

JOURNAL OF RESISTANCE STUDIES

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## EDITORIAL

# **Researching Resistance: Methodological Challenges, Ethical Concerns and the Future of Resistance Studies**

**Anton Törnberg**

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Resistance is a complex phenomenon: dynamic and uncertain, constantly adapting to surrounding power structures and often leading to unpredictable consequences. Metaphorically speaking, it is reminiscent of a river surging through a landscape, adjusting dynamically in relation to the physical conditions of the surroundings: to hills, slopes, ascents and obstacles that momentarily hinder its sweeping progress, but also to trenches and drains that may canalize the river in certain directions. Yet despite how it is affected by the environment, the river itself also contributes to changing this very landscape. In the same way, power and resistance operate in a mutually constitutive relation: forming and reforming, shaping and reshaping, thus remolding the conditions of its very existence. Underground currents may, in certain circumstances, reach the surface and erupt into sudden cascades that generate waves and ripples across the surface. These can multiply and diffuse, and may ultimately contribute to the radical alteration of the river's shape. Other times, these underground currents may never reach the surface, but gradually and unnoticeably excavate the surrounding terrain, forging underground tunnels and passageways. In these conditions, even the smallest and most seemingly-insignificant changes may sometimes have a large impact, constituting tipping points that lead to global consequences.

In this way, characterized by currents, eddies and storms, as well as moments of lull and calm, resistance is not a linear phenomenon that can easily be measured, calculated or predicted. There are surely ebbs and

flows in the level of activity, but as Taylor (1989) neatly captures with his notion of *abeyance*, decline in movement activity does not constitute its disappearance. On the contrary, resistance tends to endure and prevail even through hard times, though sometimes in less visible forms. Pockets of resistance may thus maintain under the surface, only to suddenly erupt again when structural conditions are more favorable.<sup>1</sup>

As researchers, we have certain access to these flows: a temporal and partial entrance to a dynamic relation undergoing perpetual and often unpredictable change. The methods, tools and instruments we use may thus at best provide us with a limited insight into these processes. While some instruments capture what happens on the surface, others are needed to illuminate the processes occurring underneath. But similar to other social phenomena, there is no universal method capable of dealing with resistance in its entirety. Different methods are needed to cast light on different aspects of the phenomenon under study, while they simultaneously exclude other aspects. This accentuates the importance of method pluralism, and the need to remain open to different combinations of methods when approaching complex phenomena such as resistance.

This leads us to a key strength of resistance studies as a field. Drawing upon a variety of research fields and disciplines, including gender studies and feminism, peace studies, political science, sociology, critical race studies, anthropology, psychology, and critical legal studies, has benefitted the development of widespread method pluralism in studies of resistance. Spanning methodological approaches such as discourse analysis, case studies, narrative analysis, action research, ethnographic studies and participatory observation, there is indeed a rich repertoire of tools available to resistance scholars. Yet it is undeniable that there exists a predominant bias towards qualitative studies in the field. There are important exceptions, like Chenoweth and Stephan's (2011) highly influential study of the conditions under which civil resistance succeeds or fails, but nonetheless the field is dominated by qualitative approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> But like most allegories, this one has its limitations. Resistance does not draw from an infinite source, nor is it so structurally determined that it rises automatically in response to structural conditions, but always emerges from actors and their agency.

In fact, all submissions to this special issue were qualitative or conceptual studies and a cursory review of the previous issues of *Journal of Resistance Studies* shows a strong bias towards qualitative and theoretical studies, with not a single quantitative paper.

On the one hand, this is not very surprisingly. Traditionally, Resistance Studies has often focused on the more subtle, everyday forms of resistance, or the processes and practices occurring beneath the surface. The field was developed partly in response to the alleged overrepresentation within Social Movement Studies on explicit, organized forms of resistance (i.e. what's manifest on the surface), which arguably risks to neglect or exclude those resistance practices that are performed in secret, disguised as hidden transcripts or concealed as symbolic codes (Scott 1990). These less tangible practices often resist being captured by blunt instruments that focus on immediate, observable and easily measured phenomena. For instance, actions which may appear at first glance as blind obedience to authorities may conceal subtler forms of resistance practices that are invisible for those in power, and consequently also easy to miss by scholars far from the heat of the battle. This brings to mind the old Ethiopian proverb that James Scott quotes in the introduction to his book, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*: “When the great lord passes the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts”. Indeed, we can hardly hear nor smell such subtle practices of defiance while reclining comfortably in our armchairs.

In her contribution to this special issue, Minoou Koefoed highlights these issues, emphasizing the strengths of ethnographic methods in capturing the “backstage” of resistance practices. She accentuates the necessity of contextual awareness in order to detect and interpret those subtle acts that may otherwise pass by unnoticed. While such careful, qualitative, in-depth studies are indeed crucial, Resistance Studies is also in need of broadening its perspectives, aiming for generalization and allowing the investigation of patterns across cases. Therefore, the paper by Brian Martin and Majken Sørensen is an interesting complement to the ethnographic approach, suggesting a broadening of the field by employing experiment-like methods to investigate the efficacy of non-violent strategies. Besides theoretical and scientific value, these more

rigorous approaches to assess and compare different types of resistance strategies could also be of great practical value for activists.

Another methodological possibility that follows the same logic as experiments, while avoiding some of the problems that Brian and Majken identify relating to e.g. ethical issues and costs, is systematic comparative studies. For instance, Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) constitutes a particularly promising approach that builds upon experimental logic, but instead uses naturally occurring experiments. The basic procedure of QCA allows it to embrace causal complexity, i.e. the fact that whether a condition is causally relevant often depends on the presence or absence of other conditions. It also permits the investigation of situations when the outcome of interest can follow from different combinations of causal conditions (equifinality) and when similar conditions may lead to dissimilar outcomes (multifinality): conditions that are arguably very common when studying resistance (Ragin 2008). While QCA is less costly than regular experiments, and also associated with fewer ethical problems, it is however also less flexible since naturally occurring experiments do not allow us to tamper with variables. Nevertheless, both of these methodological approaches hold great promise to further develop the field of resistance studies, both theoretically and practically.

Finally, relating to the idea that our instruments and tools have a saying in both studies and practices of resistance, Otto von Busch elaborates in his paper on how a return to matter would affect the methodological aspects of Resistance Studies. As a field, Resistance Studies has for long been heavily inspired by the linguistic turn with its focus on language, thus largely neglecting the role of matter. Otto aims at (re)introducing a materialist methodology, by using a case of how consumer objects are transformed to interfere with consumer relationships to become tools for cultivating resistant capabilities. This evokes a number of relevant questions, such as: can we consider material things as co-resister, and what happens with methodology if we broaden the notion of agency to include material things?

## Ethical Concerns in Resistance Studies

A central theme that runs through many of the papers in this issue is that of ethics. As several of the authors point out, questions of methodology are always closely and inevitably related to ethical concerns. As researchers, we observe, participate, engage and contribute—thus shaping the very objects that we study. Like the river, our objects of study undergo constant change not only as we are studying them, but also *because* we are studying them. This includes, of course, practices in the actual field of research, as scholars using e.g. action research and participant observations often actively and explicitly aim to be part of what they are studying. Similarly, the concrete results of our research may either help activists or, at worst, hinder practices of resistance.

However, this aspect of change also occurs on a deeper, epistemological level which has to do with a social reality that is highly complex, consisting of multiple entrenched, complex systems. This implies that when we approach a certain phenomenon we delineate it as an object of study based on certain perspectives and assumptions: we focus on certain parts of it while leaving out others. In this sense, science is never objective and external, but rather an inseparable part of the object of study (Bhaskar 1979). By implication, any empirical project is inevitably enmeshed with ethics and politics; by cutting off a certain phenomenon, we also frame it in a certain way.

While this applies to all types of social research, an interesting aspect of studying resistance is that it evokes some unique ethical challenges and dimensions not likely to be an issue in other strands of research. Often students of resistance are driven not only by a desire to accumulate abstract knowledge, but also that the knowledge generated actually come to practical use: to empower communities in resistance or in various ways sharpen the tools available to resisters. As a result, it is not necessarily the case that the same ethical guidelines apply for resistance studies as for other fields of the social sciences.

For instance, despite our noble intentions, there is always the risk that the results of our research can be used to suppress resistance. To accentuate and draw attention to resistance practices obviously poses a potential risk for the resisters, and revealing the practices themselves also

risks rendering them less effective or even useless. While this may not have constituted any serious problems for the peasants in James Scott's (1990, 2008, 2009) historical studies on everyday resistance—simply because his subjects were not alive during the course of investigation—it does pose more serious problems for studies of contemporary forms of resistance, and may even have a decisive impact on the potential for, and outcome of, resistance. These challenges are of course not exclusive to studies on clandestine forms of resistance, but apply equally to overt forms of mobilizations and tactics employed by activists and social movements. There is always a risk that insights generated from studying these resistance acts could be used by those in power to develop even more effective counter-measures. How should resistance scholars deal with these issues: do we perhaps need our own version of the Hippocratic Oath?

This special issue includes several interesting pieces that discuss various aspects of these questions. In order to encourage a dialogue on these important issues, I have chosen to open the issue for extensive comments by including shorter papers that discuss particular ethical issues that researchers have encountered in their own research.

Drawing upon fieldwork amongst resistance activists in Western Sahara, Joanna Allan discusses how studies on resistance may involve unique ethical challenges. More specifically, she raises four ethical dilemmas in relation to Resistance Studies, namely *participant risks*, *state permissions and lying to authorities*, *personal risk and privilege*, and *anonymity*, and shows that sometimes the most ethical thing to do actually contravene some of the traditional plinths of academic ethical frameworks. This requires that the researcher is prepared to actively contribute to the resistance struggle that she studies.

In her piece, Massimiliana Urbano looks at how ethic review boards and their principlist approach to ethics guidelines may constitute possible methodological impediments for participatory action research, thus risking silencing critical and socially engaged research. She argues for more flexible guidelines that depend on the purpose and context of the particular study.

Mino Koefoed discusses how to deal with situations that may emerge when we engage in participant observation in resistance movements with

armed branches. In this thought-provoking piece, Minoò draws from her own experience of participant observation with the Kurdish movement in Turkey's southeast, when she was confronted with the dilemma of whether to observe, and even participate in, a weapon production workshop. This evokes relevant questions concerning how we should deal with situations when our ethical guidelines collide with methodological considerations. Where do we draw the line between gaining access to unique empirical material, while at the same time risking contributing to legitimizing illegal and/or immoral practices?

Drawing from her experience of fieldwork of urban activists in Malmö, Sweden, Christina Hansen highlights in her piece an issue that many of us may recognize, namely the potential tension and difficult balance between being both an activist and a researcher. How do we balance between being a “useful activist” and “useful researcher”? How should we deal with questions such as informed consent when we are shifting between these different roles? What are the advantages and challenges of having an “insider position”, in the sense of sharing ideological sympathies with our research participants?

Clearly, there are no easy answers to these questions, but the contributors in this issue raise pertinent points of which we as scholars must be aware and take into consideration when researching resistance. Perhaps a general conclusion from these discussions is that we should approach ethical concerns more as broad and open questions, rather than as strict ethical rules. Instead of taking a Hippocratic Oath, therefore, perhaps the field of Resistance Studies is more well-suited to a Socratic debate, continuously engaging with difficult questions and embracing the frequent lack of clear-cut answers.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Future of Resistance Studies: Resistance in the Digital Era**

While reviewing the submissions for this special issue, I noticed that none made any predictions for the future of Resistance Studies. This is probably because the discipline favors explaining and understanding what happened and why, rather than forecasting trends. That said, one

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<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Sarah Freeman-Woolpert for suggesting this metaphor.

of the privileges of writing an editorial is the possibility to speculate on the future for Resistance Studies, in this case particularly in relation to methodological issues.

So far, we have established that the structural context or socio-material landscape has a decisive impact on resistance, and that power and resistance thus exist and co-evolve in a complex and intricate relation. With this background, in recent decades we have seen a dramatic change in the socio-material landscape as social interactions and everyday forms of communication are increasingly moved online. This fundamental process of digitalization has brought with it changes in the means of domination and suppression, but has also given rise to new, emerging resistance practices.

Hence, while technology has undeniably created new possibilities for surveillance and controlling a population<sup>3</sup> by relaying regime propaganda, monitoring dissidents, infiltrating networks and tracing dissidents for spreading regime-critical posts on social media, there is no doubt that digitalization also has enabled new forms of resistance, thereby forming and reshaping resistance in and of itself. Based on this, I believe we may distinguish between two main changes in contemporary resistance practices: changes in the repertoires of contention and new spaces of contention.

## Repertoire of contention

In a now-classic study, the historian Charles Tilly (1986) discussed the relation between resistance practices and the established political regime. Tilly introduced the notion of a repertoire of contention, defined as [i] the set of tactics available at a given historical moment and [ii] the common characteristic or logic shared by these tactics. The basic idea is that activists do not exist outside their historical context and cannot freely choose from an infinite number of tactical options, but rather chose a tactic from a culturally and historically specific set: the repertoire of contention. This repertoire tends to change over time, depending on

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<sup>3</sup> One example of this is mentioned by Minoos in this issue, namely how the Turkish surveillance system uses sensors that pick up phone signals and thereby enable them to detect and target resistance activities.

e.g. broader social and political context and power structures. In other words: different regimes foster different styles of protest.

Tilly distinguished between a traditional repertoire which was predominant in the 18th century and comprised various local forms of collective action, aimed directly at the perceived social problems. This includes tactics such as food riots, disruptions at festivals, appropriation of land and destruction of property. In the middle of 19th century the power structures became more centralized as the national state grew stronger, which led to the emergence of a modern repertoire of contention that focused on creating alliances and coalitions that could address these new power structures. Thus, the specific tactics became more modular and were adapted so that they could be transferred more easily from one setting to another, and includes e.g. boycotts, mass petitions, public meetings, strikes, and blockades.

In recent decades, we have seen an upswing of new forms of online-based tactics such as DDoS-attacks, e-blockades and hacktivism, but also various digitally-enabled forms of (offline) collective action, such as swarm mobs and network-based action (e.g. Bennett and Segerberg 2013, Earl and Kimport 2011). Interestingly, these tactics seem to differ from both the traditional and modern repertoire that is based to a large extent on physical co-presence and certain assumptions regarding the enduring nature of protest. In other words, people gathered in space and time, and activism tended to remain relatively stable over time. But with these emerging digital tactics, collective participation no longer requires co-presence in time and space: we can now participate online and from home, and physical togetherness varies between different tactics (Rolfe 2005). Furthermore, digitally-enabled collective action does not necessarily take the form of a long and continuous stream of contention; it is sometimes rapid and overwhelming but short-lived and sporadic, something which is illustrated in the recent viral and global mobilizations to denounce sexual assault and harassment using the hashtag #metoo. Are there reasons to assume that there is a fundamental change occurring in the underlying logic of contemporary collective action—are we observing the emergence of a new digital repertoire? What is the nature of these digital tactics and what potential do they carry in relation to social change? These are questions that clearly deserve more attention.

## Spaces of contention

Besides these dramatic changes in the methods and means of resistance employed by protesters, it is clear that the spaces for social interaction also undergo important changes. Using terms such as *free spaces* (Evans 1979), *counter-publics* (Fraser 1990), *safe haven* (Hirsch 1993) and *safe spaces* (Gamson 1996), scholars have for long emphasized the central role physical spaces play in relation to resistance and collective mobilization by creating possibilities to develop both a repertoire of tactics and strategies, but also to foster oppositional consciousness. There are many examples of these kinds of spaces throughout history, including the black churches in civil right movements, union halls, student lounges, separatist women groups, and the working class cafes in the French revolution. These physical spaces thus often serve as clandestine embryos for mass mobilization and insurgency, offering a protective shelter against repression and the prevailing hegemonic ideologies in society but also serving as a hub for the diffusion and circulation of ideas and ideologies.

While physical spaces are undeniably still relevant in mobilization, much indicates that they are now moving to the electronic realm as their functions are increasingly realized through electronic networks, independent of physical space. Recent studies of contemporary revolutions and mobilizations such as the so-called Arab spring clearly indicate that social media often plays a significant, but not undisputed, role in revolutionary processes, creating a space of freedom in a totalitarian context which would not otherwise exist (Howard et al. 2011, Mourtada and Salem 2011). This suggests that what constitutes the 'backstage' of resistance may thus be shifting, increasingly moving to the digital arena. Accordingly, Facebook groups and Internet forums may be the new cafeterias of the future revolution, with Twitter constituting the new speakers corner. If this is indeed the case, this brings certain challenges to the fore regarding how we as researchers should deal with these changes: are our traditional tools and methods of data collection and analysis sufficient, or are more fundamental changes required? In the latter case, what would a digital ethnography look like? This leads us to the next point.

## New methods and means of studying resistance

Besides forming and changing resistance as a practice and an object of study, digitalization also contributes by shaping the means, methods and possibilities available for scholars to study these practices. Digitalization thus brings about both new possibilities as well as methodological challenges when it comes to researching resistance.

Increasing use of digital services has given social scientists unprecedented access to previously unimaginable data: traces of the lives, dreams, and feelings of hundreds of millions of people. What is interesting is that Internet and social media platforms provide a form of naturally-occurring longitudinal social data of a quality not previously imaginable, thus providing the opportunity for powerful new studies. We may now dissect wide-scale social change in detail and closely follow entire communities over time, tracing key actors, networks, groups and their interactions. In this sense, digital data provides a unique entrance to the discourses of everyday life: in words, songs, jokes and in the otherwise often impenetrable world of kitchen-table discussions. These new data sources open doors to arenas and fields of resistance previously understudied, including non-emancipatory mobilizations such as extreme-right resistance (Caiani, Della Porta, and Wagemann 2012). The lack of research on this topic can be explained both by the fact that scholars often focus on movements with which they themselves sympathize, but also in how the difficulties (and dangers) of gaining access to this field has led to a consistent lack of data. Interestingly, digitalization provides us with a possible entrance to this world and, in a sense, practical means to untangle the grassroots of the extreme right.

At the same time, these exciting possibilities for resistance studies also carry with them certain challenges that need to be addressed. Interested scholars have for long been limited by multiple methodological challenges, perhaps foremost relating to the sheer amount of unstructured and unruly textual data that often characterize social media. Thus even relatively small data sets can be difficult to approach as it is hard to delineate, select and confine materials consisting of millions of texts, posts or tweets. To make matters worse, these texts are often short, lack discursive context and spread in complex and highly non-linear ways, making them difficult

to extract and study using established methodological and analytical approaches.

Again, the way forward does not come from any singular, omnipotent methodological solution. There is no parochial method capable of embracing this type of data in its entirety. Rather, this further accentuates the necessity of an informed method-pluralism and openness to innovative combinations of methods in order to harvest the full potential of this data. Thus, we need to combine powerful techniques for automated text analysis developed in computer science such as Topic Modeling, Sentiment Analysis and Cluster Analysis, capable of organizing and categorizing large quantities of unstructured data and thus rendering a valuable overview or map of the content, with qualitative approaches that are more sensitive for uncovering those subtle linguistic nuances, coded strategies and symbolic meanings that often lie deeply embedded in texts. There is no doubt that Resistance Studies as a field has much to gain in being at the forefront of this methodological development, but also has much to contribute considering the rich experience of using qualitative methods to unmask and highlight hidden and less tangible social practices.

## **Conclusion**

To wrap up, resistance is indeed a complex and dynamic phenomena that is constantly adapting to surrounding contexts and social structures. If we are interested in following these often unpredictable flows, as well as describing and explaining contemporary forms of resistance, we must consequently follow the arenas wherein these processes are played out. This also requires that Resistance Studies as a field must act as a pioneer when it comes to methodology.

To this end, this special issue aims to highlight the practice of researching resistance, which includes a range of both methodological and ethical questions that we must consider when doing research in our field. The various papers in this issue put focus on the tools we use; their advantages as well as their limits, and how they potentially also affect the very object that we are studying. This topic is important for maintaining a broad methodological competence in the field and avoiding the risk of adjusting and delimiting our research questions out of convenience

in accordance to the methods we like and feel comfortable with—thus risk ending up like the drunkard searching for his car keys under the streetlight, not because that is where he lost them, but because this is where the light is.

Due to the inherent complexity of our object of study, different tools and methods are needed to highlight different aspects of what we are studying: to capture both what happens on the surface, but also to understand the more covert processes occurring underneath. I believe such a method-pluralist endeavor is essential if we are interested in studying the interaction between these levels and the link between clandestine and small-scale forms of resistance and the processes of overt, organized mass-mobilizations. This schism cannot be solved through analytical means only; we need to study these processes empirically as they unfold.

