolution, with socialism in the sense of people collectively managing their own affairs for the benefit of all, which is quite different from state socialism. This remains a revolutionary idea that I believe needs to be higher on the agenda of scholars and activists. Those with less sympathy for this viewpoint may find de Ligt's analysis and call to action less relevant today.

The Conquest of Violence makes it apparent that some of the major obstacles to social transformation remain much the same. One of them is trust in official channels such as disarmament negotiations. Too many people leave matters to governments, though, as de Ligt argued, they will never disarm unless there is mass pressure. De Ligt argued that the League of Nations, set up after World War I to adjudicate disputes between governments, was totally ineffectual.

However, it remains just as difficult today as it was in the 1930s to mobilise large numbers of people against war preparations and war. It remains just as visionary today to imagine defending against a foreign invasion by letting the invaders enter the country and then using a variety of methods of nonviolent resistance to oppose them.

In the Netherlands in the 1930s, de Ligt saw the need to oppose at least two systems of domination: Nazi invaders and the Dutch capitalist ruling class, which at the time was also an imperialistic power. To this he added Bolshevism as a possible third system of domination to be opposed. Today, the same systems of domination, in transmogrified form, continue and need to be opposed. De Ligt's commitment to revolutionary pacifism in the 1930s, on the eve of World War II, can serve as a model for today's campaigners:

So instead of waiting till the last moment, why not begin to mobilize at once against not only war but mobilization for war itself? Why not fight at once, by non-co-operation, civil disobedience, boycott, both individual and collective, all preparations for war, so as to make it — this obsolete method of settling political conflicts and regulating the affairs of the nations — impossible once and for all? (p. 264)

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BOOK REVIEWS

Bob Overy: Gandhi the Organiser: How he shaped a nationwide rebellion: India 1915-1922

Irene Publishing, 2019

Reviewed by **Thomas Weber**, *La Trobe University, Melbourne*

I first came across Bob Overy through a letter he had written to Peace News (of which he had been editor), published in September 1971. There he made the important point many in the peace movement tended to overlook: we are often concerned with the point of conflict rather than the source of conflict. In a debate over the value of sending nonviolent peace brigades into conflict areas, Overy proclaimed that the notion should not be taken seriously by pacifists because if the force does no more than keep the peace then in fact it is serving the interests of the status quo and therefore is not neutral. In short, Overy was telling us that it is not enough to follow our hearts, that we have to use our heads as well, that we had to think through the possible repercussions of our peace activism. He took such valuable analytical thinking further in 1982 when he published a booklet titled *How Effective are Peace Movements?* (where he noted that single action campaigns were the ones that generated mass movements but failed to “develop an adequate analysis and programme for the abolition of war itself”) and completed a Ph.D. dissertation on “Gandhi as a Political Organiser”, neither of which made it into the wider peace discourse in any substantial way that I could tell. And then, as far as I could determine, his contributions ceased.

Thankfully, Overy, with his keen analytical insights, is back and his dissertation has been resurrected as an extremely valuable addition to the literature on Gandhi that is not merely historical but also instructive. He informs us that when he noticed that the number of those who were willing to go to jail for peace actions was dwindling, he was encouraged to research and write this book. He went back to Gandhi to “see how his methods actually worked.” He revised his Ph.D. dissertation and gave us

this important addition to the literature on Gandhi and potentially how lessons he gained could be incorporated into current peace activism.

He made it his task to look at Gandhi's early campaigns after the Mahatma had returned to India following his twenty-year residence in South Africa in order to examine "how he was able to do what he did." How, through seven campaigns between 1917 and 1922, Gandhi managed to go from being a local organiser to controlling nationwide movements. He points out that he was not interested in looking at Gandhi's philosophy, but "how he applied his philosophy", how he used nonviolence not merely as a technique of action but "as a tool for transforming social, economic and political conditions" through his constructive program, something he sees as important but generally neglected in the western nonviolence literature. Further, Overy examines the seeming division between nonviolence as a philosophy of life and as a useful conflict technique by analysing the activities of Gandhi as an organiser of social as well as political movements – and how they were linked.

Gandhi was involved in several interlinked and overlapping campaigns of various sizes in his early years back in India and Overy does an excellent job of teasing them out and explaining how they fitted in with Gandhi's developing political knowledge, in explaining the lessons of each that carried over into the next. The simplified accounts of these political campaigns that are presented in most Gandhi biographies do not reveal the complexity of the movements Gandhi was leading in those early years before his imprisonment in 1922. Overy shows just how many balls Gandhi was trying to keep in the air at the one time and how the dynamics of noncooperation evolved.

Overy's account of the Ahmedabad mill workers strike of 1918 demonstrates how far beyond the narrow political outcome various campaigns Gandhi led went: Gandhi was not only trying to win a victory for them but was attempting to "develop the character of the mill-hands by helping them discover depths of courage and self-sufficiency of which they did not know themselves capable" (p.77). In other words, "Gandhi's methods had more to do with changing consciousness than with winning specific material concessions from opponents" (p.81). While this approach may have activated the masses it may also explain

why many important nationalist figures went on to work with Gandhi “even though they never fully accepted that they were ‘revolutionising’ politics by introducing into it the religious spirit. But this is what Gandhi intended and what he thought he was doing” (p.106).

A large part of Overy’s discussion concerns what Gandhi called his Constructive Program and how this was integral to the more assertive satyagraha movements and could give even the poor a means of playing a part in the national struggle. And it was a way of training people in self-confidence and self-reliance. This, notes Overy, has generally not been included in Western peace movements to their detriment.

For Gandhi the constructive program put future leaders in contact with the masses (working not just *for* the people, but *with* them) helping to bring about the society Gandhi envisaged in a future free India and, indeed, a future just world. In fact, Gandhi claimed that the wholesale fulfilment of the program would amount to independence because if the nation was involved in the very process of rebuilding itself in the image of its dreams, from the bottom upwards, it would by definition be free. Originally the program dealt with the problems of communal unity and the uplifting of the rural masses by providing them with the kind of work which enabled them to self-respectingly help themselves.

Gandhi linked constructive work to civil disobedience, sometimes saying that it was an aid to it and at other times that it was necessary for it. In fact, he went so far as to say that national campaigns could not be fully nonviolent if they were not accompanied by a constructive program. Gandhi had at times claimed that he was born for the constructive program whereas politics without it was a botheration to him and that he was wrong when he placed civil disobedience before constructive work. Overy avoids the limited view taken in many Gandhi biographies that focus on the more exciting and spectacular political campaigns and leave aside the social and moral aspects of Gandhi’s activism. He notes that between 1915 and 1919 Gandhi did not move into the national arena as he was “content to wait precisely because his ambitions were different from those of other political leaders and therefore the ground had to be thoroughly prepared in advance” (p.165). In this manner, the importance of Gandhi’s heavy involvement in the seemingly Muslim concerning Khilafat campaign, which appeared to be something either of

a mystery or blatant expediency to many, becomes clear. Further, when Gandhi had moved onto the national arena, he “still retained his instinct for moving one step at a time, that is, not mobilising the people to fight for something beyond their capacity (nor beyond the capacity of the opponent to yield)” (p.232), and going to great lengths to ensure (not always successfully it must be admitted) that the campaigns remained nonviolent. In short, Overy has given us a brilliant review of Gandhi’s rise as a national leader and as to how he used lessons of previous campaigns to inform future ones.

There is, however, one quibble that can be noted with regard to this book. Most of the references in *Gandhi the Organiser* are old, dating back to before the finishing of Overy’s dissertation. While he has attempted to include later references, often as add-ons in footnotes, his work may have had a larger impact if it had been published in the early 1980s. As it stands, as superb as this work is, he has not been able to incorporate much of the more recent literature (for example more recent work on the Constructive Program, Gandhi’s approach to conflict through human needs theory, or some of the more important writing on the analysis of nonviolence as principled or pragmatic) or has done so in a less than comprehensive way.

The penultimate chapter of the book that details Gandhi’s methods in the West comes as something of a surprise. The previous 360 pages give no indication that the history of Gandhi’s early campaigns in India was to be used as lessons for western peace movements. And given that the campaigns that Overy details were dependent on Gandhi’s personal leadership, it is at times difficult to see how these lessons, other than the importance of a constructive program, can be applied in the more frequent cases that lack such leadership. While he is right when he informs his readers that “by studying Gandhi as an organiser ... we can gain fresh insights into his methods and a deeper understanding of them” (p.401), this is perhaps not enough to provide guidance for contemporary nonviolent campaigners.

When Overy examines some of the key texts on nonviolence, and enters the debate on whether more is gained or lost when a pragmatic approach is championed in preference to a more principled Gandhian one, along with Stellan Vinthagen (*A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How*

Civil Resistance Works), he is attempting to resurrect Gandhian approaches in the nonviolence literature which have largely been excised in favour of a “technique approach” to nonviolent activism. Overly makes the point that:

It helps us to understand Gandhi’s technique if we see it as a method of social struggle informed by strongly held positive values, with rules about how we approach people and present ourselves and with a vision of how life could be better, virtually all of which may have some relevance for us. It appears to me that the attempt to separate the technique of action from the background of beliefs and social initiatives which supported it, has diminished our understanding of the technique. (p.372)

By way of conclusion, Overly points out that it is neither enough to see Gandhi as a nonviolent general or warrior or as a philosopher of right-living with a vision of a rural craft-based decentralised economy. For him, Gandhi stands “as a consummate political activist and organiser, who had an original perspective on how to build and direct a movement for nonviolent social and political change” (p.403). How much this is lesson-rich for current nonviolent campaigners remains to be seen, but there is no doubt as to the contribution Overly has finally publicly made to the understanding of Gandhi’s rise from a local activist to the leader of an empire-challenging noncooperation movement.