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# Accessing the Backstage: Ethnographic Research Methods in Resistance Studies<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abstract*

*This article aims to critically discuss particular advantages, disadvantages and challenges concerning ethnographic research within Resistance Studies. By so doing, four methodological aspects of ethnography will be scrutinized in depth. These are epistemological assumptions referred to as the ethnographic stance, the practice of doing participant observation, the emic-etic distinction, and the emphasis on thick description. Fusing James Scott's notion of hidden resistance with Erving Goffman distinction between the frontstage and backstage of self-presentation, this article suggests that ethnographic research methods could be particularly useful to access backstage spheres, and thereby a useful tool for observing hidden resistance practices. As hidden resistance draws its strength from the virtue of being disguised, ethnographic resistance studies imply ethical challenges particular to Resistance Studies. This is especially relevant in research contexts characterized by high levels of violence and repression.*

## Introduction

Several useful works are available on research methods and methodologies, some of which are particularly relevant for Resistance Studies. Some examples are Linda Smith Tuhiwai's account on decolonizing methodologies (Smith Tuhiwai, 2012), various works on feminist research methods (see e.g. Ackerly, B. and True, 2010; Laliberté & Schurr, 2016; Reinhartz &

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Carolina Valente Cardoso, Viggo Vestel, Lisa Åkesson and Mona Lilja for useful comments and literature suggestions regarding ethnographic research methods in the process of writing this article.

Davidman, 1992; Wibben, 2016) and feminist epistemologies (see e.g. Alcoff & Potter, 1993; Doucet & Mauthner, 2002; Grasswick, 2011), Leslie Brown and Susan Strega's edited volume on anti-hierarchical and resistance-based research methods (Strega & Brown, 2005), Donatella Della Porta's volume on methodological practices in social movement research (Donatella Della Porta, 2014), as well as Stephen Shukaitis, David Graeber and Erika Biddle's book on militant activist research methods (Shukaitis, Graeber, & Biddle, 2007). However, none of these works scrutinize the particularities of ethnography for its potential usefulness in resistance-related studies.

At the same time, Susan Seymour argues that anthropology has played an instrumental role for the emergence of the field of Resistance Studies (Seymour 2006), partly due to the influence of the works of James Scott, seen by some as 'a catalyst for resistance studies' (Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou 2009). Ethnographers and anthropologists have, since the 1980's, '...actively sought "cracks" in systems of dominance and "sites" of resistance by subordinate groups' (see e.g. Abu-Lughod, 1990b; Colburn, 1989; Hoffman, 1999; Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou, 2009; Ortner, 1995; Scott, 1985, 1990; Seymour, 2006). Despite what appears to be a strong anthropological influence in Resistance Studies, Sherry Ortner argues that '... the most influential studies of resistance are severely limited by the lack of an ethnographic perspective' (Ortner 1995:173).

Much could be said about this proposed deficit, but the aim of this article is not to investigate the extent to which this critique potentially holds water, also for more recent Resistance Studies literature. Nor is the aim to scrutinize the ramifications such a deficit would potentially entail for our understanding of resistance practices and movements. Rather, this article embarks on a critical investigation exploring potential advantages, disadvantages and ethical dilemmas that may emerge in ethnography-based resistance studies projects. The aim of the present article is to answer the following research question: what are the particular advantages, disadvantages and challenges concerning ethnographic research within Resistance Studies? By so doing, I apply Sandra Harding's useful distinction between methods and methodology, viewing the former as 'techniques for gathering evidence', and the latter

more related to epistemology and ontology as ‘a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed’ (Harding, 1987:2-3). Similarly, I understand anthropology on the one hand and ethnography on the other in line with Tim Ingold as two intimately connected yet distinct endeavors, where the latter is more closely connected to the methodic tradition of doing participant observation. Ingold suggests:

The objective of anthropology, I believe is to seek a generous, comparative but nevertheless critical understanding of human being and knowing in the one world we all inhabit. The objective of ethnography is to describe the lives of people other than ourselves, with an accuracy and sensitivity honed by detailed observation and prolonged first-hand experience (Ingold, 2011:229).

Whereas there are various sub-approaches to ethnography, including auto-ethnography (Ellis, Adams and Bochner, 2011), collaborative ethnography (Lassiter, 2005) critical ethnography (Madison, 2012), feminist ethnography (Abu-Lughod, 1990; Davis and Craven, 2016), and multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995), I will in this article approach ethnography as it conventionally has been done within the traditions of social and cultural anthropology.

I will scrutinize four defining aspects of ethnography in depth from a theoretical framework, fusing Erving Goffman’s conceptualization of the frontstage and backstage of self-presentation (Goffman, 1959) with James Scott’s notion of hidden resistance (Scott, 1985, 1990). Firstly, I will discuss the epistemological assumptions guiding much ethnographic research, what Sherry Ortner termed ‘the ethnographic stance’ (Ortner, 1984). Secondly, I will address the concept and practice of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973). The third aspect will be the emic-etic distinction and the risks of ‘going native’, while the fourth and dominant aspect I will discuss is the practice of doing participant observation.

I will start this article with a section clarifying what I mean by Resistance Studies and mapping out the theoretical lens I will apply in the following analysis of this article. After that, I will describe the four above mentioned aspects of ethnographic research methods and methodologies. This will be followed by a reflexive discussion where I grapple with some

of the pros and cons, as well as some of the ethical implications these methodological aspects may imply for Resistance Studies in the light of my theoretical framework. The article concludes with a summary of the main findings.

## **Resistance Studies and the Nature of Resistance**

Much resistance-related literature has emerged in recent decades (see e.g. Amoore, 2005; Duncombe, 2002; Hoffman, 1999; Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Juris, Jeffrey & Sitrin, 2016; Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014; Scott, 1985, 1990; Seymour, 2006; Vinthagen, 2015). In line with Anton Törnberg, I see Resistance Studies as a relatively young but rapidly growing field of research (Törnberg, 2013), as well as an interdisciplinary and multilayered academic pursuit (Baaz, Lilja, & Vinthagen, 2017), which takes inspiration from, and sometimes overlaps with, related fields. Some examples are contentious politics (see e.g. McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 1994; Tarrow & Tilly, 2007), social movement studies, and literature on civil resistance and nonviolence (see e.g. Chenoweth & Cunningham, 2013; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2008, 2011; Nepstad, 2011; Roberts & Ash, 2009; Schock, 2015, 2013, G. Sharp, 1979, 2013; Vinthagen, 2016). I do not find it fruitful to narrow down the definition of Resistance Studies too radically, fearing this could lead to the exclusion of potentially valuable resistance perspectives. However, when I refer to Resistance Studies as a distinct and particular field of study in this article, I refer particularly to the post-structuralist-inspired Resistance Studies research tradition (see e.g. Abu-Lughod, 1990b; Hoffman, 1999; Johansson & Vinthagen, 2016; Lilja, Baaz, & Vinthagen, 2013, 2015; Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014; Ortner, 1995; Seymour, 2006; Sharp, 2000; Vinthagen, 2007; Scott, 1990, 1985).

In my reading, what distinguishes Resistance Studies as a distinct academic pursuit is its particular concern with what I here choose to term the ontology of resistance. With this, I mean the philosophical and empirical inquiry of the nature of resistance itself, both in conceptual and empirical terms. Resistance Studies asks what constitutes resistance, how resistance could be classified, and how do and could acts of resistance negotiate with, (re)produce, or undermine power (see e.g. Dahl, 1957; Foucault, 1980; Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014; Sharp, 2000) in its various

multilayered forms, expressions and manifestations. Resistance Studies tends, in this tradition, to be approached in an agency- and subject-oriented manner, in line with Lilja, Baaz and Vinthagen, emphasizing an interest in ‘the resistance act, the agency itself or the way of acting’ (Lilja, Baaz, & Vinthagen, 2015:416).

The way we understand resistance potentially could lead to methodological consequences; therefore, before I embark on my ethnographic journey it is crucial to clarify how the concept of resistance is understood in this article.

## **Resistance, its Hidden Forms, and the Importance of Accessing the Backstage**

Resistance studies is often criticized for its confusing definitions, or lack thereof (see e.g. Juris and Sitrin, 2016). Hollander and Einwohner argue that ‘everything from revolutions (...) to hairstyles (...) has been described as resistance’ (2004:534). However, in post-structuralist inspired accounts of resistance, the term is seen as closely connected with the concept of power, seen as productive, entangled and mutually constituted (see e.g. Sharp, 2000). Common to all acts of resistance is that they are undertaken by individuals or groups in a subordinated position in terms of power, or alternatively on behalf of, or in solidarity with, such groups, what Mona Lilja, Mikael Baaz and Stellan Vinthagen have termed *proxy resistance* (Lilja, Baaz, & Vinthagen, 2015:416). I find Stellan Vinthagen’s definition particularly useful, viewing resistance as ‘a subaltern practice that might undermine power’ (Vinthagen 2015:7). Resistance could be conducted individually or collectively, take overt and covert forms, occur on macro as well as micro levels, and should be understood as connected both with *action* as well as *opposition* (see Hollander & Einwohner, 2004; Juris & Sitrin, 2016). Resistance could be undertaken either with the conscious aim to, or/and with the possibility of, undermining dominating forms of power.

In his work from 1956 ‘The presentation of self in everyday life’, Erving Goffman used the metaphor of theatre and dramaturgy to make sense of human interaction and presentation of the self. Seeing the individual as ‘an actor’, and society as a ‘stage’, human beings, argued

Goffman, could be understood as to be playing several different ‘roles’ in their everyday lives. The roles or masks that individuals take on depend on the ‘audience’ who observes, as well as social factors like class, social hierarchies, and social norms. By making a distinction between what he saw as ‘the frontstage’ and ‘the backstage’ of human self-presentation, he demonstrated how subjects may present one image of one’s self in public (frontstage), and a different one in private spheres (backstage).

If we now take a deeper look at the work on ‘hidden resistance’ by James Scott, the methodological implications of Goffman’s observations described above become evident. In his works, James Scott (1990, 1985) calls to the surface how resistance practices do not need to be conducted openly and visibly on the ‘front stage’. On the contrary, he argues, resistance might just as well be ‘disguised, low-profile, [as well as] undeclared (...)’ (Scott, 1990:198). What he terms ‘the public transcripts’ could be defined as ‘(...) a shorthand way of describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate’ (Scott, 1990:2-5). The so-called ‘hidden transcripts’, on the other hand, could be found in the ‘discourse that takes place “offstage”, beyond direct observation by power holders’ (Scott, 1990:2-4). Furthermore, such hidden forms of resistance could be found when assessing the discrepancy behind ‘(...) what is said in the face of power and what is said behind its back’ (Scott, 1990:2-5). Or in other words: hidden forms of resistance could be traceable through assessing the discrepancy between backstage ‘the hidden transcripts’, and frontstage ‘public transcripts’.

Fusing Scott’s notion of hidden resistance with Goffman’s proposition of a backstage of self-presentation, I suggest that the way we frame resistance potentially entails methodological consequences. In order to study hidden forms of resistance, it seems necessary to obtain access to the research subject’s private spheres of resistance – the disguised backstages of resistance movements.

This leads to a section in which I seek to describe and discuss four aspects of ethnographic research methods and methodologies, which will later be analysed for Resistance Studies through this theoretical lens.

## Ethnographic Epistemologies

Sherry Ortner defines ethnography broadly as ‘the attempt to understand another life world using the self – as much of it as possible – as the instrument of knowing’ (Ortner, 1995:173). Ethnography furthermore refers to qualitative interpretations of data with the aim to understand other life worlds from the position of the people living them. Rejecting essentialist epistemologies, ethnography does not center on an interest in the scrutiny of things in themselves, but in how things are subjectively experienced by individuals and groups. Central to how Sherry Ortner understands ethnography is what she refers to as *the ethnographic stance* (Ortner 1995), seen as ‘much an intellectual (and moral) positionality, a constructive and interpretive mode, as it is a bodily process in space and time’ (Ortner 1995:173). In my reading the epistemological starting point here rests on the emphasis on subjective experiences representing what James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer see as ‘opportunities for understanding’ (Davies and Spencer, 2010:3). According to this view, subjective reactions, perceptions, experiences and emotions are seen as implicit components of ethnographic methodologies (Davies and Spencer, 2010:3).

Epistemologies of emotions and epistemologies of subjective experiences have also been a central component of feminist research methodologies (see Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2016), as well as researchers affiliated with the turn to *affect* and *the emotional turn* in various social science disciplines, which have increasingly gained influence across the specter of the social sciences since the 1990s (see e.g Ahmed, 2013; Clough & Halley, 2007; Flam & King, 2005; Gould, 2009; Thompson & Hoggett, 2012; Wetherell, 2012). Arlie Russell Hochschild proposes that emotions have what she calls a ‘signal function’, in the sense that it is from ‘feeling we discover our own viewpoint on the world’ (Hochschild, 2003:17). Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, researching wartime rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) launches what they term a ‘methodology of unease’, suggesting how emotionally disturbing (and unexpected) experiences and findings during field research became a useful methodological compass which, in turn, paved the way to a deepened and enriched understanding of the use of violence and rape in wartime DRC (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2016:129). This approach

resonates with the methodological concept of ‘revelatory moments’ in ethnographic research traditions, referring to unexpected or unplanned situations during fieldwork that evoke emotional reactions in the researcher, such as discomfort, unease or surprise, which eventually triggers new insights (Trigger, Forsey, and Meurk, 2012). Lynne Hume and Jane Mulcock (2004) show how experiences of discomfort and awkwardness during field research offer new courses of insights and revelation. Linda Green (1999) argues that her own experience of fear during fieldwork became a way of understanding the fear of her Mayan widowed interlocutors in Guatemala.

The epistemic value given to emotions, subjective and embodied experiences and encounters influence the research methods associated with ethnographic research. As a result, in the section below I seek to discuss one of the main methodic features defining ethnographic research methods – the practice of doing participant observation as a mean to collect empirical data.

## **Participant Observation**

Within anthropological research traditions, ethnographic fieldworks are characterized by their emphasis on participant observation, often framed as a defining feature of ethnographic research methods (see e.g. Balsinger & Lambelet, 2014; Hylland Eriksen, 2010; Geertz, 1973; Malthaner, 2014). Thomas Hylland Eriksen defines ethnographic fieldwork as ‘a thorough close-up study of a particular social and cultural environment, where the researcher is normally required to spend a year or more’ (Hylland Eriksen 2010:4). This is related to what Sherry Ortner referred to as ‘using the self’ and ‘a bodily process’, as discussed above; the researcher, by doing participant observation in prolonged ethnographic fieldworks, uses herself in a way in which ‘(...) the whole self physically and in every other way enters the space of the world the researcher seeks to understand’ (Ortner 1995:173).

Participant observation hence refers to a method of collecting empirical research material wherein the researcher seeks to understand her research subject(s) as far as possible from the position of the interlocutors themselves. This is done through prolonged participation in the everyday environment of the interlocutors. This also often includes learning the

local language, as well as embedding oneself in local customs, traditions, social practices, and ways of socializing. This is seen as related to the efforts of interpreting human perceptions, reflecting an ‘(...) interest in what people do and in understanding the meaning they give to their actions’ (Balsinger and Lambelet, 2014:145). In that sense, ethnographic research methods could be seen as bottom-up and human-centered, but also inherently time-consuming. In ethnographic research methods, the researcher is thus not constrained to the more distanced, self-contained methods like interviews with individuals representing her research environment. The participatory aspect in ethnographic research methods relates to the embodied, subjective, prolonged and active participation in whatever activities the interlocutors are doing. The idea here is that through shared and embodied experiences, subjective encounters, and ‘revelatory moments’, the researcher gains knowledge and insights into the empirical context which constitutes her research field. The assumption is that participant observation enables a deeper, or different, insight into the research subject. It could be argued that participant observation leads a different type of empirical data to be gathered, which could become more holistic and rich in detail. This leads to the next defining feature of ethnographic research methods discussed below, namely the importance given *to context*, what within anthropology and ethnography is known as thick description.

## **Thick Description**

Clifford Geertz suggested in 1973 that the act of doing ethnographic research should not predominantly be defined by methodic technicalities like ‘(...)establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on’ (Geertz, 1973:2). Rather, a defining feature of ethnography, he proposes, ‘(...) is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, “thick description” (Geertz, 1973:2). Ortner (1995) understands ‘thickness’ broadly as ‘(...) producing understanding through richness, texture, and detail, rather than parsimony, refinement, and (in the sense used by mathematicians) elegance’ (Ortner, 1995:175).

The ethnographic idea of ‘thickness’ has been understood and operationalized in anthropological research since the 1960s, and could be

seen to have gone through three major orientation shifts (Ortner, 1995). During the first years after the idea was introduced to anthropological theory, thickness came to mean 'exhaustiveness' which produced 'the almost unreadably detailed descriptive ethnography' (Ortner, 1995:174). Later, the term came to be associated with holism, assuming that the object of research was "a" highly integrated "culture" and that it was possible to describe the entire system or at least fully grasp the principles underlying it' (Ortner 1995: 174). After extensive theoretical debates and critiques of the limitations and weaknesses of these framings of thickness, in recent times, thick description still remains at the center of the ethnographic stance, but is now primarily understood as synonymous with *contextualization* (Ortner 1995:174). In my understanding, thick description could be seen as the consideration for, and the spelling out of, detailed descriptions of contextual aspects of our empirical research field, as well as our interlocutors. This could include sayings, descriptions of particular locations, situations, emotional reactions and responses, signs of affect, family backgrounds, religious beliefs and customs, social status, class backgrounds, smells, tastes, sensations, atmospheres, moods, symbols, as well as cultural and social codes and practices. Within ethnography, all these aspects would be seen as relevant for the understanding of the phenomena and practices of people in question.

Due to the richness of the empirical data gathered throughout participant observation, combined with the prolonged participation in the everyday lives and activities of our interlocutors as discussed above, ethnographic research methods and methodologies may enable researchers to gain a deeper, or different, understanding of the subject of our research.

However, before I introduce the analysis of the advantages, disadvantages and ethical challenges that may arise when applying these methods within Resistance Studies, I will below discuss the fourth aspect of ethnography that will be incorporated in this analysis: the ethnographic striving towards what is termed *emic perspectives*.

## **The Emic Perspective**

Ethnographic research aims towards capturing the subject of research as far as it is possible from the perspective of the subjects involved. Clifford Geertz argued in 1975 how cultures often are expressed and

reproduced in symbols, and that in order to understand how symbols express culture, it becomes necessary to strive towards understanding a given society as much as possible from the point of view of the people representing that particular cultural context themselves. This is what he termed “emic perspectives” (Geertz 1975). Lassiter translates the emic perspective as an insider’s view, as opposed to an “etic perspective,” or outsider’s view (Lassiter, 2005). That is not to say that all ethnographic studies only capture or deal with emic perspectives. For instance, when James Scott argues that acts of hidden resistance are not necessarily seen or experienced as resistance by the people understood to be undertaking these forms of resistance, he is applying an etic perspective. However, the ideal of altering the emic perspectives of our research environments,

‘(...) does not imply that we must get ”into people’s heads”. What it means, very simply, is that culture is a product of acting social beings trying to make sense of the world in which they find themselves, and if we are to make sense of a culture, we must situate ourselves in the position from which it was constructed’ (Ortner, 1984:113).

Below I will critically discuss advantages, disadvantages and ethical challenges concerning ethnographic research within Resistance Studies, building upon the foundations of the earlier discussions.

## **Ethnography in Resistance Studies: A Critical Reflection**

Participant observation is time-consuming. Establishing rapport, building up new social networks from scratch, building trust and acceptance, and learning new cultural and social rules – takes time. When the research context additionally requires the acquisition of new language skills, the time-aspect becomes even more pressing. Questions thus arise as to whether or not the added value that ethnography potentially has to offer Resistance Studies outweighs the additional time invested in the process.

Goffman’s distinction between what he sees as the frontstage and the backstage of human self-presentation (Goffman, 1956) illuminates how individuals may present different images of themselves in public versus private spheres. By taking part in the everyday activities of our

interlocutors, participant observation enables resistance researchers to gain access to backstage spheres of resistance movements and practices. This may enable critical insights into internal contradictions and conflicts, as well as potential (re)productions of power and hierarchy within resistance communities, which resisting subjects themselves would otherwise be inclined to conceal, or alternatively unable to point out.

In cases where there are clear discrepancies between what is being done (practice) and what is being said (discourse) within resistance communities, ethnography offers methodological tools wherein these discrepancies could be revealed to a larger degree. Such revelations may offer original, nuanced, and illuminating insights for Resistance Studies. From this perspective, ethnographic research methods could become a tool for critical resistance analysis, hence reducing the likeliness of what Lila Abu-Lughod criticize as overly-romantic narratives of resistance communities within resistance studies (Abu-Lughod, 1990b).

However, the opposite argument could also be made. For instance, it could be argued that precisely because of that long-term participation in the everyday lives of our research subjects, there is a risk that ethnographic resistance researchers 'go native' with their resistance community. This refers to a loss of emotional and analytical distance to the study subject due to excessive identification and sympathy stemming from taking an active part within the studied community, a methodological challenge which has been widely observed and discussed in anthropological and ethnographic literature. In my view, this occurs when the boundaries between the emic and the etic becomes so blurred out that the researcher loses ability to see her research field from the outside. It could be argued that such deep, personal 'embeddedness', identification, involvement, and sympathy with the resistance community in question is more likely to develop with lengthy participant observation, striving towards capturing the insider's view.