Todd May: Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction

Polity Press, 2015

Reviewed by **Anthony Huaqui**, *University of Massachusetts*

Todd May’s *Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction* (2015) is a welcomed theoretical analysis of nonviolent action from a philosophical perspective, as well as a worthy inclusion to the resistance studies literature. May’s book shines an important philosophical light on nonviolence, its central dynamics, values of nonviolence, and even its historical lineage. In doing so, May consistently provides references to key vignettes of nonviolent action to help situation their multidimensional

argument. These include: the “Singing Revolution” of Soviet-occupied Estonia, the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos’ dictatorship in the Philippines, the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt, and Occupy Wall Street in the U.S., just to name a few. The book pushes philosophers and resistance scholars to think critically about the dynamics and values that define nonviolent action.

May’s argument begins by establishing some parameters for understanding the concept of nonviolence. In defining what nonviolence is, one must also define what is “violent” since the former is in opposition to the latter. This is a strength of May’s overall analysis, as it places the concepts of “violence” and “nonviolence” in a dynamic relationship with each other; something that can be overlooked or taken for granted in other attempts to define nonviolence. With this in mind, May argues that nonviolence avoids three categories of violence: physical, psychological, and structural violence, each with its own unique dimensions. The definition arrived at is that nonviolence is “...political, economic, or social activity that challenges or resists a current political, economic, or social arrangement while respecting the dignity... of its participants, adversaries, and others” (59).

Crucial to May’s argument is the inclusion of the term dignity when discussing nonviolence and its relation to how the idea of equality is instrumental in nonviolent action. Dignity here is thought of as the ability to lead one’s life in the way that one chooses; a sense of self-determination. It is physical, psychological and structural violence that violate the dignity of those who are subjected to violence and its effects. This is integral to the understanding of nonviolence in that nonviolence seeks to ultimately avoid violating the dignity of the oppressor or the subject of oppression. The concept of equality intersects with dignity, as May makes a claim that all rational beings have equal dignity; in other words, all are equally capable of constructing meaningful lives. Through nonviolent action, the dignity of the adversary is respected on the grounds that they have equal ability to live a life by their own choosing. These two terms coexist in nonviolence as its foundational values, which separate it from strictly violent acts of resistance (though May is quick to emphasize that this relationship is not so dichotomous).

Additionally, May breaks down the dynamics of nonviolence by using Gandhi's concept of satyagraha as an analytical template. Gandhi's satyagraha is anchored by two principles: Truth and ahimsa, which is the refusal to do harm. The former is thought of as the ultimate reality, which differs by person or groups of people who have different lived realities. These two are intertwined and relevant to May's discussion of nonviolence. "Those who engage in violence are not simply trying to get others to recognize the Truth. They are instead seeking to eliminate those who refuse to ratify what they take to be the Truth" (73). As nonviolence is a form of struggle that seeks to respect the dignity of the adversary, different dynamics are used to enable the adversary to recognize the Truth of the oppressed (i.e. their oppression) without the use of violence. These dynamics include: persuasion, suffering, conversion, accommodation, and nonviolent coercion.

While May presents a rich and complex philosophical introduction to nonviolent action, this remains an important reading for any scholar of resistance studies. Included in May's larger arguments surrounding the dynamics and values embedded within nonviolence are discussions on questions of resistance that resistance scholars would appreciate. These include questions on whether nonviolent resistance needs to be intentional, the distinction between practical and principled nonviolent resistance, the relationship between resistance and power, and more. While not the central focus of May's analysis, these dives into additional dimensions of nonviolent resistance provide insights into larger debates within the resistance studies literature.

Ultimately, Todd May's *Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction* (2015) is a compelling read for those interested in a philosophical approach to defining nonviolent resistance. This book was written with other philosophers as the target audience, as stated by May in the beginning of the book. However, this should not discourage resistance scholars in other disciplines from engaging with the material presented here. May succeeds at making this book an introductory and accessible read, fulfilling the interdisciplinary initiative that is resistance studies. This book is recommended to readers interested in resistance studies, nonviolent movements, and philosophy.

Todd May: Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction¹

Polity Press, 2015.

Reviewed by **Nalanda Roy**, *Georgia Southern University*, and
Stephanie Mae Pedron, *Georgia Southern University*.

Political philosopher Todd May in the book, *Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction*, writes a thoughtful and engaging philosophical reflection on the concept of nonviolence, its ethical significance, and its presuppositions of equality and dignity for all parties involved. Like other forms of protest, nonviolent resistance has, at its base, the goal of rearranging an unjust social structure. But through careful analysis and meticulous incorporation of existing literature throughout his discussions, the author successfully distinguishes nonviolent resistance by emphasizing two key differences: the values associated with it and how those values affect the methods employed by individuals to achieve change.

The book is split into six chapters. Each segment builds upon the previous by steadily incorporating new themes into the overarching discussion of nonviolence. Owing to the introductory nature of the book, any philosophical themes mentioned are followed by clarification. This makes it an excellent resource for those looking to establish preliminary knowledge in the field. Rather than delving straight into the philosophical analysis, the author decides to open his book with examples of nonviolent resistance around the world. For academics with a grounded interest in the subject, the chapters that follow the first are more likely to be points of interest. In the second chapter, he seeks to define what nonviolence is and, perhaps more importantly, what it is not by assessing several definitions of violence by philosophers. The third features an investigation

¹ Book editor's note: Two book reviews for May's text, *Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction* were received for this issue. Given that May's book makes an important contribution to understanding the philosophy of nonviolent resistance, and the two reviews provide different perspectives on the text, it was decided that both should be included.

of the various dynamics of nonviolent resistance. The fourth and fifth chapters should be taken together since they discuss two values that—the author argues—are embraced by nonviolence. By drawing upon the philosophies of several thinkers, May constructs a fascinating discussion about how nonviolence recognizes the intrinsic value of an individual and how, in some instances, it can even be considered immoral. He uses the anti-abortion movement as an example (p. 160). In the final chapter, May steers from past nonviolent struggles to future ones by linking the subject to neoliberalism.

Although *Nonviolent Resistance* was inspired by the author's personal participation in nonviolent resistance campaigns during the mid-1980s, May primarily uses large-scale incidents from around the globe as evidence for his arguments. But instead of integrating these historical and contemporary examples into different segments as needed, May dedicates the first chapter to overviews of each for ease of reference in later pages. He cites international affairs like the EDSA Revolution to overthrow Dictator Marcos in the Philippines and the uprisings that eventually came to be known as the Arab Spring. For domestic protests, he goes over Occupy Wall Street and its fight against economic inequality in the United States. The summaries are succinct and packed with relevant information that would be useful to students seeking examples of nonviolent resistance in action. While fact-by-fact recounts of history might not be the most exciting topic for scholars, this chapter does serve as a good refresher of the times when slight protests managed to transform into nationwide civil movements.

The author pivots away from examples in his second chapter, where he argues that there are many types of violence, and thus a single, all-encompassing definition might be a challenge. There is, therefore, a need to dig deeper into the subject because nonviolence cannot be understood without first understanding its boundaries—that is, the kind of violence it rejects. May provokes an interesting line of thought: if nonviolence is the rejection of only specific types of violence, is pure non-aggression simply an idealistic way of thinking? Indeed, by May's definition, absolute nonviolence (in terms of campaigning) isn't viable. Instead, it is an elucidation for a particular form of dissent. May goes on to examine several dynamics of nonviolent resistance in chapter three, but perhaps

the most significant takeaway is that “not all nonviolence is a matter of conversion” (p. 83). When persuasion fails, coercion through civil means may be necessary in order to bring about change. While this might still result in conversion, more often, it results in the use of force from the opposing side. This is important to note when studying the history of social movements around the globe.

Following this section of the book, May returns to a more philosophical discussion regarding the values that nonviolence expresses: dignity and equality. What differentiates nonviolent resistance—and what makes it morally superior—is its respect for the dignity of the other person and its belief that everyone is equal. In an earlier chapter, May states that “Violence is not confrontation; it is suppression” (p. 73). While violence obstructs the individual, nonviolence considers the fact that people on both sides are capable of self-reflection, and are thus capable of amiable behavior towards each other. In other words, those parts of the opposition have an inherent significance that nonviolence doesn’t trample on. This is a compelling thought because it is a subtle recognition that both sides are human. Acknowledging an individual’s capacity to make their own choices and respecting their final decision is part of what makes nonviolence the most suitable, moral response to a situation. Towards the end, May touches upon future resistance against neoliberalism. Owing to the late introduction of this topic, a good deal of time was spent discussing the concept of neoliberalism, as well as related themes like deregulation, which I feel could have been related to the value of equality during the initial discussion of its role in political theory in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, May’s dialogue regarding civil undermining—as opposed to aggressive overthrowing—of neoliberal institutions is both logical and appealing, considering that the leaders of these institutions have the military at their disposal.