However, precisely because participant observation enables access to backstage spheres of resistance communities, it becomes particularly useful for projects aiming to understand covert, hidden and everyday resistance practices which, as argued above, occur precisely in backstage spaces. Participant observation thus becomes a especially useful research

method to broaden our understanding of the manifestations, dynamics, meanings, and implications of hidden resistance.

At the same time, this also poses crucial ethical challenges. For instance, if, as Said (1989) suggests, hidden resistance takes its strength by virtue of being hidden, would not the practice of illuminating such resistance potentially reduce these practices' potential of undermining power? Resistance Studies could be seen as a field of research driven by solidarity with subordinated groups, movements and individuals who struggle to increase their space of maneuvering where such spaces are limited, or who struggle to reduce oppressive political and cultural structures, and thereby creating different forms of societal change. If resistance researchers then produce texts which potentially enable powerful institutions, companies or State representatives to more effectively weaken the resistance we claim to support, I argue that this would undermine an important aspect of the ethos that gives rise to Resistance Studies. To put it in other words: if our research could weaken rather than strengthen the resistance of the subordinated communities we seek to understand, could such research ever be ethically justified from Resistance Studies perspectives? Some may counter this proposition by arguing that an academic publication, with its inaccessible language and style, unlikely will be read by anyone other than fellow academics, and as a result will pose minimal damage to the research communities in question. Whereas the inaccessibility of much academic research could hardly be denied, it becomes dangerously simplistic to dismiss a potentially-complex ethical issue based on assumption that nobody will read it. After all, as researchers we write because we hope to be read, and we hope to be read because we believe that our research has some kind of societal relevance. For Resistance Studies as an emerging academic field, as well as for the individual researcher in question, publishing peer reviewed articles in academic journals is clearly a fruitful, expected and necessary endeavor to pursue. At the same time, from an ethico-political point of view, I suggest that publishing should never be done at the expense of the communities with whom we study. While I agree with Maria Eriksson Baaz and Maria Stern, drawing from feminist ethnographic research traditions, that while critical self-reflexivity is of crucial ethico-political importance while conducting research, it is also important not to fall into the pitfalls of

‘navel-gazing’ (Eriksson Baaz & Stern, 2016:118). One example of navel-gazing could be to ascribe too much importance to our own research. At the same time, I still suggest we should take Said’s critique seriously and subject any resistance research project, whether based on ethnographic methods or other methods, to thorough ethical scrutiny and critical self-reflexivity. Furthermore, it may be that not all forms and practices of hidden resistance in all contexts take their strength from being hidden, but some may. Hence, if we use ethnographic methods as tools to access backstage resistance spaces, spaces which reveal structures and resistance practices that otherwise would have been hidden to the general public, it becomes particularly crucial to critically scrutinize the potential consequences our published research may entail, rather than turning to the convenience of simplistic ethical reasoning.

Participant observation could pose particular emotional, psychological and security-related challenges to resistance researchers in a more direct way than less-embedded, more emotionally distant methods of empirical data collection. This is particularly the case in conflict-ridden, repressive regions where participant observation may raise suspicion from repressive authorities due to what could be perceived as ambiguous boundaries between the researcher on one side and the resistance community on the other. I argue that this challenge becomes even more likely in resistance research projects wherein participant observation includes actively taking part in resistance practices themselves such as demonstrations, the process of organizing events, political meetings, etcetera. In extreme cases, ethnographic Resistance Studies may evoke serious practical challenges, where destructive outcomes or obstacles could include detentions or arrests, denial of official research permits, as well as deportations and country-bans.

Furthermore, because resisting subjects in Resistance Studies are often in subaltern positions in terms of power, while also acting in opposition to power or directly challenging power, interlocutors in Resistance Studies are often in a vulnerable position. The nature of Resistance Studies as an academic pursuit makes us as researchers inclined to engage with individuals and communities with a higher likelihood of being subjected to arrests, and in some cases even torture and other types of violent treatment by individuals and institutions in

power. Whereas this is not particular to ethnographic resistance research in itself, it could be argued that the prolonged and visible appearance of an (ethnographic) resistance researcher who participates in the day-to-day activities of individuals active in a resistance community may draw additional attention from local authorities to the resisting subjects in question. This could potentially create additional ethical challenges to ethnographic resistance research projects, compared to resistance research based on other research methods.

Since the 1990s there has been a boom in the interest in subjectivities, affect and emotions in various social science disciplines, what has been termed *the emotional turn* (see e.g. Flam & King, 2005; Gould, 2009; Thompson & Hoggett, 2012) and *the affective turn* respectively (Ahmed, 2013; Clough & Halley, 2007; Thompson & Hoggett, 2012; Wetherell, 2012). This reinforces the argument that resistance studies needs methodological perspectives which adequately capture subjectivities, as well as emotional and psychological dimensions of resistance (see Seymour, 2006). In a comparative ethnographic and linguistic study, James A. Russell shows how language used to describe and understand emotions differs widely across cultures and across linguistic groups (Russell, 1991). Illustrative of these differences could be the Arabic word *tarab*, used among other things to describe the particular feeling of ecstatic joy in personal encounters with music (Racy, 1991; Shannon, 2003), a feeling uncovered by words available in Indo-European languages like English. Other examples could be the Norwegian word *skadefryd* or its equivalent in German *schadenfreude*, describing the feeling of pleasure from another person's displeasure, another emotion word with no equivalent in English (Russell, 1991). Whereas most languages have lexical or conceptual equivalents to the English word for anger, there are some which do not, and others again – such as the case with Samoan and Biblical Hebrew – have several (see e.g. Fontaine, Scherer, & Soriano, 2013:337). In some languages, the word to describe anger is the same as the word used to describe *sadness* (ibid). What these studies illustrate is that words for emotions should be understood as cultural artifacts within their particular linguistic-cultural context without objective, essential meanings which could potentially be more easily translatable across languages. This, I would argue, indicates

that interview-based fieldworks in resistance studies in linguistic and cultural contexts, which differ from those of the researcher, could lead to insufficient or inadequate representations of precisely the subjectivities, experiences, narratives, emotional expressions and experiences of our interlocutors, which seem so important for resistance studies:

(w)hen we talk about emotion terms cross-culturally, it is crucial to describe what they actually mean for representatives of a different cultural or linguistic group – or, more specifically, what kind of appraisals, subjective experiences, action tendencies, expressions, and body changes accompany them (see e.g. Fontaine, Scherer, & Soriano, 2013:337).

Furthermore, because resistance cannot be adequately understood without understanding its relation to power, resistance studies requires methodological approaches that consider, as broadly and holistically as possible, the contextual particularities within which the practices understood as resistance occur. As Hoffman argues, power and resistance are ‘...shaped by cultural context and informed by assumptions that are both culturally particularistic and highly divergent’ (Hoffman 1999:673). Thus, both power and resistance is culturally, socially (and thereby also contextually) situated, making the thickness of ethnography particularly useful for understanding power and resistance. To illustrate my point, I would like to illuminate the case of ‘foot-dragging’ (see e.g. Colbourn, 1989), an act often referenced in resistance studies to illustrate how resistance can take covert forms. It is clear that the act of foot-dragging in itself does not necessarily need to bear direct relation to power or resistance. Rather, such an act becomes resistance due to those particular circumstances within which the foot-dragging occurs: for instance, when undertaken by a person or group of people in a subaltern position in terms of power, with the aim to undermine power or domination.

## **Conclusion**

This article has critically investigated some of the advantages, disadvantages and ethical challenges concerning the application of ethnographic research methods within Resistance Studies. Four ethnographic aspects have been explored in depth. These have been the ethnographic stance,

thick description, the emic-etic distinction, and the practice of doing participant observation. By so doing, the aim of this article has been to broaden the understanding of research methods and methodologies from, and for, Resistance Studies perspectives.

Through long-term participant observation in the everyday activities of resistance communities and movements, resistance researchers become equipped with methodological tools which are useful for gaining insights into the long-term processes of movement driven social change, but also their challenges, deficits and the internal contradictions. Participant observation provides resistance researchers with methods that potentially give access to backstage spheres of resistance. This makes ethnography particularly useful in projects concerning hidden resistance, occurring precisely in such backstage spaces. However, as I have argued in this article, this also evokes a number of complex ethical challenges, requiring careful consideration from resistance researchers.

Ethnographic research methods also enable researchers to actively engage in resistance practices as a method for empirical data collection. In this way, ethnographic research methods could be seen as useful tools for bridging the academia-resistance/theory-practice divide which still characterizes resistance studies.

At the same time, ethnographic methods are time-consuming, could be emotionally and psychologically challenging, and potentially put both researcher(s) and interlocutors at additional risk, especially in repressive contexts.

This article concludes that ethnography has much to offer Resistance Studies. At the same time, it is of crucial importance that research ethics, security, future research possibilities, the likeliness of obtaining research permits, and potential unforeseen consequences of publishing research results are carefully considered before potentially embarking on ethnographic Resistance Studies research projects.

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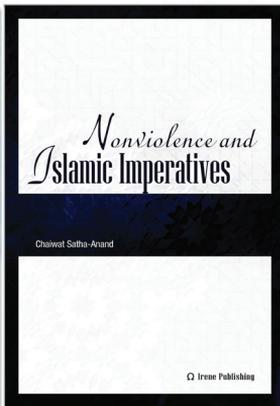
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*This important book by a famous Thai Muslim--theoretician and practitioner-- carries a double message. First, it puts to shame those who equate Islam with violence and terrorism, often called "jihadism" in a total misunderstanding of jihad. Second, it also puts to shame those who classify entire religions as violent or nonviolent; they may have both aspects, let us identify and build on the nonviolence, and move forward!*

**Johan Galtung, Founder Transcend International, Dr hc mult**

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# **Investigating nonviolent action by experimental testing**

**Brian Martin<sup>1</sup> & Majken Jul Sørensen<sup>2</sup>**

## **Abstract**

Strategic nonviolent action has developed enormously over the past century: there is a burgeoning body of research, widespread use in social movements, and regular training of activists. Even so, understanding of nonviolent action has been constrained by the methods used to investigate it, for example case studies and practical experience. The experimental method, as widely used in scientific research, has yet to be applied to the study of nonviolent action in systematic ways. In this article, two possible experiments with nonviolent action are presented to highlight some of the possibilities. Experiments with nonviolent action have the usual rationale of acquiring knowledge and two additional rationales: participant practical understanding and participant willingness to learn from experimentation. There are a number of obstacles to nonviolence experimentation, including lack of funding, ethical challenges, and opposition from various parties. Yet until experimental testing becomes routine, the full potential of nonviolent action will not be realized.

## **Introduction**

Nonviolent action can be a remarkably effective means of challenging social injustice, for example in opposing the exploitation of workers, racial discrimination, and repressive regimes. This is an important topic for the emerging field of resistance studies, and much that has been learned from the study of nonviolent action is also likely to be of interest for those studying other forms of resistance. Yet the potential power of nonviolent action is only gradually being recognized outside activist circles. Researchers have documented case studies of nonviolent struggles (Ackerman and DuVall 2000; Roberts and Garton Ash 2009; Stephan

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2009; Zunes et al. 1999), examined the previously understudied history of nonviolent action (Bartkowski 2013), examined the factors involved in success and failure (Nepstad 2011; Schock 2005), and documented campaigns transitioning from armed to nonviolent methods (Dudouet 2014). Chenoweth and Stephan's (2011) path-breaking study of anti-regime, secession and anti-occupation struggles over a century showed that nonviolent campaigns seeking regime change were far more likely to be successful than armed campaigns.

Nearly all the research into nonviolent action has been based on evaluations of naturally occurring events. Gandhi (1927) referred to his nonviolent campaigns as “experiments with truth,” yet these were not experiments in the sense of formal testing, but rather subjective evaluations of actions and campaigns based on personal observations. Similarly, Chris Dixon (2014: 103–104), who has researched contemporary “transformative movements,” recommends treating actions as experiments in the sense of analyzing successes and failures and applying lessons to future actions.

Drawing an analogy with natural science, it could be said that nearly all nonviolence research until now has been like observational studies in botany or astronomy — observing and classifying plants or celestial objects — without any laboratory experiments. The same can be said for most other areas of interest for resistance studies, such as everyday resistance and revolutions. Experimental science goes beyond observation to interact with nature. Modern science has adopted this experimental approach to such an extent — with associated technologies such as cyclotrons and gene splicers — that it sometimes seems isomorphic with science itself, though observational studies still play a role.

Within the social sciences, there are many possible methodologies, for example action research (McIntyre 2008), computer-based simulation, qualitative comparative analysis (Schneider and Wagemann 2012), and natural experiments (Dunning 2012). Genuinely experimental studies based on comparing different social interventions are less common. There is a long tradition of experimentation in psychology, though often limited by being carried out in labs. Many social policy initiatives, for example to reduce drug addiction, improve school performance, or reduce youth involvement in crime, are introduced with little or no systematic testing,

and sometimes are discovered by subsequent studies to be ineffective, or even to be counterproductive (Wilson 2013). In recent decades, there has been an increase in experimentation in political science, sociology and economics (Jackson and Cox 2013; McDermott 2013; Riach and Rich 2002), from which much can be learned.

The growing body of experimental research in sociology and political science includes numerous studies of factors that influence whether citizens vote (García Bedolla and Michelson 2012; Green and Gerber 2008). In these studies, usually aimed at learning how to increase voter turnout, members of an electorate are subject to various interventions and their subsequent voting behavior is monitored. Another group of studies looks at the responses of politicians to queries (Broockman 2013; Spada and de Sá Guimarães 2013).

Large-scale experimentation in real-life scenarios involving social change, which might be threatening to groups with vested interests, is rare. For example, there have been studies of industrial democracy, comparing the productivity and commitment of workers in different conditions for carrying out their work (Emery and Thorsrud 1976; Melman 1958; Williams 1982). Because most such studies require cooperation from management to be carried out, in recent decades there have been few such investigations. There is a continuing interest within businesses on ways to improve morale, reduce turnover, and enhance productivity, but this is constrained by a need to maintain the usual hierarchies in which management retains most of its prerogatives.

This same pattern is manifest in experimentation for military purposes. There is a huge investment in improving weapons technology, from bullets and missiles to drones, as well as in associated fields such as communications (Martin 2001). Also within the military, there is considerable investment in psychological research into how soldiers can best be trained to be effective on the battlefield and how they can build their commitment to their roles (Radine 1977). However, little is publicly known about any military-funded research that might be used to destabilize the military's line of command, for example on techniques to encourage soldiers to revolt, refuse orders, or abandon their posts — research that would be useful to nonviolent opponents of repressive regimes.

Compared to military research and development, nonviolence research operates on a shoestring budget, with hardly any money for laboratories or paying participants, much less for large-scale testing of techniques and preparedness such as staging simulations. The military can run exercises costing hundreds of millions of dollars, involving thousands of soldiers and numerous weapons systems worth billions of dollars. For instance, the worldwide market for military simulations and virtual training is about \$10 billion<sup>3</sup>. Meanwhile, any nonviolence exercise today would probably depend on volunteers and rely on the simplest of equipment.

The huge discrepancy between resources available for military R&D and those available for nonviolence R&D is seldom noted when comparisons are made between armed and unarmed struggles. In this context, it is remarkable that nonviolent campaigners have been as successful as they have been. Nonviolent campaigners are analogous to an army entirely composed of volunteers, few with any training, most of whom are only occasional participants and rely on cast-off weapons. The implication is that with more resources and with more research, nonviolent struggles are likely to be even more effective than they currently are.

Given the current straitened circumstances for nonviolence research, our aim here is modest: to present some of the issues to be considered in future nonviolence experimentation. In the next section, we outline some of the methods used in studying and attempting to improve nonviolent methods. Then we give two examples of experiments that could be undertaken, after which we turn to some of the challenges involved in nonviolence experimentation. Our hope is to encourage thinking about the possibilities for nonviolence experimentation as well as the difficulties it will involve.

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<sup>3</sup> The Global Military Simulation and Virtual Training Market 2015–2025 (London: Strategic Defence Intelligence, 2015), as summarized at <http://marketreportsstore.com/the-global-military-simulation-and-virtual-training-market-2015-2025/>.

## **Improving the effectiveness of nonviolent action**

The most common approach to the study of nonviolent action is the examination of case studies (Ackerman and DuVall 2000; Roberts and Garton Ash 2009; Stephan 2009; Zunes et al. 1999). Some campaigns, notably the Indian independence struggle under the leadership of Gandhi and the US civil rights movement under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr., have received extensive analysis, providing insights for activists and serving as strong inspiration.

However, along with learning lessons from a systematic case study approach, it is useful to acknowledge the shortcomings of this approach. One of the problems is a strong tendency to examine successes and ignore failures. More fundamentally, the outcome of any particular campaign may depend on circumstances (resources available to campaigners, political openings, opposition unity) and thus paint a misleading picture of which factors were significant for a campaign's effectiveness. Also, the choice of which case studies to examine often depends on the availability of information and the simplicity of the narrative, often leaving highly complex engagements avoided or simplified (Sørensen 2017).

Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) are the standard-bearers for a more rigorous approach. They selected 323 campaigns fitting well-defined criteria and analyzed them statistically. Their most well-known findings are that, compared with armed campaigns, nonviolent anti-regime campaigns are far more likely to be successful and, when successful, more likely to lead to enduringly peaceful and democratic societies. Their statistical analysis, supplemented with case study analysis, also offers guidance concerning what makes nonviolent campaigns more effective, in particular greater levels of participation and defections from regime troops. However, statistical analysis of campaigns struggles to address the internal dynamics of campaigns when non-linear processes are involved, for example in the case of bandwagon effects, when people join a movement because it appears to be gaining popularity. Since conventional regression-based methods often strive to isolate and study specific variables, these methods often have difficulties accounting for nonlinearity and causal complexity. Furthermore, statistical analysis does little to provide guidance to activists about what to do in particular circumstances.

Chenoweth and Stephan's statistical approach has one thing in common with the case study approach: it relies on studying struggles that occur "naturally," namely without any involvement by researchers. By looking at a large number of campaigns, it is possible to isolate variables of interest for special analysis, for example to examine the influence of the co-presence of an armed struggle (Chenoweth and Schock 2015). However, this approach does not enable experimentation, for example to see whether modifying the tactics used would affect the outcome.

Simulations can be used to train people in a variety of skills. Flight simulators are now standard for training pilots, and military forces run all sorts of training exercises. In the nonviolence field, there is one significant simulation tool: the video game "A Force More Powerful," designed to teach strategic thinking in nonviolent struggles. Nonviolence training, which typically includes role-plays or sociodrama, takes place in a wide range of venues, sometimes through training centers such as the Highlander School<sup>4</sup> or by groups such as CANVAS (Popovic et al., 2007a, b), as well in preparations for nonviolent actions. The most significant live large-scale nonviolence simulation was in 1965 at Grindstone Island, Canada, to test nonviolent defense against a military takeover. Many significant lessons were drawn from this exercise, but it has not been repeated (Olson and Christiansen 1966).

Although nonviolence training is widespread, it is not the same as experimentation. There is seldom any systematic comparison between two or more different ways of carrying out actions, different choices for when to initiate an action, or different methods to achieve the same goal. Nonviolence training and the video game "A Force More Powerful" seek to impart skills, not to assess the effectiveness of differing tactical or strategic choices. Nonviolence experimentation is needed to discover more about what makes nonviolent action effective. To illustrate what this might involve, we describe two possible experiments intended to measure the impact of humor and civil disobedience.

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<sup>4</sup> Highlander Research and Education Center, <http://highlandercenter.org/>.

## Types of experiments

In the natural sciences, there are various types of experiments. Some involve measurements, for example to determine the mass of the electron. This has no obvious analogue in social experimentation due to the lack of fundamental, reliably-reproduced quantitative features of social systems. Some experiments involve finding out whether something is possible, for example to synthesize a chemical or to produce a radioisotope. Many inventors employed this sort of experimentation, most famously Thomas Edison who tested hundreds of substances in a search for a suitable filament for an incandescent light.

Social experiments to test potentials could play a role in studying nonviolent action. For example, activists might seek to coordinate sit-ins in 25 different bank branches simultaneously without alerting bank officials in advance. It is possible in principle but actual tests would be needed to show whether it could be carried out. Another possibility is to see whether it is possible to make a whole group of police laugh together within five minutes. It might be necessary to try out numerous techniques to find one that succeeded. The shortcoming of this sort of social experimentation is that, unlike chemical synthesis or light filaments, social conditions are seldom sufficiently stable enough to enable reproducibility. It might be possible to coordinate 25 sit-ins on one occasion, but this offers no guarantee of success on a subsequent attempt.

A more promising option for social experimentation is to compare two options. In natural science, the most famous such experiment (whether or not it was actually carried out) involved Galileo dropping two stones of different masses off the Leaning Tower of Pisa. When they hit the ground at the same time, this refuted the prior belief that heavier objects fall more rapidly. In such experiments, it is usual that all conditions except one are kept constant. The two stones were dropped from the same height in the same weather conditions through the same distance, so the variable of interest was the mass of the stones. Of course, not every condition was equal. For example, air resistance is greater for a larger stone, but it has a negligible effect; if Galileo had dropped two feathers of different masses, the outcome would have been different.

In social experimentation, this approach of comparing two options has considerable promise. For example, two groups of voters can be exposed to differently-phrased messages and their subsequent votes recorded to determine the effect of the messages. But there is an additional complication that does not apply in physics or chemistry: human behavior. Atoms and molecules behave the same irrespective of experimental conditions, but human subjects may react to them.

Two practices can help to ensure more reliable results: randomization and blinding. In the late 1940s, major interventions were carried out to test the hypothesis that fluoride added to public water supplies would reduce tooth decay in children. Fluoride was added to water in several cities in the US and Canada, with other cities serving as controls. Dentists counted the number of cavities in the teeth of children in each city in subsequent years. The experiment, planned to run for a decade, was terminated after five years because the results showed a huge reduction in tooth decay in the fluoridated cities. However, the experiment was criticized later on methodological grounds (Sutton 1960). The cities to be fluoridated were not chosen randomly: there might have been systematic differences between the fluoridated and unfluoridated cities. The dentists, when counting children's cavities, knew where the children lived. Because determination of whether a cavity is present involves subjective judgment, the dentists might have unconsciously counted fewer in the children from fluoridated cities. To overcome this source of potential bias, randomization and blinding could have been used. Participating dentists could have been presented with children from both fluoridated and unfluoridated cities, in an order determined by a random process, and without the dentist knowing where each child lived (blinding).

With suitable experimental design, including the use of randomization and blinding, it is possible to isolate one factor and show its effect on the results. It is then possible to say (with a degree of confidence calculated statistically) that the changes in the single factor caused an effect, rather than simply being correlated with it. The role of randomization and blinding are illustrated in the following possible nonviolence experiments.

## Experiment 1: Humor

Creative nonviolent actions are common in many different contexts, both in democracies and dictatorships. They can be more or less skilled, with some undertaken by professional artists and others by “ordinary” activists who play with various artistic expressions. The creativity takes many different forms, such as theatre, songs, and graffiti. One popular type of creative expression is humor (Sombatpoonsiri 2015; Sørensen 2008, 2016). Although many activists assume this to be more effective than other forms of communication, no research has systematically tested this perception. In order to evaluate the effect of humor, humorous nonviolent actions should be compared with actions that are also creative but not humorous.

To ensure a fair comparison, audience involvement needs to be held constant. An example is comparing humorous street theatre with non-humorous street theatre: in both cases, there is a clear distinction between the performers and the audience. An even more interesting experiment would involve the audience, something Sørensen (2016) has characterized as an important element of the humorous political stunt. Such stunts can take many different forms. If a group wanted to challenge the military’s recruitment of young people, it could engage in what the peace movement calls counter-recruitment, aiming to disrupt or discourage the military’s recruitment, for instance in schools. One creative form of action the peace movement has tried out in various places is to create a rebel clown army. Activists dress in a mixture of clown outfits (red noses, fluffy orange hair) and military uniforms, and in the role of curious, innocent, and bewildered clowns they interact in absurd ways with both soldiers and potential recruits during events where the military tries to recruit young people (Sørensen 2015)<sup>5</sup>. The clowns can for instance attempt to be recruited for war based on their experiences with water pistols and playing hide and seek. Although the activists are

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<sup>5</sup> A video from British CIRCA (Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army) gives an impression of what clowns involved in counter-recruitment can look like: Anonymous, Glasgow Section of Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (youtube.com, not dated). <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xqgcBblriBQ>. Accessed 6 August 2017.

seriously concerned about recruitment, they use absurdity to expose and ridicule military hierarchies, double standards, and involvement in killing civilians.

To evaluate the effect of the humor, a comparison is needed with something equally attention grabbing, but not humorous, that disrupts the recruitment process. A possible comparison is a die-in involving pouring of artificial blood. The activists lie down on the ground, pretending to be the dead civilian victims of warfare. This is a popular type of action in the peace movement, having absolutely no humorous aspect.

In this comparison, the interesting question would be how the two types of actions influence the young people who are the target of military recruitment. In order to evaluate this, one would need a group of young people who could be questioned about their attitudes towards the military and joining the military both before and after they were exposed to the recruitment and counter-recruitment effort. In such a pre-post survey design, the difference between attitudes before and after could be regressed on the “treatment,” namely the choice of humor or die-in. In many places, the military is often present at educational fairs where different employers, universities, and other educational institutions are present. This would provide an opportunity to give questionnaires to entire school classes before and after being exposed to the clowns or the die-in, supplemented by interviews with some of the students.

To introduce randomization, one option would be to choose two different military recruitment exercises, run at different times, and intervene with the clowns at one exercise and the die-in at the other, with the assignment of intervention made randomly. If recruitment exercises are of sufficient duration, there is another possibility: at one recruitment exercise the clowns could be followed by the die-in and at the other the die-in by the clowns, again with the assignment made randomly. To ensure a level of blinding, the questionnaires could be assessed by independent individuals, not involved in the action, who did not know what interventions had been made. Interviews could be recorded and likewise independently evaluated.

## Experiment 2: Influencing police

The goal in this experiment is to compare two contrasting methods of influencing police. Protesters encounter police in many nonviolent actions, such as rallies, vigils, and blockades. Such actions may be legal or illegal, and protesters may or may not be engaged in civil disobedience. Although the primary goal of the action might be to influence politicians or a private company, police are frequently the only ones the protesters can easily engage, making them an important secondary target group. Protesters have used a variety of techniques when there is a police presence, including trying to get through police lines, shouting at police, talking politely to individual officers, offering flowers, and singing songs. Some protesters have tried out different methods and compared their experiences in different situations, but there seems to have been no systematic experimentation to determine what is more effective. Complications include that protesters may have different goals and that police may react quite differently depending on the circumstances, including their orders, possible dangers or expectations of dangers, media coverage and media presence, personalities of individual police, following the lead of other officers, and the issue that is the focus of the protest.

In an experiment, organizers could prepare two separate groups of protesters to use two contrasting techniques with police in different parts of a large demonstration. This could be a legal demonstration or an illegal one in which police have decided not to arrest protesters, or are holding off from making arrests. For the experimental comparison, one group of protesters might prepare to engage in earnest conversation about the issues in the protest while the other group of protesters prepares to sing songs while maintaining eye contact with particular officers. The effectiveness of the methods could be assessed by looking at how the police respond, by examining facial expressions, comments made, attitudes of nearby officers, and actions taken for or against protesters.

A modification of this experiment would be to use variations within a single technique. Several protesters could prepare to engage in discussions with different police, each protester trying out a somewhat different set of arguments and examples. Or the protesters could each prepare to sing a different song, to see whether melodies or styles made a difference. Alternatively, a single protester could try out several sets of

arguments or songs in sequence or with different officers.

To introduce randomization, one officer could be approached for discussion followed by a song and another officer approached with a song followed by discussion. Innumerable variations are possible. Also important is standardizing the protester approaches, which would require training. The impacts of interventions could be judged by independent observers, who could look at videos of the police without knowing what was being said or sung.

Yet another variation is to determine the impact of protester skills and training (Martin and Coy 2017). At a basic level, the impacts on police of a song sung by a beginner singer and an experienced one could be compared. For discussions, the effects of learning more examples and arguments, and of practicing interpreting emotional responses of police, could be studied.

## **Analysis of the experiments**

When conducting experiments, criteria are needed for evaluating the success of the nonviolent actions. In conventional social science, the goal is increased knowledge, and for this goal there are many standard techniques and methodological approaches, including model construction, hypothesis testing, regression analysis, and qualitative comparative analysis. We take for granted that skilled researchers will be able to deploy such methods when designing and assessing nonviolence experiments. Rather than go into details about how to make statistical analysis robust and reliable, we will discuss two different, complementary goals of research: empowerment of the participating nonviolent activists and increasing activists' commitment to experimentation.

The additional factor in the sorts of nonviolence experiments we have discussed is that we consider nonviolent activists to be key players in themselves, in two ways. First, how they are affected by the experiments — in planning, preparing, training, doing, and evaluating the experiments — is important. Second, for research to be of any practical use, activists need to understand and be committed to an experimental approach to activism. Being involved in experiments, potentially as consultants or collaborators, is likely to increase their willingness to reflect on their methods and to adopt ones that promise greater effectiveness.

Philosopher Nicholas Maxwell (2004, 2007) distinguishes between the “philosophy of knowledge” and the “philosophy of wisdom.” Maxwell’s philosophy of knowledge is concerned with gaining an understanding about the world, and assumes knowledge has intrinsic value; this is the traditional rationale for research. The philosophy of wisdom, in contrast, is concerned with helping solve important problems facing humans, such as poverty and war. It might seem on the surface that there is quite a lot of research about poverty, war, and other social problems, but most of this research is written by scholars for other scholars and is not readily applicable to practical action. This has been noted in relation to studies of social movements, most of which are oriented to scholars and very little of which are addressed to or useful for activists (Croteau et al. 2005). These studies are written about social movements, not for social movements (Rootes 1990).

To assess research that aspires to Maxwell’s philosophy of wisdom, different criteria are needed. In addition to evaluating the impact on others, we also think it is essential to include the impact of the experiments on the participants. For this type of research, it ought to be an additional goal that activists who participate can benefit in various ways, including gaining a greater understanding of nonviolent action, reflecting on goals and methods, and becoming more empowered to take action. For example, one possible outcome from experiments is that participants become more skilled at communicating. Along with looking at how experimental conditions affect communication with opponents and other audiences, attention can be given to how the conditions affect participants’ skills, confidence, and self-understanding of communicative processes. It is possible that some experimental conditions might improve skills and thereby lay the basis for greater long-term effectiveness, even though the immediate impact on opponents is not great.

The introduction of a second set of experimental outcomes — effects on participants in addition to effects on target audiences — can make evaluating results more complex methodologically. Trying to examine two sets of outcomes means that determinations of causality may be compromised, so careful experimental design is required.

To see whether participation in experiments leads to greater activist reflection on the effectiveness of their methods and greater willingness

to undertake further experimentation, independent observers could interview activists, attend activist meetings, and monitor the level of experimentation. Levels of activist reflection on and commitment to experimentation could be assessed and compared between different sorts of experiments. Statistical analysis might not be needed if, for example, activists became enthusiastic about methods shown to be more effective, are keen to do more experimentation, and suggest new sorts of experiments or, on the other hand, they show a lack of interest in further experiments and express annoyance at the impositions to undertake them. One implication of assessing the impact of experimentation on commitment to experimentation itself might be that designing experiments to foster enthusiasm could be as important as having a design that enables an evaluation of the effects of actions on target audiences. It could be that fostering a commitment to experimentation, even without conventional outcomes in terms of statistically significant results, could initially be desirable so that more rigorous designs become possible later on.

For generating interest in experimentation, results for small experiments might well be obvious to everyone involved. If statistical tests are needed to show significance levels, this would be fine, but in order to have an effect on changing activist behavior, much more than statistical results are needed. All research faces the challenge of communicating findings in a convincing manner, and statistical results would need to be very striking in order to be convincing.

The important point here is that experimental results can be compared both by conventional social science methods and by looking at their impacts on participants in the experiments. This means thinking of participants not just as subjects used as tools to obtain knowledge, but as agents whose skills, understandings, motivations, and engagement are important outcomes of research exercises. Going one step further, participants can be involved in designing and evaluating experiments. It may be that one factor to take into account in choosing research methods is the likelihood that the results will be convincing to activists.

There is another complication in experimentation with nonviolent action: learning by opponents. Sophisticated rulers take note of the methods used by challengers and adapt their own methods accordingly (Dobson 2012). If activists learn from experiments that certain methods

are more effective and begin to use them more often and more skillfully, opponents may respond by developing countermeasures. It is possible to imagine police developing ways of dealing with humor or attempts to engage them in conversation. In an iterative strategic encounter, the moves by one player are countered by those of the other player and so on. Research can provide a short-term advantage but needs to be continually updated to take into account adaptive counter-tactics. How to address this issue methodologically is not obvious; it involves learning about the opponent's learning and tactical innovations.

### **Practicalities**

For greater reliability, involving larger numbers of participants can overcome the risk that the results will be too influenced by single individuals — say a few clowns who are particularly skilled or a media spokesperson with above average rhetorical skills. In order to increase the reliability of the experiments, several groups could work with humor or civil disobedience independently of each other, preferably with the same number of control groups. To reduce the role of unconscious bias, participants should be assigned randomly to the experimental and control groups. The actions should be comparable in terms of the number of activists participating, time spent, effort expended to reach media, money spent on the campaign, etc.

Since the experiments should be as close as possible to reality and not artificially created by a research team, we think the most promising prospect will be to identify issues and locations where there are already organized groups and invite them to take part in the experiment. Ideally, the groups would be relatively well-established and have decision-making structures that can realistically make a commitment for the time the experiment will last. This might be a challenge, since such groups might already have a strategy and plans for the future. It is questionable whether any payment should be offered for the participants' time. Aside from this, there are several aspects of the experiments that might make the opportunity interesting for established groups.

Cooperation with a research project like this would offer an opportunity to involve more people in discussing plans and ideas, and might also be a way to attract more people into activism. The

participating students and researchers should also be familiar with many practices of campaigning that can be used as inspiration. If the researchers are cooperating with established groups that see the actions in the experiments as part of a larger campaign, the researchers need to be humble, accept that it is not “their” campaign, and leave decision-making to those likely to carry on after the experiment is over. For groups open to new input, participating in the experiment could potentially be a breath of fresh energy. However, frictions about leadership are bound to arise because the researchers will have to oversee the experiment, making sure the different actions remain comparable. One can imagine scenarios wherein a group in one location will have to carry out its actions in a smaller scale than what its potential is in order to remain comparable with the other locations. This could cause much frustration for the activists who feel they really have a momentum. Such scenarios should be discussed before the groups commit themselves to the experiment, but it is one thing to talk about it as a theoretical future possibility and another to be in the middle of it.

Another opportunity for the groups and their members will be to learn new ways of planning and evaluating and thinking more strategically about their nonviolent actions. One can also imagine that the research project will have resources to organize workshops that can provide new skills for the participants, for instance receiving advice from a professional actor for the clowns and from a journalist about media relations. As Martin (2015) has pointed out, nonviolent action has to be applied skillfully in order to have the desired effect. Just as army recruits need months of training to become competent soldiers, so do nonviolent activists need to practice relevant skills, for example being a convincing clown or resisting the urge to strike back if assaulted while undertaking civil disobedience.

Carrying out experiments in “real life” and not in a lab means that there will be many issues to take into consideration. For instance, there are likely to be participants who are not able or willing to do what they have heard about during trainings when it comes to real encounters with police and military, for instance. Another issue is that activists share information with each other. Those considered the control group might have heard about new ideas or practices from acquaintances who have

learned new skills through the experiment, so the control group could potentially try out some of these “on their own”, making problematic the comparison between those who had gone through training in new skills and those who had not. However, this problem can be overcome if the experiments compare different types of interventions, such as in experiment 1, so there is no control group which is not trying out something new. A more troublesome issue occurs if police or the military know that protesters are studying interventions: the police might (or might not) resist being affected or even disguise their responses in order to hinder the protesters or, more likely, to make the job of the police easier. The point is that learning from interacting with police must take into account the implications of interactions potentially being a strategic encounter, in which police and protester actions affect each other. These problems with “real life” might put limitations on what is possible to do or how reliable the results are, but in themselves they should do not rule out obtaining valuable lessons about nonviolent actions from experiments.

Who would be willing to pay for this kind of research? Nonviolence research has seldom received significant funding from granting bodies, and experiments would probably cost much more than theory, interviews, or database construction and analysis. Even if funding were available, there would still be the challenge of getting acceptance from institutional review boards. Both funders and review boards could be concerned about research involving illegal actions.

## **Ethics**

Experiments of any kind always raise ethical issues, since it is a question of interfering and manipulation rather than just observing naturally-occurring events. Just as researchers testing new medicine on patients or social workers trying out new interventions with their clients need to carefully consider ethical issues, so do those planning to undertake experiments with nonviolent action. That ethical issues might be a challenge should not rule out the experiments as an option to be explored further. The three principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and consequences can be a starting point for discussing ethical issues. All information identifying individuals participating in or being exposed

to the nonviolent action should be kept confidential, which is standard practice both with other methods and in other disciplines. Informed consent is relatively unproblematic when it comes to those participating in the nonviolent action. Participation in the experiments should of course be voluntary, and any course of action decided by the organizations themselves. Participation should be limited to adults, and they should receive full information about all the components of the experiments. In the sort of experiments outlined above, there will be little need to conceal information. A more problematic aspect when it comes to consent is that police, military, and audiences witnessing the nonviolent actions will not be informed in advance about what is going to happen and cannot give their consent. This leads to the question of consequences. Can this lack of consent be considered acceptable when one takes into consideration the potential benefits of the experiment?

First of all, it is important to note that no one is likely to be harmed by the experiments. A central aspect of nonviolent action is to limit the harm to others, at a minimum by avoiding physical violence (Martin 2015). However, it must be acknowledged that the experiments suggested here might cause stress to police, military personnel, and/or audiences. Young people attending an education fair might be distressed when exposed to the pouring of artificial blood, military recruiters could experience ridicule by a clown as a form of abuse, and the police might be annoyed when they are shouted at or have to ward off persistent protesters eager to offer flowers and have conversations. However, in psychological lab experiments, participants are regularly exposed to mild stress, and the stress caused to audiences by the experiments suggested here does not seem unreasonable, even if they have not consented to participate.

What about the potential psychological harm experienced by the police and military? Here one needs to take into consideration the kinds of stress that people in these professions regularly experience when they encounter death and trauma. Compared to these stressors, the experiments suggested here appear rather harmless. When discussing consequences, it is also necessary to consider the long term consequences. For institutional review boards, short term stress might be more justifiable if the experiments are likely to have important and long term positive consequences for many people. Although many nonviolent activists

object on principle to “the ends justify the means” arguments, it must be part of the ethical discussions that the goal of nonviolent action is to reduce different forms of violence and create a more just and peaceful world. With more effective nonviolent action, the presumption is that the likelihood of a more peaceful future increases.

## Conclusion

Nonviolent action, as a method of struggle, has developed enormously over the past century. Although the methods have long been used on a spontaneous or ad hoc basis, the practice of a nonviolent strategy was pioneered by Gandhi, theorized by Gene Sharp, and subsequently refined by numerous researchers and practitioners. Despite these advances, nonviolent action has received little funding or official support, and has lacked a crucial means of improvement: experimental testing. Although we have focused on nonviolent action, the same is the case for all other forms of resistance of interest in the field of resistance studies.

In contrast, militaries around the world have devoted huge resources to research and development, including applying the experimental method to weapons development and testing, and many other arenas. A comparison with the sophistication of military R&D suggests that nonviolent action has much to gain by research dedicated to improving its methods and strategies. However, nonviolent researchers and practitioners have seldom explored the use of experiments, for a range of reasons including reliance on case studies, lack of theoretical agreement, and lack of resources.

Our aim in this paper is to point out the value of applying the experimental method for improving the effectiveness of nonviolent action, providing two examples and a survey of relevant issues, including practical, ethical, and financial concerns. The outcomes of nonviolence experiments can be evaluated using conventional social science tools, using randomization, blinding, and statistical analysis. In addition, there is an important aspect to nonviolence experimentation seldom addressed in social research: the effects these experiments have on participants. These effects are important if nonviolence experiments are seen as a way of increasing the capacity for skilled nonviolent action and not only as a way of acquiring knowledge about nonviolent action. Therefore,

studying the effect of experiments on participants' skills, understandings, emotions, and commitment is important.

Though there is much to be gained through experiments, the obstacles to large-scale testing are currently considerable, including limited funding, shortage of trained personnel, and lack of experience. There is no tradition of nonviolence experimentation and hence little skill base for undertaking it, and no source of ample funds. However, every new enterprise has to start from a low base, and so the first step is to put experimentation on the agenda so activists and researchers can start thinking about possibilities.

Militaries do not sponsor research comparing, for example, drone attacks or counter-insurgency wars with alternatives such as diplomacy, promoting social justice, or nonviolent action. One of the great advantages of nonviolent action is that it should not fear fair comparisons with alternative methods or built on alternative value systems for attaining the same goals. In this context, nonviolent experimentation is inherently threatening to both militaries and most governments, because it would highlight possibilities for citizen empowerment, with the strongest endorsement, that of rigorous testing. This is yet another reason to put experimentation on the agenda for nonviolence research.