Nevertheless, *Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction* was an enjoyable read from start to finish. It contains excellent analyses of the dynamics of nonviolence and its moral differences with its counterpart, as well as wholly original connections that relate nonviolence to dignity and equality—two values typically associated with different fields; ethics and politics, respectively. This book is a must-read for both fledglings in the field and scholars that want to build a more rounded foundation on

the subject. Social science students, in particular, might find this book to be a vital resource. It could also be used as an early guide for future peace studies research. In the final segment of his book, May prompts readers to think about the structural injustices within today's society, so they might transform history's lessons into relevant action for the world's collective future. This call to activism provides a delightful twist that makes the book read as far more than a simple introductory piece.

Gaurav J. Pathania:
The University as a Site of Resistance:
Identity and Student Politics.

Oxford University Press, 2018

Reviewed by **Arvind Kumar**, *University of London*

This book is an ethnographic study of the movement for the formation of Telangana state in India. This movement began right at the dawn of India's independence in 1947 but went through a series of ups and down before becoming the 29th state of India in 2014. With the objective of testing theories of new social movements in the context of South Asia, the author chose this movement and conducted his field work when the movement was in the last stage. In this movement, students, professors and alumni of Osmania University played a pivotal role in terms of creating consciousness and organising protests for the said cause, which is reflected in the title of the book.

The choice of the site of study compels the author to minutely document the everyday activism of the students and the professors of Osmania University, which sometimes leads us to believe that the book is simply about student activism at a single Indian university. However, despite the possible confusion, as the title suggests this book indeed not only comments upon the student activism of the Osmania University but also provides a thick description of student activism of other universities, both Indian and foreign. This compels us to explore the reason behind universities becoming sites of resistance. The author argues that it is the autonomous environment of universities which turns them into a

habitat for protecting dissenting voices resisting against various kinds of dominations. Osmania University has played similar role in India.

The initial half of the book provides a thick description of contemporary student activism in Indian universities as well as abroad and opens up many new vistas, but the second half of the book which contains explanatory chapters guides readers in the direction of the formation of the post-colonial Indian nation-state and the problems which it has been facing in this endeavour. The relentless resistance from tribes, ethnic and religious minorities in the form of Maoism/Naxalism, secessionism and separatism respectively have created a continuous problem for the post-colonial Indian nation-state. The issue of language has been one of the principle concerns of all these struggles. Therefore, the Indian state has used language as an instrumental tool to govern the subcontinent, and that has been done through superimposition of Hindu language and reorganisation of states on linguistic basis.

As explained in detail in the second half of the book, post-colonial India has been constituted off two set of states—transferring the power of colonial provinces and annexing the princely states. This made the Government of India remain conscious of possible emergence of separatist tendencies especially among those princely states, the rulers of which were not ready to join India. Hyderabad was one of those states. To arrest the possible emergence of separatist tendencies among those states, the Government of India merged such states with the provinces that it has acquired from the colonial empire. The Telangana region was part of the Hyderabad princely state, and hence it was merged with Andhra Pradesh, the first state formed on the linguistic basis. This policy of the Government of India is referred as ‘internal colonisation’, a term which was coined by the State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) of India. The internal colonisation created problem of domination which resulted in the creation of discrimination and backwardness. The author argues that in the combined Andhra Pradesh, elites of Telangana region faced discrimination and humiliation since their dialect was mocked in the state machinery and the masses of the region faced backwardness due to exclusionary policies of the state. Andhra Pradesh was the first state to be formed on a linguistic basis, but it mostly promoted a kind of Telegu dialect that was different from Telangana people. On the issue

of language, the people of Telangana had supported the *Telugu language-based organisations such as the Andhra Jana Sangam Andhra Maha Sabha* (1930), and *Vishalandhra Mahasabha* (1949) and resisted during the colonial era when the Nizam of Hyderabad tried to impose Urdu. In fact, the Osmania University was established by the Nizam under the same policy, and thus the linguistic policy of the Nizam had already excluded ordinary people of Telangana. In the post-colonial period, the Government of India continued English as an official language, so when the Telangana region was merged with the erstwhile British administered coastal Andhra, the residents of the coastal region Andhra region automatically captured public offices and opportunities because they were already trained in English language. The people of Telangana region could not enter into public office because they were trained in Telegu and Urdu language. To resist with the exclusion, the Telangana people especially students of Osmania University started demanding separate statehood in 1969 and for that they formed Telangana Praja Samiti (TPS). The TPS contested elections in 1971 and won 11 parliamentary constituencies out of 14, but somehow got merged with the Indian National Congress. However, the TPS created awareness about the issue through pamphlet, posters and public meetings.