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# Resistant Materialities and Power Tools: Dynamics of Power and Resistance in Everyday Consumerism

Otto Von Busch

## *Abstract*

*In an everyday perspective of resistance, there is a tendency to favor human action and agency, both in the exercise of power or in the acts of resistance. The aim of this study is to examine material agency in everyday power-dynamics and to open a methodology of resistance studies in the realm of physical objects, designs and materials. In correlation to a “new materialist” perspective on power, resistance works to build affinity between humans and nonhuman agency and disrupt materially-supported subordination. In this study, a materialist methodology is introduced, with examples of how consumer objects are transformed to interfere with consumer relationships to become tools for cultivating resistant capabilities. As a case, the study examines a handbag made from a cookie box, produced by the Spanish activist “movement” Yomango, where the material properties of the metal box are mobilized to become active in the resistance. From a materialist perspective, the handbag becomes more than a symbolic prop for human-led activists and joins the ranks of co-resistors.*

## **Unpacking power tools**

Objects have power. They add leverage to our bodies, as the design of objects is always a form of cunning, a way to trick gravity or forces of nature in order to enhance human capacities to act (Flusser 1999: 19). The lever is a primordial design, enhancing human agency beyond the mere properties of the physical body. But simultaneously, we also align our actions with our designs, in ways that make our bodies turn into levers: our arms become levers and we become extensions of the tools we use. Just like we are the herder of our sheep, we organize socially in ways that submit us to our ideas of agency, and thus “since we have

been pastoralists we have behaved like a herd of sheep and have needed pastors.” (Flusser 1999: 53)

As political theorist Jane Bennett argues, objects and their networks are imbued with “thing power,” which she describes as cultural forms that not only enhance capacities but also “are themselves material assemblages that *resist*.” (2004: 348). Building on the notion that bodies, not only human bodies but all physical objects, have a propensity to form collectivities which are in themselves sources of power, Bennett captures how in an assemblage, “*objects* appear more vividly as *things*, that is, as entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics.” (2004: 351) Building on the “body materialism” of Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Irigaray and Butler, Bennett argues for an expanded view to also include how things as bodies are controlled, gendered, sexed, pacified and excited (2004: 348). To highlight this propensity of matter to act, Bennett uses Spinoza to unpack the power of things,

Nature according to Spinoza is a place wherein bodies strive to enhance their power of activity by forging alliances with other bodies in their vicinity (and, in a parallel way, wherein ideas strive to enhance their power of activity by joining up with other ideas. This process or modifying is never under the full control of any one body, for it is always subject to the contingency of aleatory encounters with other modes. (2004: 353)

Thing power is the “curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle.” (2004: 351)

The relevant point for thinking about thing-power is this: a material body always resides within some assemblage or other, and its thing-power *is a function of that grouping*. A thing has power by virtue of its operating in *conjunction* with other things. (2004: 353f)

To unpack the agency of matter and things, Bennett uses Latour’s concept of things as actants,

Unlike the term ‘actor,’ an actant can be either human or nonhuman: it is that which does something, has sufficient coherence to perform

actions, produce effects, and alter situations. [...] Agency appears to [Latour] as a continuum, as a power differentially expressed by *all* material bodies. (2004: 355)

Objects act on, with or against bodies and intentions, and materializes the social and metaphysical; values, morals, norms and regulations. As Latour highlights, an object like a seatbelt “does not reflect the social. It does more. It transcribes and displaces the contradictory interests of people and things.” (Latour 1992: 153)

Examining the material agency of objects adds to the general methodologies in resistance studies and opens the field to wider explorations of human and non-humans agency, and as I argue, it adds a new perspective to everyday resistance (Scott 1985). Following Flusser (1999), human designs and tools are leverages of power, amplifying the frail and impermanent human body to become “power tools,” that is, material agencies engaged in the realm of social and political powers. As we will see in the case of Yomango, a material perspective can open new dimensions of how humans and objects (or nonhumans) act in concert to open specific possibilities of resistance which point to the material culture of capitalism and everyday consumerism.

### **The participatory power of objects**

So how does power and object interact? As Vinthagen argues, power should not be seen as a totality of domination but always a form of consent-production and “participatory subordination” (2015: 167f). From this perspective, as conceived as well by Gandhi (1970) and Arendt (1970), resistance is not merely a new form of domination or “counter-power,” but the activity that undermines participatory subordination. As Vinthagen argues, “resistance is concerned with breaking up power relations in which humans are made into ‘tools’ for external interests or ‘servants’ in oppressive hierarchies. [...] Power does not primarily emanate from above – on the contrary, it originates from below, through subordinate behaviour.” (2015: 168) Vinthagen continues,

The power-holder himself does not create power; instead it is given to him by others in their daily cooperation and support. The necessary act of choice by the subordinate, the leader’s weakness and the possibilities

of resistance are all manifested in the power-holder's position of dependence. The sort of cooperation that generates power consists of active support, passive acceptance, or unwilling obedience to demands or rules imposed by the power-holder. (Vinthagen 2015: 171)

As Winner argues (1980: 123), artifacts enact special forms of politics through their “arrangements of power and authority in human associations as well as the activities that take place within those arrangements.” Artifacts distribute agency, allow or refuse access, amplifies or displaces actions. To understand power from this perspective means to seek the mechanisms that facilitate the reproduction of cooperative subordination and obedience, to seek the small everyday components that contribute in a material way to what Foucault calls the “dispositif” or “apparatus” of discipline and control (cf. Agamben 2009, Bussoloni 2010). If, as Sharp also argues, all government is based upon consent (1973: 28), then a material perspective of power needs to examine how everyday objects contributes to align subjects to such subordination. In its transitory form, subordination and obedience is regulated in legal authority and mutual contracts to assume stability. But objects are also used, not least symbolically, to manifest and celebrate subordinate participation and collaborationism, for example getting a golden watch after 25 years of bureaucratic servitude, or a medal for obeying orders to kill the people the state defines as “enemies.” But objects are also more direct manifestations of power as they reproduce obedience and subordination in very tangible ways by sorting and stratifying social processes.

Feminist theorist Sara Ahmed highlights how objects and matter have a certain “orientation” and this quality not only makes the world available to some people and not others, but also aligns the agency and mindset of users and ensures that bodies feel they are “in place” as they align with the suggested orientation (Ahmed 2010: 235). The orientation an object or space suggests is thus no coincidence, but a designed property that aligns bodies, time and emotions to facilitate certain activities while at the same time disqualifying others, not unlike sociologist Madeleine Akrich's notion of object's “script,” which she defines, “like a film script, [by which] technical objects define a framework of action together with the actors and the space in which they are supposed to act” (1992: 208).

Some things are within reach, or ready-at-hand, while the orientations make other actions and connections impossible.

What is reachable is determined precisely by orientations we have already taken. Some objects do not even become objects of perception since the body does not move toward them: they are 'beyond the horizon' of the body, out of reach. Orientations are about the direction we take that puts some things and not others in our reach. (Ahmed 2010: 245)

Some orientations make us subordinate; we seek keys for access or need elevation in order to gain agency and overview. Gates and barriers put bodies in lines and queues, spikes make certain areas impossible to inhabit by homeless people, and corkscrews favor right-handed people in the ability to open wine bottles. If objects are oriented to allow proximity they can "co-incide" with our actions to make certain things happen, while also shaping these endeavors.

Similarly, the orientation of objects also makes history "sediment" in certain patterns (Ahmed 2010: 240f). Not only are some expensive products out of the reach of a poor consumer, or a high shelf unreachable to a short person, but objects oriented towards us meet us half-way: they are available, ergonomic, greeting in the way that their affordances are directing us to align our endeavors together as a unit. By offering themselves half-way, they become more easily accessible, or "user-friendly" to some, while remaining untouchable for others. Through such shared orientations "we inherit proximities." Ahmed argues, "We inherit the nearness of some objects more than others (Ahmed 2010: 248). When we align attention and orientation with objects, they not only await our agency but help amplify and guide the work of the body. In this way, Ahmed's perspective on orientations resonates with that of Vinthagen, where he claims,

When we moderate our behavior to fit a routine or scheme of techniques, we become part of the shaping of power. It does not matter (for power production) if this happens to be what we want to do or if we do it without thinking. Power will be at work anyway, if our action produces subordination. (Vinthagen 2015: 177)

As Sloterdijk has argued, technologies must be seen as instruments which are construed in order to “tame” humans, making them less “feral” (Sloterdijk 2009), a perspective in tune with Flusser’s argument of how “the lever strikes back” on its inventors (Flusser 1999). Yet actions, neither by objects nor by humans, are predetermined by their original intentions. Instead, they are feral in the sense that they continually interfere with each other depending on their proximity and contextual, as well as temporal, re-orientations. Human agency is always aligned through material assemblages, and tracing the material agency or “thing-power” of matter can help us see how objects help orient users towards everyday subordination, but also to better unpack how resistance may act throughout the material and nonhuman world.

### **Introducing a materialist perspective**

As already noted, power is invested in objects, and these objects act on its users with a certain force, beyond their legal or discursive agency; they align, sort and sediment bodies and behaviors (cf. Deleuze 1988). Objects act on us with their own “vibrancy” as Bennett would say (2010), but they also, in a very hands-on way, orient us towards certain possibilities and paths of action. A materialist methodology in resistance studies could involve analyzing how matter continually facilitates and acts to enhance power and enforce subordination.

Fox and Alldred (2017: 4) argue for three main ontological points in what they call a “new materialism” that brings together “power and resistance, language and knowledge, bodies and subjectivity.” Building on the works of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), Haraway (1991), Barad (2007), Latour (2005) and DeLanda (2006), they argue for a materialist perspective that brings forward how,

- the material world and its content are not fixed, stable entities, but relational, uneven, and undergoing constant flux;
- ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ should not be treated as distinct realms, but as parts of a continuum of materiality. The physical and the social both have material effects in an ever-changing world;

- a capacity for ‘agency’ – the actions that produce the social world – extends beyond human actors to the non-human and inanimate. (Fox & Alldred 2017: 4)

As Fox and Alldred posit, this makes materialist methodology primarily seek the connections between relational networks and assemblages of animate and inanimate affects (DeLanda 2006: 4), and how these actors produce social worlds with regards to desires, feelings, and meanings (Braidotti 2000: 159). A key feature in such a perspective is the displacement of privilege from human actors to the surrounding material, natural and social environment (Fox & Alldred 2017: 4f). Thus building on a Marxist materialism, Fox and Alldred argue the new materialists shift the focus towards micro-production, with a focus on ontology (instead of epistemology), to “flat” or “monist” assemblages of forces and actants (instead of top-down hierarchies) and events (rather than pre-determining structures). Positing in a blunt way, the perspective seeks to explain power not as overarching, total, and persistent, but instead power continually needs to reproduce itself in small, recurrent, everyday and collaborative events that utilize human as well as non-human agencies. Rejecting surface/depth dichotomies, such perspective points towards how “everything that goes on in the social and natural world should be judged on its own terms, without recourse to notions of a deeper mechanism or structure” (Fox & Alldred 2017: 14). From the perspective of power and resistance, the main implications of this shift are new openings to affect and attune agency to change the world,

While post-structuralism and social constructivism provided a means to break through top-down, determinist theories of power and social structure, the focus upon textuality, discourses and systems of thought in these approaches tended to create distance between theory and practice, and give the sense that radical, interventionist critiques of inequalities and oppressions were merely further constructions of the social world. The turn to matter offers a re-immersion in the materiality of life and struggle, and a recognition that in a monist world – because there is no ‘other level’ that makes things do what they do – everything is necessarily relational and contextual rather than essential and absolute. (Fox & Alldred 2017: 7f)

Rather than painting broad strokes across the social world, employing large abstractions of “society” or “class,” the new materialists seek the small components, technologies, behaviors and events that make up these larger entities, but the larger parts are also reflected into the components that co-create them (thus suggesting a process-oriented ontology between parts and wholes). Latour, one of the key figures in the shift towards a flat ontology in Actor-Network Theory, argues that “social forces” are not to explain the world, but instead, they are to be explained, that is, the heterogenous elements of various actors and forces which produce social aggregations or assemblages (Latour 2005: 5) It is the aggregation, such as an institution, corporation, nation or social category, that is the outcome of the interactions of various actants, rather than the cause of interactions. The task at hand is to unpack and open such aggregations, for example capitalist social relations, patriarchy or the neoliberal market, to unpack their dynamic workings (Latour 2005: 130f). For example, from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983) perspective, we need to trace the many forms by which material components as well as psychological forces amplifies and supports the “micro-fascism” that builds the fascist state from the bottom-up as “everybody wants to be a fascist,” (Guattari 2007) a collaborationist force of power answered by that of the top-down fascist state.

### **Towards a materialist methodology**

This brings us to the issue of methodology, in that it is the micro-politics of human and material components and forces of aggregations that need to be studied, rather than primarily seek their ideologies, aggregations and totalities. Technologies and artifacts play a central part in these human and non-human dynamics, as they materialize social relations and guide the reproduction of social behaviors and relations (Winner 1980, Latour 1991), for example how subway systems shape people’s movement and behavior following certain directions and formations, or how material extensions of ethics, such as the turnstiles in the metro, “remind” me to follow the law (Latour 1992). This materialist approach from Latour resonates well with the micro-politics of Deleuze and Guattari (1988), and their focus on what assemblages *do* or *produce*. Here, bodies and social formations are consequences of affective subjectivizing processes,

specifying, or “territorializing,” the capacities of bodies to form certain assemblages (and not others). Human subjects are controlled and “nudged” in certain ways through designated assemblages, and similarly, subjects try to resist by allying with other material actors. To paraphrase Scott (1998) in his examination of “seeing like a state,” the materialist perspective studies the continuous processes making sure subjects “behave like a state” on an everyday level.

The task of a materialist method used in resistance studies thus begins to open up and examine the many interacting parts within the assemblages that produce or contribute to participatory subordination; how the various parts and forces act upon each other and amplify or enforce certain forms of *doings*. As humans, we often misconceive our rational power over objects, Bennett suggests, and instead we are much more controlled by them than we think. What we can do in our everyday environment is facilitated and controlled by tools, vehicles, roads and power-grids, the form and voltage in electrical outlets, or which doors we can open or not. But humans are also manipulated in the subtlest ways, and with agency that overpowers human will. In a playful example, Bennett points towards how even the smallest potato-chip has the power to conquer the most stubborn will (2010: 40f).

Fox and Alldred (2017: 23ff) suggest a set of points as departure for a new materialist perspective. First; focus on matter, second; explore what matter does, not what it is, third; make sure human agency is not privileged, forth; take into account that thoughts, memories, desires and emotions have material effects, and finally; examine how material forces act locally. While this may sound simple enough, a challenge from a classic humanist perspective is not to fall into the trap of imagining the human purposes and intentions of action to take the forefront, but rather take into account the material recalcitrance, that is, that matter itself is resistant to the human will and skills. Matter does not simply follow the commands of human agency, but materials are stubborn and recalcitrant and the skill to shape them is always a form of manipulation (to be “crafty” is an affirmation of the artisan as cunning and manipulative). As anthropologist Tim Ingold has pointed out, human agents have a tendency to favor a “hylomorphic” viewpoint, that ideas spring forth from our mind (often ready-made and finished) and we then simply

implement these into the world (Ingold 2013: 25f). For example, we imagine we will build a chair, “see” the chair to our inner vision, and then simply build it. Rather, our ideas of the chair is shaped by our knowledge of the material, *what wood can do*, and similarly, we need to struggle with the material in the process of making an order to give it a shape that is only vaguely similar to what we may have imagined.

This recalcitrance of matter also offers a perspective on the study of aligned resistance between humans and non-humans, such as the tools and materials mobilized during resistant activities. Material agencies are used to align action with the goal of the activist and support of their cause, but materials, objects and tools may need manipulation to address the issues at hand.

Let us draw an example: one type of materiality is mobilized in the metal chains of a tree-hugger to challenge the muscle power of the authorities. Another materiality is used in the pink wool yarn of a knit-in craftivist making a “pussy-hat” for a women’s march. Both activists use material components in their action that both have great symbolic value, yet also employ these beyond the use of words or signs trying to convince other human minds of their views. The materials *literally tie together* their actions to others and towards their cause. On a materialist continuum between the two, the chains take on a high material form of stability and resistance to force, whereas the yarn is softer yet may require more agile fingers to knit, which in turn give shape to knitting-groups and skill-shares in yarn stores. Both ends of the continuum use materiality to mobilize and also orient bodies in alignment in ways that amplify (or in some cases even move beyond) discursive messages in protest lists, slogans or painted signs. Both chains and yarn align and orient bodies and practices with the means and ends of the protest; they are materials that *do things* in the assemblage with people and other materials, they act locally and even beyond the initial scope of the users.

It is easy to think firstly on the human agency of the tree-hugger or of the knitting protester, and focus on their dedication, resoluteness and behavior in their challenge of ideologies or other people (such as police). But the task for a materialist perspective is not to favor the spiritual strength of the resisting subject, which partly was the perspective favored by Gandhi in his focus on the spiritual training of Satyagraha and

the activist's "strength to suffer." (Gandhi 1998: 17) Instead, using the materialist perspective may help reveal how affinity is not only created between human actors, but also *in, through, and with* non-human actants. It is assemblages like these we need to unpack: how do parts of the assemblage support, multiply, and act together as a unit?

There may of course also be many cases of material resistance which involve various forms of creation of representative or symbolic elements, intersecting with the very material agency of the objects. This may be everything from the building of demonstration puppets, creation of symbols and flags, to interventions on systemic levels, such as hacking of computer networks or the forgery of passports. So the study of material affinity is not meant to undermine the symbolic or systemic practices of other forms of resistance, but to complement the study by "flattening" the perspective between various elements and actants in resisting assemblages: that symbols, behaviors, discourses, laws, and agencies act on the same plane, and "ideology" or "the State" are not primary actors or explanations of power. But this does not entail all forms of resistance is equal in effort, agency, symbolic or strategic power. A protester chaining him- or herself to just any tree is not as effective as one climbing the tree at a strategic point refusing access for the forest harvesters. Similarly, the political and human effects are very different between forging passports for refugees rather than counterfeiting tickets to Disneyland. A "flat" perspective on such practices does not equate their agencies or political effects. Used in a systemic and strategic manner, where humans and non-humans act in unison towards a common goal, material disruptions can be part of a strategic campaign for liberation. What we in everyday language call "power tools" reveal how power is projected through our everyday tools, objects and action spaces as real "thing-power" in Bennett's sense, and they also orient us in alignment with the agency that is considered legitimate and lawful. The manipulation or "hacking" of everyday tools and objects exposes what is considered a misuse or resistant practice, from the DIY practice of making moonshine with local potatoes, to producing lock-picking tools or file-sharing, and all the way to large scale strategic actions such as Gandhi's salt march (von Busch 2009, 2017).

As outlined above, a material perspective can make us see affinities and alignments between humans and nonhumans in assemblages that

resist “participatory subordination.” The studies of resistance practices could gain a lot from a wider perspective of how actors and actants are mobilized in various forms of activism. We will examine such example in the Yomango cookie-box handbag.

## The Yomango handbag as power-tool

The Spanish Yomango “movement” uses an explicit rhetoric of commodity “liberation” and promoted tactics for upending the commodity economy that resonates with resistance and direct action. Yet their approach is not about refusal or asceticism, but setting the system of consumerism against itself. They may agree with Debord that consumerism is a “spectacle” (Debord 1994) that has also turned protest into an aesthetic lifestyle, yet what Yomango does is turn the lifestyle back onto itself and channel it into direct action. In the end, their approach seems to dissolve the demarcation between the very acts of consumption and resistance.

The first Yomango projects took off in 2002, although the ideas that formed Yomango had been in circulation before, not least that of Abbie Hoffman’s *Steal this book* (1971), but also the protests around the G8 summit in Genoa in July 2001 (Yomango 2008). The group sprung out of the Spanish collective Las Agencias, “The Agencies,” an informally-structured collective of artists and anti-corporate activists based primarily in Barcelona (Juris 2005; 2008). As a label for action, rather than a strict group, Yomango allowed freedom to whoever adopted its brand, and the right to adjust its image. Some of its memes are still circulating around the internet, but the group froze its main website in 2007 and went into hibernation.

Yomango calls itself a counter-lifestyle movement critically commenting on the role consumerism plays in contemporary society and in practices of identity formation. The name is a fusion of the clothing company Mango and the Spanish slang “mangar” [to steal], but as they argue,

We did not talk about mangar, but yomangar, in order to differentiate it from the simple act of ‘stealing’ or shoplifting’... The spirit of Yomango is not a consumerist one, and the act of magic that takes place in a Yomango moment of liberation (the magic of making things disappear

and reappear) escapes the legal-illegal dichotomy. (Yomango 2008)

According to Yomango, in a consumerist culture, stealing is a form of civil disobedience, but they argue this form of action must take the shape of a brand and lifestyle more than a classical organized political movement. They support a “lifestyle [that] consists of shoplifting as a form of social disobedience and direct action against multinational corporations (Smith & Topham 2005: 36).