The story of the Telangana movement suggests that it was a struggle against discrimination and backwardness of a region but actually it was also resistance against India's nation building project, where one India (erstwhile princely ruled India) fought against another India (erstwhile British empire ruled India). The book provides a good historical account of the Telangana movement when it reached its peak, but does not provides reasons for why, after a certain period, it fell into a dormant situation, especially after 1971 and during the 1980s. The 'federalisation of Indian polity' which began after 1967 and the 'regionalisation of India polity' which began after 1980s seems to have played very important roles in pushing the movement to the back seat, since both processes provided regional elites and sub-regional elites with an opportunity to be incorporated into the power structure. However, the author seems to suggest that the Maoist turn in the social movements of India in the mid-1970s further soaked the elites of the Telangana movement, and pushed it to the backseat. The disillusionment of those activists with

Maoism rejuvenated the movement in the first decade of the twenty-first century, culminating with the formation of the state in 2014. Besides, the formation of Uttarakhand, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh in 2000 also gave new lean to the Telangana activists for relaunching the struggle for statehood.

The author finds marginalisation of the people from Telangana region as the principal reason behind the movements and demonstrates how language acted as a reason behind the marginalisation. He sees the continuity of the colonial policy and tactics in post-colonial India resulting in the marginalisation of people from a particular region, and to escape from that the people laid resistance by forming political and civil society organisations such as Telangana Praja Samiti (TPS) and Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS). In the formation of organisations, students of Osmania University played pivotal role. They did this by suspending old identities temporarily and forming new ones.

The book provides good insight into the role of space in the making of social movements and keeping the spirit of struggle alive. In the case of the Telangana movement, it is Osmania University which kept the spirit of the movement alive. Otherwise, the post-colonial Indian state with the use of its 'coercive apparatus' has left no stone unturned in killing such movements. Osmania University could nurture such space since it enjoyed some degree of autonomy because it was founded by none other but the Nizam of Hyderabad. The Indian state could not penetrate very easily into this university. The author argues that having such a space of the university resulted in the institutionalisation of student politics that made the Telangana movement successful. But how does this movement adversely affect the academic life of the first-generation university entrant students who came from the underprivileged background through the policy of affirmative action and protective discrimination, as claimed by the author? The book is silent about this question.

Nevertheless, the book can be a good starting point for the readers who are interested in resistance, student movements, identity formation, marginalisation, linguistic politics, elite-mass politics and formation of the post-colonial Indian state. Additionally, the book is very useful and insightful for readers of sociology, education and political science

disciplines who assess the process of backwardness and marginalisation through ethnographic studies.

Chandra Russo: Solidarity in Practice: Moral Protest and the US Security State

Cambridge University Press, 2018.

Reviewed by Anthony Huaqui, University of Massachusetts

Solidarity in Practice: Moral Protest and the US Security State by Chandra Russo (2018) examines the practice of “bearing witness” as an act of resistance to state violence and forging solidarity with the targets of state violence. Russo coins the term solidarity witness to refer to this resistance mode of making visible the unseen violence of the U.S. security state through ritual protest and embodied activism. By U.S. security state, Russo refers to the “amalgamation of domestic and foreign military, carceral and policing priorities that coincide with the global transition to neoliberalism” (p. 14). Using the ethnographic method of observer participation, Russo studies how three movement groups engage in solidarity witness, the latter’s historical influences, how activist participants make sense of the practice, and ultimately, some of the issues that arise from this mode of resistance.

Resistance within the contexts of Russo’s study expands traditional notions of political activity. Ritual protest and embodied activism are two key features in the practice of solidarity witness that challenge the dominant epistemologies which reinforce the U.S. security state. The use of public mourning, naming, religious symbolism and culturally significant space within ritual protest is used to evoke emotions that challenge social norms and contest the injustices of the security state. As an embodied form of resistance, solidarity witness allows activist participants to divest from their privilege, create a sense of closeness to targets of state violence, amplify the resistance of the aggrieved, and earn political credibility with a host of audiences.

Each of the movement groups that Russo examines in this study come from a lineage of radical pacifism whose origins are rooted with Historical Peace Churches. School of the Americas Watch (SOA Watch), Migrant Trail Walk, and Witness Against Torture (WAT) all come from this lineage which is “characterized by the pursuit of nonviolence at all levels of society; a cynicism toward the state [...] an emphasis on direct action and disobedience; and a commitment to moral right” (p. 17). Their religious roots provide the symbols and traditions that are used as repertoires of dissent against the invisible injustices of the U.S. security state. It is through these movement groups’ religiosity that dimensions of solidarity witness, such as ritual protest and embodied resistance, take up religious meaning to these activists:

“For Jessie, the physicality of walking ‘requires’ her to think of all the migrants who are forced to walk; it is an embodied and emotion-infused orientation to a political cause. The language of ‘incarnation’ suggests that Jessie interprets the embodiment of this walk in part through a Christian framework, which makes sense given that Jessie’s work with the Mennonite Church is what first brought her to the Migrant Trail” (p. 105).

This bridge between religiosity and resistance is referred to throughout the book as Russo explores how members of these movement groups understand and practice solidarity witness.

One of this book’s major contributions to the field of resistance studies is the analytical focus on individuals who are not the direct targets of injustice. The movement groups examined in this study are predominantly comprised of those who are in privileged positions to the U.S. security state, i.e. white, middle-class men and women. This challenges traditional approaches to resistance studies which assume that social change is rooted in the self-interest of the directly aggrieved. Activists here take a stand against the privilege afforded to them under dominant social and political systems by relinquishing material comforts and “paying attention” to injustices. The latter becomes especially important as their social positions provide them the opportunity and privilege to ignore state violence. As an ascetic political practice, solidarity witness allows activists to engage in subject work which “aims to craft a form

of collective subjectivity that starkly contrasts with what the dominant system demands” (p. 126). It is the subject work of solidarity witness that offers these privileged activists the ability to create resistant modes of being.

Alternatively, Russo also devotes a chapter in her book to addressing some of the complications with solidarity witness within each of the respective movement groups. It is here that the author could have spent more time analyzing these contradictions; especially considering the author is uncovering how activists in privileged positions do solidarity work across differences. Four modes of contention within the groups explored include: 1) the alienating effect to some of using ritual as direct action; 2) issues of exclusion; 3) concerns about the subject work of solidarity witness, and 4) how solidarity witness may not lead to institutional changes. When discussing issues of exclusion, Russo highlights how race and class-based issues arise internally for each movement group. For example, the privilege connected to the availability of taking time off to engage in political acts, such as walking the Migrant Trail, is not equally afforded to everyone. It is a privilege that mostly white, middle class people can afford, and this contributes to the movement groups remaining mostly white. Even discussions around privilege from inside the group are rarely brought up; only more macro-level privilege in relation to social structures is discussed.

This provides some great insights into the contradictions within these groups, as they aim to confront and deny their privilege but ultimately reproduce privilege dynamics internally along class and racial lines. However, this led me to want more analysis from Russo into these contradictions that many movements, past and present, often navigate. Only a few pages are devoted to each form of contention and it seems like a missed opportunity to contribute to larger dialogues surrounding how power operates within movements whose goal is to try and suppress it. Applying more analysis of these contradictions would not serve as a critique of these movement groups but instead offer a richer look into the complexities and difficulties of solidarity building and the denial of one’s privilege afforded from social structures.

In the end, Russo’s *Solidarity in Practice: Moral Protest and the U.S. Security State* (2018) provides a compelling look into the embodied

and ritual dimensions of solidarity witness. SOA Watch, Migrant Trail Walk, and WAT all make visible the often-invisible injustices of this neoliberal social and political structure. The subject work involved with this political practice offers insights into how other movements can create resistant modes of being that counter dominant epistemologies. This book is recommended to all readers interested in resistance studies, social movements, and solidarity formation.

Bloc by Bloc: The Insurrection Game

Out of Order Games. 2016.*

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

As a boardgame for up to 4 players focusing on the tactics of urban resistance, *Bloc by Bloc: The Insurrection Game* is a rather novel offering. ‘Insurrection’ has some specific definitional use in Marxist and Bolshevik theory, broadly as a mass-based proletariat uprising organised and directed by the party of the proletariat (Lenin, 1972, p.22), while it has been used in relation to resistance against global neoliberal capitalism (Danaher & Mark, 2003) and nonviolent resistance (see Zunes, 1994). However, TL, game designer and artist of *Bloc by Bloc*, defined a more non-ideological underpinning to the game: “Social insurrection is a defining feature of our time. It is a crucial form of resistance and joy in a diverse array of cities [...] Insurrections sustain social movements and they have reshaped the political map”, as a bottom-up fight by ‘social antagonists’ against “capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and the state” (CrimethInc., 2018). It is these social antagonists that the game’s creators Rocket Lee and Tim Simons have attempted to situate within “a specific ethical framework”, which does not situate “the conquerors or the powerful at the center of the narrative” (CrimethInc., 2018). The four playing factions are ‘workers’, ‘students’, ‘prisoners’ and ‘neighbours’, with the latter an interesting addition in particular, invoking questions of how communities have incubated protests and occupations in urban

* Currently available, downloadable for free from *Out of Order Games*.
www.outofordergames.com

areas during recent uprisings. The original concept of a game such as this, its very existence, makes a significant step in challenging these common narratives, promoting resistance in a field where games concerning regular and irregular violent conflict has tended to dominate.