Yomango believes in a multitude of practices of resistance, and as they argue “As a good brand, Yomango is in competition with other great brands, never with practices of protest” (Yomango 2008). The act of shoplifting is rephrased from the distinction of legality/illegality to instead address the foundations of consumerist society,

Yomango’s message is not ‘legalise shoplifting’, but rather: ‘shoplifting exists, and it is neither an individual psychical perturbation, nor some sort of pseudo-kleptomania; we have to make it visible and turn it into a message, a story, a moment of reappropriation of those things that publicity is always promising, but never delivers’. (Yomango 2008)

The failure of the consumerist economy to offer a true freedom, channelling all available pleasures through a commodity economy, produces social vulnerability and exclusion. As Yomango sees it, they distribute both methods and accessories to assist a fairer distribution of agency and access to these pleasures. And in their own wording they see themselves primarily as liberators;

YOMANGO liberates objects and liberates your desire. It liberates your desire which is trapped within objects which are trapped inside large shopping malls, the same place where yourself are trapped. YOMANGO is a pact between co-prisoners. (Yomango 2004: 152)

Shoplifting is in this sense an act of shared self-fulfilment and creativity, and as Yomango sees it, a more truthful form of lifestyle than brands can offer,

The de-purchasing of consumer goods is promoted by YOMANGO as a “style” that goes beyond one season and has more to do with social

engineering than fashion design. [...] The hole left by tearing the locks off becomes a logo in its own right, a symbol of coherence to YOMANGO values. (Smith & Topham 2005: 36)

Clothes at Mango may be cheap, but Yomango addresses not the price of clothes, but the distribution of agency and creativity and how subjects are oriented under the reign of consumption, “creativity may be expensive when we buy it, but it is actually quite cheap when we sell it to big business! [...] it reduces ‘creativity’ to the use of the credit card.” (Yomango 2008) The real theft is appropriation, keeping people in precocity and psychological blackmail. The issue with consumerism is for Yomango not a question of good or bad consumerism, but exposing our dependencies to these systems,

We know how hard it is today to distinguish between good and bad chains... This is why Yomango makes no distinction among chains: what it expects is, precisely, that we don't allow them to become natural to us, but confront their existence and break with all our chains. (Yomango 2008)

As has been argued elsewhere, Yomango can be seen as an example of a “hacking” of consumerism, that is, they combine direct DIY and hands-on engagements with systemic interventions into the “operating system” of consumption and capitalism (cf. Critical Art Ensemble 1996, von Busch 2008). Yet, of course, the practice of Yomango opens for many crucial questions too. Not least the ethical and constructive aspects of their tactics of stealing, and similarly, one can argue that their focus on commodities hampers as much as promotes liberation, as this focus still preserves the primacy of value production with the producer over the consumer, thus furthering subordination (in Vinthagen's sense). By producing itself as a brand Yomango does not “reveal” the system as much as it opens instances to engage the logic of consumerism in a hands-on way, that is, to touch and intervene into the foundation of consumerism itself: in the acts of appropriation, ownership and the demarcation between inclusion and exclusion. But in order to open this space for questioning and working together as co-prisoners, both commodities and consumers, the desire and magic of commodities are offered an intimate space: a surveillance-safe hand bag.



Image: Yomango cookie-box handbag

The cookie box handbag of Yomango is a simple accessory; a metal cookie-box (for Danish cookies or similar) equipped with a shoulder strap, and possibly some decorations. With its metal casing, the box becomes a Faraday-box, and thus blocks out the alarm tags inside. The cookie-box offers an unsurveilled space for the possibility of stealing. The box is a manifestation of critical thought, but as Yomango argues, it is “also a practical way of thinking; creative, disrespectful, with a taste for rupture.” (Yomango 2008) In this way, the handbag is a materialization of the Yomango ideas and a symbolic signifier for their actions. But the bag is also more than that in a very material sense.

With its material agency to offer an unsurveilled space for carrying goods, the Yomango bag not only comes to symbolize a possibility for resistance against surveillance and regimes of ownership and control, but it also presents the user such a space in the highest material sense. The bag leverages the materiality of the everyday objects, the metal cookie box, with the popularity of the handbags as an object of desire as well as consumption, and transforms it into an object which allows it to bypass alarm systems; a resistance it-bag that may house a desirable designer

it-bag, if the user so desires. The bag goes beyond symbolizing and communicating the opportunity for disobedience, but also acts materially to offer a room for disobedience and defiance of the alarm system. The bag acts subtly on the minds of the user and audience, or the surveilling environment, as it neither aims to convince the observer or user, nor affects or sabotages the alarm system. Rather, the materiality itself displaces the surveillance of the alarm and in a way also mirrors it back, revealing how alarms take for granted that inside every consumer there is a potential little thief wanting to spring into action. By highlighting how alarms are ubiquitous in our everyday shopping environment, the very act of carrying an unsurveilled space to possibly enact theft is a provocation in itself. The assemblage of bag and faraday box offers room for new forms of action which merges artistic, symbolic and practical forms of resistance. The bag collapses tensions between lifestyle and resistance to lifestyle, surveillance and non-surveillance, symbolism and material mobilization exactly by its material form and design, and it does so by not explicitly saying so but by doing it.

## Discussion

The case of the Yomango cookie box handbag offers a glimpse of a material perspective on resistance, or how strategies of resistance can mobilize nonhuman actors and “thing-power” in order to strengthen and expand their impact. Yomango may be playful, but their use of material props as an integral part of their everyday resistance echoes the active part of the salt in Gandhi’s salt Satyagraha of 1930. And just like Gandhi’s practice, their target is the interface of power that resides in everyday practices such as eating and consuming, or our everyday cognition of where power is and how it acts upon us and through us in our “participatory subordination.”

Sociologist Franck Cochoy uses the term “equipped cognition” to show how an object, such as a shopping basket or bag, modulates our cognition but also “modifies consumer’s calculations” (2008: 15). For Cochoy, the shopping cart is a typical example of such modification as its mobile space produces not only an effortless amplification of the shopper’s carrying capability, but also, by stacking up on goods, makes it hard to regret or undo an object’s place in the cart once it is inside. Indeed,

returning a product on the shelf would make the consumer “assume the cognitive dissonance of contradicting already made decisions,” thus leading the consumer to keep adding more things to the cart (2008: 20). The cart as a device thus modifies consumer cognition as “the shopping cart implicitly leads its pusher to become a shopper.” Cochoy continues, “if the consumer thinks she may come out of the shop without a purchase, why then should she take a huge cart?” (2008: 20)

As Cochoy also highlights, the cart acts as a buffer to create within it “a short moment of abundance and pause in calculation,” that makes consumer choices appear free (*gratis*) until reaching the moment of judgment at the cash register. “Prices are forgotten in the literal sense, since price labels remain stuck on the shelves.” (Cochoy 2008: 20) The cart thus produces a certain cognitive and “calculative space,” or rather a space of “de-calculation” as it substitutes budgetary constraints with volumetric ones (2008: 21).

In the case of the cookie-box, the bag also modifies the user’s “equipped cognition,” and this modulation of cognition happens on several levels at once: an ethical (“is it right to steal as I have an un surveilled space to house the goods?”) as well as a calculative level (“will these goods fit into the box?”), and mixing it with the calculation of resistant action (“what is the rationale, symbolism and impact of my action, versus, is it worth the risk of getting caught?”). These considerations are brought about by the very opportunity offered materially by the Faraday-box of the cookie bag. The material aspect opens new vistas for action as well as calculations about their impact and effect, which may even be contradicting other forms of action and symbolism. That is, the box opens a space for dissent and radical questioning of the basis of the “participatory subordination” that is consumerism, simply by offering the *un surveilled possibility* of theft in high-surveillance environments such as fashion stores.

As Latour has pointed out, everyday matter and technologies shape our behavior and ethical considerations (2002). The un surveilled abyss inside the box is a space that reorients the moral calculations of agency and is thus *inside ethics*, in a sense that aligns with the perspective of Crary (2016), that is, it is a dark room, it puts light on the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion and demands a re-evaluation of moral judgment. In the case of Yomango’s box, it requires us to reexamine the relationships

between creativity, consumerism and resistance. Extrapolating further on Winner's (1980) idea that artifacts have their own politics, and agency towards politics, the box contributes to breaking the "human monopoly of agency," in resonance with Hans Habers' critique of the humanist focus in the ethics of technology (Habers 2005: 259). As Verbeek points out, "Moral action is *a practice* in which humans and nonhumans are integrally connected, generate moral questions, and help to answer them." (Verbeek 2011: 38) Not only is the bag part of the action and its effects, it also becomes part in the ethical considerations of its activities and alliances.

As opposed to the "totalitarian" regime of consumerism (Lipovetsky 1994), which reproduces consumer behavior as the most "user-friendly" mode of engagement, a box like Yomango's opens a room for thinking, thus challenging the "banality" of user-friendliness and habitual lifestyle consumption. Indeed, in a culture which refuses the consumer a room or moment to think, the bag is a materialization of resistance which is not only discursive or bound to action itself; it is in its protected space, which offers room for both stealing and not stealing. It offers materially a *capacity* to choose, a micro-freedom beyond the governmentality of the panoptic surveillance of the alarm systems, and under a regime of big data calculations gives the user a little "room of one's own." Where a shop alarm act as a material agency of surveillance which "orients" us in specific ethical ways (if not enforced by high-pitched noise), the box allows for an unsurveilled pocket wherein the choice between obeying or not obeying (steal or not steal) becomes a materialization of ethics. As the alarm systems "reminds" me to be a lawful citizen, the bag allows room for what James Scott (2012) has called "anarchist calisthenics," that is, in a very everyday situation I can choose to steal or not steal, which means I am called upon to judge and evaluate my own ethics. Scott gives the example of jaywalking or not, depending on the cultural context or if there are young children watching. The contextual judgment calls forth a quick evaluation, but also prepares the subject before more serious ethical situations. As Scott puts it,

One day you will be called upon to break a big law in the name of justice and rationality. Everything will depend on it. You have to be

ready. How are you going to prepare for that day when it really matters? You have to stay ‘in shape’ so that when the big day comes you will be ready. What you need is ‘anarchist calisthenics.’ Every day or so break some trivial law that makes no sense, even if it’s only jaywalking. Use your own head to judge whether a law is just or reasonable. That way, you’ll keep trim; and when the big day comes, you’ll be ready. (Scott 2012: 4f)

The shoplifting of Yomango may not be a challenge towards the “big law in the name of justice,” but it offers the user a small quotidian reflection on which situations it would be justified to challenge participatory submission in the realm of lifestyle consumerism. In its most rudimentary form, the Yomango handbag is a gym for “anarchist calisthenics.”

Yomango proposes and supports a carnival of desire rather than strict fashion asceticism or a “critical” revelation of consumer hegemony; the cookie-box offers a material space to both celebrate desire as well as questioning the everyday ethics of consumer participatory submission. In the material qualities of the cookie box bag, Yomango assigns a material space to manifest an ethical space beyond the regime of surveillance in which true and unbound desire can grow forth.

Dare to desire: YOMANGO is your style: risky, innovative. It is the articulate proliferation of creative gestures. YOMANGO is not about theft, it’s about magic, about the liberation of desire and intelligence crystallized in the “things” offered for sale. If YOMANGO has a politics, it is the politics of happiness, of putting the body first. Be happy, insultingly happy. YOMANGO: feel pretty! (Yomango 2006)

It is not only the user who shall feel happy, but also the spectators of the cute cookie box bag. It is a symbol of a consumerist anarchist vision; a free ethical space, built in the shell of the old, amongst the crumbs of plenty. It is an artistic, performative, symbolic, and materialist form of resistance, and perhaps most poignantly, done with a lot of wit. It can be all at once. And this is just as Yomango would have it. Or as they say; *You want it? You got it!*

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## ETHICS

# Activist Ethics: the Need for a Nuanced Approach to Resistance Studies Field Research

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### *Abstract*

*There is little existing research on the ethical issues facing researchers amongst resistance activists in conflict settings. This paper engages this research gap using the case study of field research amongst resistance activists in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara. It argues that fieldwork amongst activists resisting authoritarian regimes involves unique ethical challenges. Researchers and academic institutions must overcome these challenges if Resistance Studies is to continue to flourish as a discipline. Sometimes, this paper contends, the most ethical way to surmount said challenges necessitates undermining some of the traditional plinths of academic ethical frameworks. The paper makes two further, interlinked arguments: firstly, research amongst resistance activists demands a highly-nuanced and politically-aware approach with regards to ethical considerations. Secondly, however, the researcher under review can only demand such flexible treatment if she is prepared to actively contribute to the resistance struggle that she studies. This is because an activist standpoint is the only ethical response, the paper argues, to the particular ethical challenges associated with researching resistance to an authoritarian regime. In summary, we need an understanding of activist ethics from researchers.*

### **Introduction**

‘You’ll never get that past the Ethical Review Committee,’ one classmate told me in our Research Ethics course. Another concluded, ‘You’ll just

have to lie on the forms.’ ‘If you have to do the fieldwork undercover, it’s not really academic research,’ opined another. During the first few months of my PhD, I attended every course I could find on fieldwork, the ethical aspects of research and ethical review processes. I read copies of approved Ethical Review forms lent by helpful colleagues. I skyped with generous academics that had realised field research similar to what I planned. But still, I wondered if my PhD project would be possible at all, taking into account the ethical dilemmas that my envisaged fieldwork brought. I could not quell my anxieties by reading past research on dealing with the ethical issues specific to a research context like mine because, as far as I knew at that time, that research did not exist.

If there is scant research on the ethics of fieldwork in conflict and post-conflict settings (Campbell 2010, 1), there is less still on the ethical issues facing researchers who focus on the lives of resistance activists in such settings. And yet such research is arguably integral to creating a more humane society (Vinthagen 2015). My paper engages this research gap. In it, I argue that fieldwork amongst activists resisting authoritarian regimes involves unique ethical challenges. Researchers and academic institutions must respond to these challenges if Resistance Studies is to continue to flourish as a discipline. Sometimes, I contend, the most ethical way to overcome said challenges necessitates undermining some of the plinths of what is traditionally regarded as ethical academic research (‘traditional’ in the sense that they are routinely referred to in the paperwork of academic ethical review forms and guidance). Secondly, however, the researcher under review can only demand such flexible treatment if she is prepared to actively contribute to the resistance struggle that she studies. This is because an activist standpoint is the only ethical response, I argue, to the particular ethical challenges associated with the context I describe. We need an understanding of activist ethics from researchers and institutions alike.

To make these arguments, I draw on personal experience of fieldwork amongst activists resisting an authoritarian regime. My most recent research project focused on the relationship between resistance to authoritarian regimes and constructions of gender and gender equality in Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea from the last years of the Spanish colonial period until today. Whilst I made use of archival data and

literary sources, my methodology also drew on multi-stranded strategies from the social sciences, including in-depth interviews, oral histories and participant observation. Therefore, the project has involved field research amongst resistance activists in various countries.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I focus on the period of field research that brought with it the most gnawing ethical dilemmas: occupied Western Sahara.<sup>2</sup>

With regards to the structure of this paper, I begin with a brief background of the Western Sahara conflict and my experiences with the Ethical Review Committee of my institution, followed by an overview of the theoretical approach that I used for my field research. Next, I turn my attention to the ethical challenges faced, and I focus on those that are particular to my research context within Resistance Studies, paying less attention to dilemmas that are already debated across several disciplinary fields such as informed consent, power relations between the researcher and the researched, and the blinders that privilege brings (although I do

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<sup>1</sup> Over 2013-2016, I undertook fieldwork in Equatorial Guinea, Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, Morocco, Spain and Algeria. I also drew on previous fieldwork undertaken in POLISARIO-controlled Western Sahara in 2006 and Algeria in 2006 and 2008.

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the Moroccan-administered part of Western Sahara as occupied rather than as disputed. This is not just because the word ‘disputed’ implies that the claims of the Moroccan invaders are just as valid as those of the Saharawis (such wording has the effect of legitimizing the expansion of a country’s territory by force, a clear violation of the UN Charter), but also because ‘occupied’ is the legally correct way to describe the territory (Kontorovich 2015, 611-612, Mundy 2007, Saul 2015). Stephen Zunes has highlighted how France and the USA have gradually altered mainstream understanding of Western Sahara from ‘occupied’ to ‘disputed’ (Zunes 2015, 290). Morocco seeks to accelerate this progressive change. For example, in 2016 it expelled MINURSO peacekeepers in retaliation at Ban Ki Moon describing the territory as ‘occupied’ (see <http://www.middleasteye.net/news/ban-ki-moon-demands-western-sahara-mission-be-fully-restored-1606934184>, accessed 30 January 2017). The gravest issue with such a change in language is the legal implications. A ‘disputed’ territory is not subject to all the clauses of Geneva Convention treaties and protocols that an ‘occupied’ territory is. For example, as Zunes says, in a ‘disputed’ Western Sahara it would not be illegal for Morocco to move settlers into the territory, or for Morocco to sell the territory’s natural resources (Zunes 2015, 290).

discuss the issue of privilege in relation to risk).<sup>3</sup>

Conducting field research amongst activists resisting the Moroccan occupation in Western Sahara inevitably puts participants at risk of repercussions from the authorities. Therefore, I firstly address the question of participant risk. I then focus on the issue of state permissions and the ethics of lying to authorities. Thirdly I explore the subject of putting myself 'at risk.' Finally, I discuss the act of not maintaining anonymity of research participants. I approach each of these issues from a feminist (and therefore activist) standpoint, and by doing so, it is possible to argue for the ethical validity of risks, half-truths and lack of anonymity. However, in arguing that a feminist and activist approach validates and indeed necessitates undermining some ethical codes that are usually left unquestioned, I must also delineate exactly how said activist approach can be practiced. In the final section of my paper, therefore, I explore the suitability of various activist approaches to research overall.

### **Background to research context**

In 1975, when the dictator of Spain, Francisco Franco lay on his deathbed, his government contravened the UN call for self-determination of the Saharawi people and sold the then-Spanish colony of Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania in exchange for revenue from the country's natural resources for Spain. Spain had been the colonial ruler of Western Sahara since the late 19th century. The POLISARIO Front, the guerrilla movement of the Saharawi natives of Western Sahara, led the struggle against the invading Moroccans and Mauritians whilst civilians formed refugee camps in neighbouring Algeria. These camps are currently home to an estimated 175,000 refugees and constitute the POLISARIO's state-in-exile. Meanwhile, the portion of the population that did not manage to escape in 1975 lives under a Moroccan occupation, separated from the refugees in Algeria and the small POLISARIO-controlled region of Western Sahara by the longest-active military wall in the world.

Whilst there are a number of studies focusing on constructions of gender and gender relations in the Saharawi refugee camps of Algeria

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<sup>3</sup> I did, of course, consider all these issues and others in my Ethical Review documents, and planned my fieldwork with such concerns in mind.

(Allan 2008, 2010, 2014, Almenara Niebla 2016, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013, Juliano 1998, Lippert 1992, Solana 2011, Tortajada 2004), similar academic studies on Saharawi society in the occupied territories are scarce. It is a quick and simple process to gain access to carry out research in the POLISARIO-controlled refugee camps<sup>4</sup>, but this is far from the case in the occupied region. Although in recent years, the Moroccan government has encouraged tourism in Dakhla, in the south of Western Sahara, for an annual music festival as well as kite surfing, tourists in other parts are likely to be monitored to ensure that they do not talk to Saharawi nationalists. Calling the territory ‘Western Sahara,’ rather than ‘southern Morocco,’ is another sign that may lead authorities to confront tourists and possibly expel them.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, a factor in explaining why Western Sahara is one of the most unknown conflicts in the world is the largely successful media blockade that the Moroccan regime has maintained over Western Sahara. Although Saharawis, since the mid 2000s, have taken advantage of the growing availability of internet, mobile telephones and other technologies to chip away at this blockade and communicate their struggle externally (Deubel 2015), foreign journalists wishing to talk to Saharawi nationalists are frequently expelled from the territory. The same can be said for solidarity activists, politicians and academics. These access problems are of central importance when considering the ethics of field research in occupied Western Sahara, as will be further explored later in this paper.

I am able to write this paper precisely because my university allowed me the freedom to carry out my envisaged fieldwork. At first sight, my plans contradicted some of the plinths of the university’s ethical framework for research, namely openness, anonymity, risk and authority permissions. However, content with the ethical judgments I had made

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<sup>4</sup> It has been my personal experience that obtaining a visa from the Algerian embassy and permission from the POLISARIO to conduct research in the camps is easy and quick to do. I have always been free to go wherever and talk to whomever I wish, even after having written and published articles that are critical of the POLISARIO in some ways.

<sup>5</sup> Conversations with Europeans that have visited Western Sahara as tourists, without the intention of engaging with Saharawi nationalists, October and November 2014.

and the reasoning behind them, the Committee ‘passed’ my plans. Nevertheless, literature focused on university ethical policies and Review Committees suggests that my case was as unusual as it was fortunate (Burr 2010, 129, Ceci 1985, De Gruchy 2001, Urbano, this issue). This makes me concerned about my ability to carry out similar research in the future at other universities. Below I argue that conforming to calls for openness, anonymity, risk and authority permissions may not always be the most ethical option when it comes to Resistance Studies research, especially from a feminist perspective, which demands an activist commitment to the (sociopolitical) issues one studies.