In my 2nd edition copy of *Bloc by Bloc* there was no introduction to the real uprisings that inspired the game, although this was apparently present in the 1st edition (Lefebvre, 2016). In terms of initiating discussion, understanding and knowledge of resistance this would be very useful, particularly in terms of highlighting perhaps lesser-known instances in popular memory cited by the developers (Oaxaca, 2006; Athens, 2008), alongside Oakland 2009, Cairo 2011, Istanbul 2013 and Ferguson 2014 (Out of Order Games, 2016). The game's emphasis on clashing with police, the need to occupy and defend physical space, is especially interesting to me in relation to the creators' referencing the Egyptian Revolution 2011. This is because of the need to explore the relationship between violent and nonviolent dynamics in Egypt and during the broader 2010/11 West Asia North Africa (WANA) Revolutions, as 'hybrid' resistance or rioting (see Brown, 2018; 2019; Case, 2018). In the Tunisian context, such hybrid resistance I found to be justified by many different participants in those particular circumstances (Brown, 2019). Rioting has often been suggested in the media as not having a political purpose, leading to periods of rioting being dismissed as nothing more than criminal—the 2011 UK riots, Gilet Jaunes and recent Iraq and Lebanon protests (Shafaaq, 2019). However, this speaks to issues of whether rioting has a practical utility, for example whether it risks alienating broader popular support. *Bloc by Bloc* would be a novel way of initiating discussion of such issues with a group.

In this regard, the game's advantage is that although engaging the police is a significant aspect, the violent aspects of such resistance are not glorified or promoted in the game. Riot vans are 'destroyed', police are 'defeated' or can be 'kicked out'; there is no physical injury to people implied. In this sense players can ultimately project their imagination or sense of this on to the game. Indeed, TL explained that, "it's also important not to fetishize the violence involved in these uprisings", which are "necessary parts of sustained insurrection. But the success of these uprisings is not determined by their ability to destroy or kill". Rather, TL

suggests that it is the transformation of social relationships, of insurrection as “expression of everyday resistance and organising” (CrimethInc., 2018). The gameplay shows the creators were effective in this regard, as engaging in the constructive resistance elements of occupation and liberation as early as possible seemed to be crucial to ‘win’, as well as keeping up momentum against the police. Such constructive aspects, such as liberating a public district, are best attained through cooperation and worthwhile pursuing, giving players a 1-turn reprieve from the 10-night countdown (when the military arrives!). Variables relating to physical occupations presented in the game, such as their constructive or defensive nature, as well as their vulnerability to security force action, could be raised as discussion points among players. In contrast, I found the loot actions largely a distraction (unless part of one’s agenda card)—perhaps reflecting the violent distraction they can prove to be in real life, and their perceived apolitical nature.

The final aspect of *Bloc by Bloc* that may be particularly notable regarding resistance is the assigning of ‘agenda’ cards for each faction. One may consider the game as missing the nuances of intra-group power dynamics and conflict that have been perceived as clear weaknesses of, say, the Occupy movement and indeed the WANA revolutions. The agenda cards largely assign social or cooperative goals—introducing another quite unusual dynamic for boardgames—which can seem quite formidable, however effective cooperation applying each faction’s unique ability simplifies matters. Nevertheless, there is a ‘vanguardist’ and ‘nihilist’ card as hidden agendas, which can lead to a faction subverting the cooperative approach. Interestingly, Rocket Lee explained the intention of these cards as being a way of avoiding the replication of “power dynamics at the table [...] You know, like when a white guy tells everyone what to do” (Lefebvre, 2016). They further suggested that, “Ironically, by introducing an element of uncertainty and suspicion among players, you protect their individual agency” (CrimethInc, 2018). Thus, power dynamics are not so much abstracted in-game, as they are actually being played out through the players’ discussions and negotiations, tensions and resolutions. This is obviously on a minor scale and without the serious implications of a practical context, but this potentially makes such learning and the

opportunity to discuss these aspects afforded by the game all the more important.

In concluding—and mindful of the brutal turn that Hong Kong’s ‘urban insurrection’ has taken this year—I should point out TL’s own emphasis that Bloc by Bloc is intended to be “fun and educational”, and to assign any more significance would be “misleading and disrespectful to everyone who has been out there in the streets in real struggles that have real consequences”. Yet, “games can be powerful tools for exploring complex ideas” (CrimethInc., 2018). Concerning education, learning and discussion of resistance and specifically nonviolent resistance, Bloc by Bloc provides a base from which violent and nonviolent resistance tactics could be explored, as well as constructive resistance elements and indeed everyday resistance.

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