Feminist research methodologies raise important questions concerning the problems of reproducing power relations in fieldwork, the inevitability of ‘taking sides’ in research and how to do so in way that is morally or politically sound, as well as the question of whose voice and knowledge is conveyed in a paper (Barrett 1996). A feminist methodology also demands that research not be undertaken for its own sake but rather to counter oppression (Barrett 1996). As Diane Wolf puts it, ‘any truly feminist research must involve some kind of change through activism and consciousness-raising’ (Wolf 1996, 5). In this sense, feminist research overlaps with activist research more generally, in that it must go further than cultural critique (that is, research that is concerned with unequal power relations but stops short of demanding action from the researcher) and ensure active involvement in political struggle for change (Hale 2006). Feminist afroepistemology in particular demands that knowledge be produced to liberate, empower and foster resistance (Gabo Ntseane 2011, 313, Hill Collins 2000, Mazama 2001). Research must have an emancipatory aim. Furthermore, knowledge production must take into account an ethics of care. Emotion is central to the research process. For example, if an interviewee feels that a researcher cares about her plight and feels compassion, she will share her experiences more openly (Hill Collins 2000). Feminists reject that a researcher can be neutral, or that research can ever be embarked upon for a politically-neutral motive. For that reason, the use of the first person perspective and authorial voice is encouraged. In summary, feminist researchers have social and political responsibilities when it comes to their research and research participants, and this must be taken into consideration at the ethical review stage of

research. I took such a feminist (and therefore activist) approach to my research project and, as mentioned above, I write this paper on ethical challenges from such a standpoint (Gabo Ntseane 2011, Hill Collins 2000, Mazama 2001, Whittaker 1994, Wolf 1996).

Next, I explore the four key ethical dilemmas that I encountered during the research project in question, beginning with my entry into occupied El Aaiún city, where I potentially put participants at risk.

## **Ethical Dilemmas**

### **Dilemma I: Participant risk**

A man's portrait swings on a string from the rear-view mirror.

It's El Wali, founder of the POLISARIO and national hero. Who else would it be?

His resolute expression stares out to the desert in black and white. Shueta, the charismatic singer of Saharawi band Tiris, belts out an upbeat number about revolution through the speakers.

The two young men sing along joyfully, the driver tapping his fingers to the beat on the window frame, the passenger taking a snap of the legally-questionable SIEMENS windfarm to his left (Western Sahara Resource Watch 2016). Meanwhile, I lie under the dashboard on the passenger side, weaved inelegantly around Saleh's legs, terrified that the police might have noted the men's number plate. What would happen to them if so?

Abdelhay doesn't seem worried. 'Everything they [the Moroccan authorities] could do has been done to us already. It's impossible to feel fear anymore' (Allan, August - September 2014).

Such sentiments would not have been surprising to Gene Sharp, a founding father of Nonviolent Resistance Studies, who has illustrated how participation in a nonviolent resistance movement gradually erodes activists' fear of an authoritarian regime's sanctions, thereby greatly denting one of a regime's key sources of power (Sharp 2013). But Saharawis' lack of fear does not necessarily make it ethically acceptable that I put them at risk. We make it to my host's (an old friend) house

with no one stopping us. The police, thankfully, must have missed the sight of Abdelhay and Saleh picking me up.

So what would have happened if Saleh and Abdelhay had been caught giving me a lift across the border to a well-known Saharawi activist's house? And what would have happened if police had caught me in the latter? In the seventies, eighties and nineties, punishment for talking to foreigner about the situation in Western Sahara could warrant imprisonment, torture and/or forced disappearance. Nowadays, the sanctions are not so extreme, yet they are still shocking. In February 2014, the Driver of a UK parliamentary delegation had his car impounded by Moroccan police for taking the British politicians to a Saharawi anti-occupation demonstration (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Western Sahara April 2014, 13). In April 2015, the home of Saharawi activist Aminatou Haidar was attacked by Moroccan police (who threw rocks through the window) as she hosted three representatives of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) inside.<sup>6</sup> In May 2015, before receiving me, my host family welcomed a Polish guest who was writing a literary reportage about the Saharawi people. My host and his guest were taken to the police station for questioning, yet the visitor was allowed to stay as long as he did not meet with any other Saharawi activists.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, visits from foreigners do not always, or only, result in negative repercussions. Some activist informants explained to me that having friends abroad, particularly in some Western countries viewed as influential on the international scene, can result in increased immunity: if Moroccan authorities have reason to believe that a Saharawi has contacts abroad that could lobby on her behalf in the case of mistreatment, police are less inclined to punish her brutally. In Saleh and Abdelhay's view, assisting me brought neither notable risks nor extra immunity. They explained that whatever repercussion they could potentially face for helping an unwelcome foreigner enter Western Sahara

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/node/863> [accessed 30 January 2017].

<sup>7</sup> He did so secretly, and indeed his book (in Polish) *All the Grains of Sand* has since been published and nominated for several awards.

would be no worse than what they would face anyway after the next week's protest, or next month's sit-in, and so on, infinitely as long as their political activities continue.<sup>8</sup> My visit could cause no additional harm to what my hosts and helpers would suffer anyway.

A key principle of my institution's ethical policy is that researchers 'do no harm.' I did no additional harm. Does that make my risk-inducing presence ethically acceptable? A textbook University Ethical Review may well find that it does not. And yet Resistance Studies research in some cases not only justifies the breaking of standard monoliths of academic ethical guidance but also requires said breaking for ethical reasons. These reasons, as we shall see, are tied up with the nonviolent strategy of the Saharawi anti-occupation activists. To understand these fully, we should first understand how the aforementioned 'loss of fear' of Moroccan sanctions came about. I attempt to explain this below by taking an historical approach to the Moroccan occupation and Saharawi resistance to it.

Since Morocco and Mauritania first invaded Western Sahara in 1975 (Mauritania made peace with the POLISARIO in 1979 and formerly recognized the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, which currently exists in exile as a nation-in-waiting (San Martín 2010) in the refugee camps of Algeria) there has been a nonviolent nationalist resistance movement led by Saharawi civilians living in the Occupied Territories.<sup>9</sup>

Over the last four decades, Saharawi activists have launched several open and public uprisings, each one opening up further demands and incorporating more members of the local population. Whilst a 1999 intifada focused on human rights and socioeconomic demands with

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<sup>8</sup> With reference to her fieldwork amongst pro-democracy activists in Malaysia, Sandra Smeltzer makes similar observations. She says, 'interactions with some Malaysians may raise (additional) red flags with the authorities about their political endeavours. Many interviewees are well aware of the risks associated with their pursuits and have, to varying degrees, made the decision to accept such liabilities. Talking to me at a coffee shop is not nearly as contentious as the majority of their other daily activities' (Smeltzer 2012, 260).

<sup>9</sup> For more on the dynamics of the nonviolent struggle see Stephan and Mundy (2006) and for the reasons for pursuing a nonviolent rather than a violent struggle, see Porges and Leuprecht (2016).

nationalist demands still perceived too dangerous to be voiced openly, the one that took place in 2005 was explicitly pro-independence (Barca and Zunes 2009, Mundy 2011, Stephan and Mundy 2006, Zunes and Mundy 2010). The most recent uprising, the 2010 Gdeim Izik protest camp (Gómez Martín 2012, Wilson 2013 and Murphy 2013), was the largest in Saharawi history, involving an estimated 20,000 people.

Saharawis that took part in the Gdeim Izik camp highlight that one of the most important effects of the protest was 'the loss of all fear' amongst Saharawi activists (Allan, August - September 2014). Activist Nguia El Haouasi explains that this is because of the indiscriminate repression that followed Gdeim Izik: every household saw a family member injured (El Haouasi, 26 November 2014). Saharawis' reaction to such violence was to become more public and brazen in their resistance. The huge levels of repression,<sup>10</sup> to which Saharawis crucially attribute the general loss of fear that followed, served to widen the demographics of protesters more than even the previous intifadas had managed to do. In this regard, another activist named Izana Amidan further explains, 'After Gdeim Izik, more older men began to protest. They hadn't done so up until this point, because they were afraid of losing their employment' (22 August 2014). As Gene Sharp argues, despotism could not exist if it did not have fear at its foundation, and indeed it is not sanctions themselves that produce obedience, but rather the fear of sanctions. Sharp says, '[c]asting off fear is closely tied to gaining confidence that one possesses power and can act in effective ways to change a situation' (Sharp 1973, 457).

If we understand the collective casting off of fear following the incidents of 2010 in Sharp's terms, then unprecedented numbers of the Saharawi people will be armed with renewed hope and confidence, the enemy of despotism. This 'loss of fear' has important consequences when Saharawis consider the risks of meeting with foreign visitors including researchers, and therefore for ethical imperatives. Although supporting and meeting with researchers may lead to regime sanctions, Saharawi activists' loss of fear of these sanctions reduces the power of the regime.

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<sup>10</sup> For more on the repression of the camp see Sahara Thawra, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (respectively 2012, December 2010, 2010).

We must also consider the future of the Saharawi struggle as a whole when weighing ethical considerations. Scholars of nonviolent resistance struggles have identified the sources of power, pillars of support, mechanisms of change and tactics that can serve as weapons for resistance movement activists (Merriman 2009). The extent to which a movement depends on each of these weapons changes according to the context. Whereas strikes, for example, have proven to be an effective tactic in various resistance struggles, such a tool is of little use to Saharawis since they are heavily outnumbered by Moroccan settlers (who could replace strikers) in their own country (Stephan 2006, 21-22). On the other hand, undermining the legitimacy of the Moroccan regime by exposing its violence is a key, if not the key, weapon of the Saharawi nonviolent anti-occupation movement. This could attract the support of international civil society, which was so integral to the success of the East Timorese anti-occupation project and indeed to the end of apartheid in South Africa. It could also convert some corners of Moroccan civil society to support the Saharawi viewpoint.<sup>11</sup>

If exposing the brutality of the Moroccan occupation is a main aim of the resistance movement, then witnesses are a necessity. Yet in Western Sahara, as mentioned above, international media is scarce, perhaps in part due to a lack of knowledge and interest in the Western Sahara case, but also because Moroccan authorities regularly harass foreign journalists attempting to cover events in Western Sahara.<sup>12</sup> In the absence of the international media, then, other possible witnesses, such as researchers for human rights NGOs, solidarity activists and academics become potential conduits for Saharawi nonviolent activists to use. Supporting foreigners to visit Western Sahara, especially since ‘the loss of fear,’ has become an act of resistance in itself for Saharawis, and for the visitors, an opportunity to support the nonviolent cause. For example, the Spanish

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy have powerfully argued that converting Moroccan civil society and garnering the support of international civil society are the two most important tasks for Saharawi independence activists (Zunes 2010).

<sup>12</sup> See for example the report of Democracy Now journalists, on their 2016 visit to occupied Western Sahara, [https://www.democracynow.org/2016/11/24/repression\\_and\\_nonviolent\\_resistance\\_in\\_africa](https://www.democracynow.org/2016/11/24/repression_and_nonviolent_resistance_in_africa) [accessed 31 January 2017].

solidarity group Sahara Thawra aims to send a constant stream of activists to the occupied zone, so that there is always a Spanish witness to regime atrocities.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara helped to facilitate, in January 2016, the collective visit of some 68 youth politicians, students and solidarity activists from seven European and American countries (all were expelled by Moroccan authorities in 22 separate confrontations) in a bid to attract Western media and political attention to the cause.<sup>14</sup> The Committee made a similar effort in 2017.<sup>15</sup> Such active forms of support for the causes of research participants is integral to the ethical demands of feminist research. Thus, whilst putting research participants at risk seems an ethical abyss at first sight, in the case of occupied Western Sahara such risks are necessary in order to comply with the desire and need of Saharawi activists to gain international witnesses to their situation. The Belmont Report, an essential reference for guiding the ethics of academic research, upholds the principle of 'do no harm,' but also considers putting participants at risk (that is, accepting that harm might occur) as ethically acceptable when the research holds potential benefits for these same participants.<sup>16</sup> What I am advocating here is that, to further the depth and breadth of Resistance Studies research, we need to consider the (long-term) political and human rights advantages to participants of risk-inducing research when evaluating the risk/benefit balance.

Of course, acting as a witness necessitates the retelling of what one has observed. Remaining silent as a witness would undermine my entire argument thus far regarding the ethics of putting Saharawi research participants at risk. Later in the article, therefore, I expose strategies for Resistance Studies academics to fulfil this ethical obligation of 'retelling.' For now though, I turn to the next ethical dilemma, which explores dishonesty in the face of state authorities.

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<sup>13</sup> Personal communications with Sahara Thawra, November 2013.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.vest-sahara.no/a49x2362> [accessed 31 January 2017].

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.vest-sahara.no/a49x2488> [accessed 31 January 2017].

<sup>16</sup> See <https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/#xassess> [accessed 31 January 2017].

## Dilemma II: State permissions and lying to authorities

The phone rings through to a recorded message. The Consulate is shut for Easter. My colleague, a Norwegian national and researcher from the University of Bergen, has more luck. Whilst she recounts the events of the last few hours to her compatriots, I try to persuade a police escort to stop the car for a bathroom break. He eventually relents. In fact, we make three more stops for our driver to drink coffee on our long route north. Finally, the policeman decides (or is instructed) to leave us in a car park in Agadir. As we step out, so too do the six or so passengers of two tinted-window people-carriers which have trailed us since the last town. We look for a hostel. The plainclothes police follow us. They book the rooms on either side of ours.

Officers had asked us to dismount the coach at the final checkpoint before El Aaiún city. This is standard practice. Moroccan authorities verify that non-Moroccan travelers are tourists, UN staff or employees of Morocco's corporate partners before allowing entry into the occupied capital. Those suspected of planning to meet with Saharawis who hold the 'wrong' opinions are often not admitted. I had spoken to several academics, writers and Saharawi solidarity activists who made similar trips before I embarked on mine. I can summarise their advice as follows: take the bus, not the aeroplane (authorities are more likely to google you at an airport than at a roadside checkpoint); insist that you are a tourist; claim ignorance of the Western Sahara conflict; travel by night, when officers are more likely to become sleepy and lax. It didn't work for my colleague and I that time.

Following our deportation to Agadir, we are shadowed by a relay of plain-clothes police and civilian informers who harass us to varying degrees. Their purpose, we eventually conclude, is to intimidate us to the extent that we will never return. On the contrary, the experience strengthens our resolve to try again. A few months later, I go back, alone this time, entrusting myself to the precise instructions of Saharawi friends. This is how I end up crossing the border under the dashboard of Saleh's car, the moral scaffolding I had built so carefully in my head

weakening under the suddenly-tangible weight of potential police threat to my friends.<sup>17</sup>

Therefore, the first time I entered Western Sahara I actively lied to Moroccan occupying authorities by claiming to be a tourist. The second time I merely slipped past the military checkpoints. I am not the first academic to do so, and I know I have not been the last. But what are the ethics of acting deceptively vis-à-vis Moroccan authorities? One immediate concern was that I could create difficulties for academics wishing to carry out non-political research in Western Sahara in the future. However, this was deemed very unlikely by other academics that I approached, who had carried out similar research under the radar of the Moroccan authorities and had a wealth of experience to advise me on such matters.

In any case though, surely a researcher should not be carrying out research on human subjects without the permission of the state, should they? With reference to Western Sahara, the question is complicated by a second necessary question: from which state(s) should one request permission? From, Morocco, the illegal occupier? Or from the Saharawi state-in-exile, which is not yet recognized by any Western state, but the leaders of which are recognized (by the UN) as the sole representatives of the people of Western Sahara? Or from both?

Wolf points out that how (feminist) fieldworkers have navigated the ‘necessary and often problematic’ negotiation of approval and clearance from state authorities is not usually discussed, ‘particularly in settings where those responsible for perpetuating systems of injustice and

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<sup>17</sup> By ‘suddenly tangible,’ I mean that the risks I had foreseen from the comfort of my university library carried far more emotional weight once they became ‘real’ in the field. I am not the first researcher to have such an experience, of course. For example, Annie Pohlman, discussing her research amongst Indonesian ex-political prisoners and torture survivors, tells of witnessing police harassment and intimidation of her research participants during her fieldwork, probably due to her presence. Pohlman highlights that her research participants understood the risks far better than even she could, and that her research is designed to help avoid future human atrocities. However, she still asks herself whether the potential benefits of research can ever justify the potential negative consequences for those who chose to share their stories (Pohlman 2013).

inequality must be appeased in order for the research to be conducted' (1996, 23). Fawzi El-Solh states that most fieldworkers 'will at some point in their research find a measure of dishonesty unavoidable. The crucial question should be how much harm we thereby cause those we seek to study' (El-Solh cited in Wolf 1996, 12). I argue below that it puts Saharawi activists (my 'subjects of study' in El-Solh's terms) at greater risk of harm to seek permission from the Moroccan state.

As we have seen in the previous section, Saharawi activists are keen to meet and host foreign visitors and thereby engage international civil society, despite the risks they incur in doing so. Indeed, engaging international witnesses, who constitute potential conduits to allies amongst international civil society, is key to the Saharawi nonviolent struggle. Some academics, concerned (foreign) citizens and politicians have travelled to the occupied zone by securing permission from the Moroccan authorities. As a result, some of these visitors have been permitted to meet anti-occupation activists as well as individuals handpicked by the Moroccan authorities. Nevertheless, the nationalist activists are often punished by the authorities following the visit. The aforementioned group of UK politicians, for example, attempted to visit Western Sahara in 2013, but were turned back upon arriving at El Aaiún airport. They returned the following year with permission from the Moroccan state for their visit. Permission was granted on the condition that the delegation met with several groups handpicked by the Moroccan authorities that supported Morocco's official position on the conflict. The politicians were also permitted to meet with some Saharawi anti-occupation and human rights activists. However, some of the latter had their property damaged and one had his car permanently confiscated in retribution for meeting with foreign actors and voicing 'dissident' views.<sup>18</sup>

If one can get to the home of a local activist whilst escaping the watchful eyes of the authorities, the lack of permissions can therefore constitute less, rather than more, risks for nationalist Saharawis: if one seeks permission from the Moroccan occupiers, the authorities will know for sure when one speaks to a pro-independence activist. If one manages

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<sup>18</sup> Conversations with the Coordinator of the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Western Sahara, January 2015.

to enter the territory secretly, the risks decrease for participants. Seeking permission in no way ensures the safety of nationalists who the researcher wishes to interview. It could, however, result in a disproportionate amount of data from those who support the Moroccan view. Seen from this perspective, circumnavigating the Moroccan authorities' permissions process is a tactic for avoiding harm to research participants, as well as for ensuring access to another data set.

Approaching the Moroccan state is also questionable in that Morocco does not have the status to grant research permissions in another country (Western Sahara is, after all, another country.) Morocco today administers the occupied part of Western Sahara in contravention of international law, hundreds of UN Security Council resolutions and the UN Charter itself, and by doing so is committing 'one of the most egregious violations of the international order codified in the wake of World War Two' (Mundy 2007, 1). Let us once again bear in mind El-Solh's argument on striving to cause the least harm to 'subjects-of-study' when considering deception. Requesting Morocco's permission before interviewing Saharawis recognizes, in some small way, the regime's authority over occupied Western Sahara. Recognising the occupation goes against the work, principles and aims of Saharawi activists (and indeed of the UN). It causes them harm.

There is also a legal question. Let us consider the latest legal case on occupied Western Sahara: on 21 December 2016 the highest court of the EU found that the EU cannot enter into trade agreements with Morocco to exploit the natural resources of Western Sahara without consulting, and gaining the express consent of, the Saharawi people's representatives in the POLISARIO.<sup>19</sup> Following this precedent, surely the most legally robust approach for academics wishing to carry out research in occupied Western Sahara is to seek permission from POLISARIO rather than Morocco. This, I believe, is the most ethically-sound course of action for a research project like mine. However, since Morocco administers occupied Western Sahara in practical terms, this case also illustrates the particular and nuanced sociopolitical (and arguably legal) understanding that is needed to guide the ethics of research in this area.

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<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.wsrw.org/a105x3695> [accessed 1 February 2017].

### Dilemma III: Personal risk and privilege

It's like when you drop an ice cream on the floor. At first, one wasp buzzes over and begins devouring the melting goo. Then, over time, more and more wasps appear and after a while the ice cream is swarming. That's what it feels like in Agadir, like the whole town is onto us. There were just a few men at first. Now the authorities have informers everywhere taking photos, notes, approaching us to ask questions, to intimidate. After dark, in a café, a kind woman discreetly leaves a note on our table. 'Be careful. Bad men are waiting for you outside.' In Marrakesh, the threat is communicated more directly. We are having breakfast in a friend's house when police storm in and threaten to 'beat everyone up' if we don't get out immediately. In Rabat, police try to put a (stolen?) wallet on my person. The Easter holidays now over, I call the Consulate again.

I get an appointment with the UK Consul for Morocco and Mauritania. My Norwegian colleague and I meet her in the Rabat offices. We are received in a cramped room, devoid of natural light, and separated from the Consul by a Perspex screen, as if we are inmates enjoying our bimonthly visitors' rights. It is the Consulate's responsibility to intervene on behalf of its citizens if their rights are abused abroad. Could the Consul ask its Moroccan colleagues why Moroccan police had forcibly deported me from a third country? Morocco has a right to, and I quote the Consul, 'police its borders.' OK. But can it police the borders of a third country? The Consul responded that it can deport those visitors 'doing political stuff. [...] They want to avoid bad publicity on Western Sahara [...] and that's their right.' We debate, but get nowhere. Nevertheless, after leaving the Consular buildings, police and civilian informer harassment is turned down several notches. My (unfair) British privilege is palpably real.

It is common for solidarity activists deported from Western Sahara to engage with their consular and diplomatic services. This is done to encourage our national representatives to reprimand Morocco for deporting and harassing foreign observers, thus increasing the safety and ease of the latter's visits and thereby facilitating international engagement with the Western Sahara issue. From my perspective, by maintaining that Morocco was policing 'its' borders when it deported me, the Consul's position contravened the UK's official policy of non-recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. I followed up the issue with

my parliamentary representative and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) when I returned home, and, months later, was told that the FCO had raised my deportation (presumably in writing) with Moroccan authorities but had received no response. If Britain wishes to maintain its worldwide reputation for international and high-impact research, we need our government to defend its researchers and thereby protect academic freedom. At the same time however, I argue in this section that universities must also give researchers the freedom to take certain risks. I take my own experience of the Risk Assessment process as a starting point for my argument.

The personal Risk Assessment process (i.e. risks for the researcher, not the participants) for my fieldwork was straightforward. Unlike the Ethical Review, which was dealt with at the university level, the Risk Assessment was managed at the departmental level. I filled in a short form, emailed it to the relevant address, and that was the last I heard of it. If I was fully aware and open about the risks to Saharawis in the Ethical Review, I undoubtedly (and naively) underestimated some of the risks to my person. In the Risk Assessment, whilst I pointed out that Moroccan police do not look upon meetings between foreign observers and Saharawi pro-independence activists kindly, that political violence against the latter was common, and that I may have belongings confiscated by police, I at no point anticipated the level of police intimidation that I would experience.

Perhaps my Risk Assessment process was also relatively simple because I was situated in a languages and cultural studies department, where risky fieldwork is probably less common than in other disciplines. Indeed, Liz Storer and Anna Shoemaker have pointed out that the Risk Assessment process is often foregone in disciplines not commonly considered 'political' or 'sensitive'.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps it was because I was travelling to a city that the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office considers green, that is, safe (it is ironic that Western Sahara regularly features on the NGO Freedom House's annual list of the 'worst of the worst' territories in the world in terms of repression, and yet it is perfectly safe for British

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<sup>20</sup> See <http://www.real-project.eu/field-diary-special-issue-call-for-contributions/>, accessed 23 September 2017.

tourists wishing to enjoy the kite surfing opportunities of the Sahara's Atlantic coast).

Perhaps the Risk Assessment procedure was quick and easy because my field research was completed before the murder of Cambridge University PhD researcher Giulio Regeni whilst he was researching trade union opposition to the regime in Egypt. His case raised questions about the duty of care of PhD students, the – as Urbano points out in this issue – influence of neoliberal discourses influencing conceptions of risk and responsibility in academia (Urbano 2017, see also Jessee 2017, 347), and the resultingly ever-more-strenuous Risk Assessment procedures, which, argue Mateja Peter and Francesco Strazzari (2016, 2), mean that the type of field research Regeni envisaged (that is, research amongst resistance activists themselves) is becoming increasingly difficult to undertake.

Perhaps the Risk Assessment process at my institution was pain-free because I knew, myself, that my white and British privilege meant I was not at serious risk in occupied Western Sahara. Although at least one researcher of Arab origin (a Human Rights Watch employee) has been detained and violently abused for interviewing Saharawi activists (Human Rights Watch 2010), I know of no white visitors of European citizenship that have been treated brutally by Moroccan police for carrying out research in Western Sahara. That said, short periods of detention and abduction, as well as deportation, general harassment and attempts by police to place stolen or illegal goods on one's person are realistic, if less serious, risks, even for someone with white British privilege like myself.

But my decision to take any risk at all has implications for my host university, and therefore raises the ethical question of putting my employer at possible risk of liability. Again, I am able to write this article precisely because the department hosting me at the outset of my project in October 2013 let me undertake my envisaged fieldwork despite the (less serious) risks. However, perhaps if I had realized the full extent of the risks, this would not have been the case. Indeed, my naivety and the potential implications for the university should something 'serious' have happened to me rightly formed part of discussions at my doctoral viva (that said, I still maintain that 'serious' consequences are low risk for white, British researchers in the case of occupied Western Sahara). In a growing climate of 'securitisation of research' in European universities

(Peter 2016), I worry that similar research is becoming impossible precisely because of the increasing fears of liability intensified by the Regeni case.<sup>21</sup>

Peter and Strazzari (2016) have explored how European academics carrying out work in conflict zones have responded to this recent 'securitization of research.' They find that some academics simply preclude interviews with 'sensitive subjects' from their research. Others avoid the risk management process entirely by employing local research assistants to carry out the risky work for them. Some European academics take risk-management practices to such an extent that the researcher is placed in a 'safety bubble (security as protection), [which] remove[s] her from the locals' (Peter and Strazzari 2016, 16).

Of course, all these strategies could affect the richness and value of data, and, in the second example, raise serious ethical questions. In the case of occupied Western Sahara, foregoing the relative impunity that my white and British privilege gives me and passing significantly higher risks to Saharawi research assistants would arguably be highly unethical. To avoid such outcomes, Strazzari himself admits to foregoing his pre-travel commitments (made with the funder and employer) concerning risk-management once in the field in Mali. Had he not have done so, he 'would not have come even close to the findings obtained by the end of [his] fieldwork' (2016, 11).

Michel Wieviorka takes a wider view. Although conscious of the need for universities to take into account the dangers researchers face from authorities when carrying out research amongst resistance activists, he is concerned that the academy's response might be silence in the face of authoritarianism.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Wieviorka points to the situation of

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<sup>21</sup> For a gendered reading of the increasingly intensified risk assessment processes see [https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/aug/19/new-rules-to-protect-women-researchers-abroad-are-sexist-and-dangerous?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw](https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/aug/19/new-rules-to-protect-women-researchers-abroad-are-sexist-and-dangerous?CMP=share_btn_tw) [accessed 1 February 2017].

<sup>22</sup> See [http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20160210.OBS4404/menaces-de-mort-sur-les-sciences-sociales.html?utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Facebook&utm\\_campaign=Echobox&utm\\_term=Autofeed#link\\_time=1455138096](http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20160210.OBS4404/menaces-de-mort-sur-les-sciences-sociales.html?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_term=Autofeed#link_time=1455138096) [accessed 1 February 2017].

academics living and working in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes. Those who speak on the side of truth and justice face a very real risk of dismissal, imprisonment and other human rights abuses. One could argue that we academics who enjoy the privileged, relative immunity that certain citizenships bring have a moral duty to make use of that privilege. A quotation from Noam Chomsky is pertinent here:

Academics are just people with privilege and privileged resources, so they have the kinds of responsibilities that accrue to that. [...] [Y]ou can do quite a lot, in free societies, to influence what is done by the power systems. This is even more the case in places like the US and Britain which are right at the centre of world power (Chomsky quoted in Widdows 2005, 197).

In summary, I would argue that the ethical imperative for academia to carry out potentially-high impact research on nonviolent resistance to authoritarianism, peacebuilding, conflict resolution and so on should outweigh the risks that universities take in allowing academics to undertake research in areas or on topics seen as ‘risky,’ ‘dangerous,’ or ‘politically sensitive.’ From a policy perspective, and to use the eloquent metaphor of Susan Thomson, when it comes to risky research fields, ‘[w]aiting for the guns to fall silent can mean that policy action is not informed by empirical research’ (2009, 2). Similarly, Matthew Porges and Christian Leuprecht point out, with reference to the case of Western Sahara, that ‘[p]opular activist attention to the conflict is limited in part due to the lack of academic research’ (2016, 67). Since, as I argued earlier, solidarity of international civil society is integral to the success of the Saharawi nonviolent resistance struggle, this lack has tangible and serious consequences. From an activist perspective, some police intimidation and harassment is not a high enough price to forego the ethical obligation of paying academic attention to a persecuted and generally-ignored people. The Risk Assessment process for researchers should be divorced from the Ethical Review process, just as it was at my host university. Flexibility must be accorded to Resistance Studies researchers who are willing to take ‘less serious’ risks in the pursuit of knowledge and justice.

## Dilemma IV: Anonymity

The eldest sister in the family that hosted me in El Aaiún in August-September 2014 did not identify as an activist, but had her own ways of opposing the occupation. The house was under constant surveillance by plain-clothes police and Moroccan informers due to her brothers' history of activism. Spies would attempt to listen at the ground floor window. One morning, whilst folding up her children's blankets, through the bars of the open window my hostess' eyes met those of a spy, a profession which, she later told me, is frowned upon in Islam. Whilst continuing to fold the blankets, she uttered loudly, for the benefit of the spy, a phrase from the Quran:

...And We have put a bar in front of them and a bar behind them, and further, We have covered them up; so that they cannot see.<sup>23</sup>

Ensuring research participant anonymity takes on new importance, but brings new difficulties, in a field context shaped by an oppressive regime with 1984-esque tendencies. Before I left for the field, I devised several plans to avoid Moroccan authorities confiscating incriminating data. Once there, I was able to follow these plans without incident. However, there was one eventuality which I had not predicted or planned for: the majority of research participants did not want to be anonymous.

Generally in academia, maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of participants is regarded as paramount to ethical research. There are few studies of research ethics that question this. Burr and Reynolds provide one exception, arguing that in the case of interviewees responding in a professional capacity, anonymity may be at odds with professional responsibility and transparency (2010, 132). However, there is little consideration of the ethics of maintaining anonymity when participants have expressly requested that their real names appear in research publications. During my fieldwork, both in occupied Western Sahara and later in Equatorial Guinea, when I explained to each participant that, should I quote them in my written work, I would ensure the anonymity of their remarks and stories, most reacted with surprise. One participant said, 'Anonymous? What do

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<sup>23</sup> From the ninth verse of chapter 36, "Surat Ya Sin," in the Quran.

you mean anonymous? I stand by what I said. Use my name'.<sup>24</sup> Others regarded their interviews with me as a form of personal testimony-giving, and firmly rejected my proposal to anonymize their testimonies. In such cases, following my university's ethical policy strictly would amount to denying the rights of my research participants to maintain ownership of their own stories, experiences and insights. I have therefore (and with the blessing of the Ethical Review Committee of my then-host university when I submitted a post-fieldwork revision to my Review) kept names attached to data when requested by the participant, concluding that this is the most ethical solution. Nevertheless, this example illustrates the nuanced approach that some Resistance Studies scholars need to take in order for their data to be generated and presented as ethically as possible.

### **Activist approaches to Resistance Studies research**

Thus far I have argued that for research in Resistance Studies, it is necessary, seemingly paradoxically, to contravene some of the traditional plinths of 'ethical' research in order to conduct fieldwork that was truly 'ethical' from a feminist (and therefore activist) position. But my arguments for contravention can only have a chance at standing on one condition: I must be capable and willing to meet the expectations of Saharawi activists in shining light on the abuses they suffer and sharing their histories and perspectives 'back home' in Britain. The 'condition' became all the more urgent once I was in the field. It became an ongoing and cherished socio-political 'debt' that I owe to those who took time, and risks, to share their stories. A quotation from my host is useful for illustrating this point. He said, after I had interviewed three women in his home, 'these women think you are here to help them' (Allan, August - September 2014).<sup>25</sup> Another interviewee explained, '[w]hen young people in the Occupied Territories see someone who is blonde they think that their small demonstration has the power to make a difference' (Mahdi Mayara quoted in Allan, 18 November 2015). Below I outline

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<sup>24</sup> Personal conversations with Boturu, April 2015.

<sup>25</sup> I should emphasise that I shared an information sheet with all participants concerning the PhD project. However, it was evident, once I was in the field, that it was an expectation, amongst several participants, that I would 'share their stories,' beyond the parameters of the aims of my PhD research.

various possibilities for meeting the 'condition' and repaying the 'debt'. I also justify why I took (and take) one approach over others.

As Grabhill highlights, some researchers advocate an 'activist-stance,' by using participatory action research (PAR) methodologies and ensuring the coproduction of knowledge (Grabhill 2000). PAR involves 'the co-definition of problems and research questions and [emphasises] the collaborative nature of research processes' (Grabhill 2000, 46). In other words, those who would traditionally be research participants become the researchers themselves. Nevertheless, in my case the PhD funding was not sufficient to economically support fellow researchers, and thus I would always hold the reins of power in deciding the topic of research, how to conduct it and in what conclusions to draw and write up from the data. In any case I expect that, at least in Western Sahara, the activists with whom I wished to do fieldwork would not have the time, space or indeed the desire to develop academic scholarship in the midst of a nonviolent war against an authoritarian and volatile regime. Indeed, activist scholars Rhoda Rae Gutierrez and Pauline Lipman have faced similar issues when envisioning PAR projects in their local community. They comment that 'at times, community organizations do not have the capacity to take on research roles and need us to shoulder that work' (2016, 1242). Nevertheless, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994) have highlighted the propensity of white, Western writers to recreate asymmetric power relations in their studies of the postcolonial subject. PAR perhaps presents the best avenue for avoiding the recreation of such power relations. Furthermore, it rightly challenges the assumption that universities and academics are the best providers of 'expert' knowledge. My inability to use such a methodology limits the extent to which I can truly call my research 'feminist,' even if the intentions were feminist.

Another option is to take on the role of the 'activist-scholar' (Gillan 2012), that is, to develop work designed to be beneficial and informative to the movements one studies. Hale uses the powerful example of the usefulness of geo-mapping for indigenous land claims (2006, 110). On the other hand, not all academic research can be so easily useful. I would hazard to say that in some cases, including in the case of my own academic research to date, there are limits as to how useful (as well

as timely and accessible) academic research can be. As Croteau has put it, '[b]ecoming an academic to support social movements is akin to launching a space program to develop a pen that writes upside down. At best, it is a circuitous route' (Croteau quoted in Gillan 2012).

Stopping short of an activist approach, another option is to ensure that the research is itself designed to be used for informing policy. Some feminist researchers (and others) have focused on such policy-orientated research, which can be politically useful to communities whose lives are dramatically affected by the policy decisions of others. As my research focused on women, gender and resistance, several women interviewees raised concerns regarding a 'double oppression,' that is, fighting a foreign occupation but also struggling, at times, against sexism within their own, as well as Moroccan, society. The written product of my research itself is thus not a polished, shining picture of Saharawi activist society that could itself be used as a strong piece of advocacy on behalf of the Saharawi independence cause. Reflecting the critical views of my interviewees, as a researcher should, I show the challenges as well as the achievements of this community.<sup>26</sup> As for influencing policy, although my own research conclusions show how the foreign policy of certain Western countries undermines gender equality for Saharawi and Equatoguinean women, I regretfully do not expect my PhD research itself to influence policy in this vein. Indeed, several researchers point out that although policymakers have ready access to high quality research, policy change is currently determined by racist and classist neoliberal agendas and therefore even policy or advocacy-focused research must be linked to organizing and activism if it is to contribute to social change (Rae Gutierrez 2016, Cox 2014).

I found that the most suitable approach, for the context I was working in, was to attempt to be an activist and a researcher in two parallel roles: an activist/researcher. The activist/researcher accepts that her academic work may be of limited use to the movement she studies and therefore commits to aiding a movement in other ways. This follows the notion of

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<sup>26</sup> See Ortner (1995) for a useful discussion on why Resistance Studies must pay attention to the political struggles internal to liberation movements if we are to advocate for a truly just future.

reciprocity to which many feminist fieldworkers subscribe.<sup>27</sup> As Smeltzer (2012) has pointed out, activism can encompass several activities, from direct action like participating in and organizing demonstrations, to ‘back-office’ work such as grant-writing and legal assistance. Below, I briefly outline the types of action I have been able to realise as an activist/researcher in order to illuminate how I envisage this role.

I am in the fortunate position to have volunteered with Saharawi solidarity organizations since 2007. I am currently a member of Western Sahara Campaign UK (WSC), which lobbies the UK government amongst other targets on natural resource exploitation in Western Sahara (we currently have a court case against the UK government for allowing the sale of products from occupied Western Sahara in UK supermarkets, erroneously labeled as Moroccan) and human rights abuses of Saharawis (we encourage the UK government to use its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to push for UN human rights monitoring in Western Sahara). I also form part of Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW), a network of activists from over 40 countries which works to end all exploitation of Western Sahara’s natural resources done without consent of the Saharawi people. We carry out research on, and campaign to end, this plunder as we share Saharawis’ belief that it undermines the UN peace process and reinforces a brutal occupation (Allan 2016). Our research was used in court in POLISARIO’s 21 December 2016 case against the European Union [EU] in the EU’s Court of Justice, which has confirmed that the EU’s trade deals with Morocco are illegal insofar as they apply to Western Sahara. Our research also underpins our wider campaigning and lobbying of parliamentarians, companies and shareholders.

Being a member of networks such as WSC and WSRW made it easy to collect data which, with the informed consent of participants, could be used more widely than for a single-authored PhD project, and could contribute to action-orientated activities. For example, I used the testimonies of women interviewees in a 2016 submission to the UN

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<sup>27</sup> In line with the view that, in order for research to be “feminist,” someone other than the researcher should benefit, many feminists engage in acts of reciprocity with their informants and interviewees, offering money (such as a share of book royalties) or other favours.

Universal Periodic Review of Morocco on women rights abuses. This was part of a more widely coordinated effort by Saharawi-led and solidarity organisations to enter submissions on various types of Moroccan regime human rights abuses against Saharawis. I have also used these women's testimonies whilst lobbying members of the European Union parliament. In 2014, I wrote a more detailed report on the wider abuses documented during my fieldwork for WSC's UK-focused lobbying and campaigning activities. I also joined a group of activists working to facilitate access for foreign observers to occupied Western Sahara. None of these activities would have been possible if I had not (tried to) enter occupied Western Sahara. At the same time, none constituted 'academic outputs' in any traditional sense. Such a parallel approach is how I envisage the role of an activist/researcher.

## Conclusion

Arguably, in-depth research on nonviolent resistance is essential for a more peaceful future for humankind. Yet the increasing securitisation of research threatens the growth of the field. Standard plinths of academic ethical research frameworks at times conflict with a feminist approach to ethics that foregrounds solidarity with the research participants. In the case of occupied Western Sahara, Saharawis see hosting researchers (and others) as worthy of significant risk, since securing witnesses to the abuses they suffer increases the legitimacy, and therefore the power, of their nonviolent movement. It also fosters the forging of international allies, which Saharawis also see as essential to the success of the movement. As long as academics commit to meeting Saharawi activists' expectations in terms of solidarity by taking an activist approach to research, I have argued here that it is not unethical to put Saharawis at risk by visiting the field. Likewise, the complicated questions surrounding personal risk, anonymity and state permissions should not be sufficient to deter research. Academia should not close its borders to under-researched, almost invisible human plights and injustices under the name of 'Ethics' and 'Risk Management.'

Feminist and activist research, when undertaken amongst a resistance movement living the conditions of struggle that I outline in this paper, necessarily challenges the existing paradigms of academic ethical and risk

review procedures. We need bold and brave approaches to ethics and risk – that is, an applied understanding of activist ethics – for Resistance Studies research to grow, show solidarity and ensure action.

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# Social Movements and Resistance Studies in Neoliberal Times

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## *Abstract*

*This article looks at the issues that the study of resistance and social movements raises to applied normative ethics in the context of neoliberal academia. In particular, by focusing on the function of ethics review committees, the article discusses how current ethics guidelines can constitute possible methodological impediments for the practice of participatory action research. Furthermore, the article reflects on the current institutional principlist approach to ethics and how this has a potential to silence socially engaged research. The article goes further to argue that, with the shift of tertiary education from public good to a corporate service, ethics committees function as bodies that contribute to implement neoliberal governmentalising and individualising techniques among academics. Neoliberal discourses have, indeed, permeated academic institutions with potentially serious consequences for the study of resistance and social movements.*

## **Introduction**

On February 3, 2016, the body of Giulio Regeni was found in a ditch alongside the highway between Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt. His body showed signs of extreme torture: numerous fractured bones, stab wounds, burns and a broken neck that ultimately caused his death. Giulio was an Italian PhD student at the University of Cambridge researching independent trade unionism in Egypt, where he was conducting his fieldwork when he was allegedly kidnapped and killed. This tragic event has sparked numerous discussions in the academic circles around issues of safety and risks for researchers in the field, and around neoliberal discourses of risk assessment, responsibility and protection.

In this piece, I will address the critical aspect of research ethics for

the study of resistance and social movements in the context of neoliberal academia. In particular, I argue that while good research practice is an important aspect of our work and every researcher has a duty to ensure participants' safety, there is a risk that the ethics guidelines and procedures implemented by universities to approve or reject ethnographic research projects have the potential to act as a subtle tool for censoring critical thinking and socially engaged research. In particular, I argue that this risk is aggravated by the conditions of labour and of knowledge production of the neoliberal academy. In this article, I will highlight the function and role ethics committees play within such context.

In the following pages, I will first briefly outline how ethics review boards have been established and the challenges that they pose to social science research. Then, I will draw on the existing literature that problematises the role of ethics guidelines and ethics committees in relation to ethnographic research and, specifically, participatory action research. To conclude, I will comment on the possible implications of research ethics institutional procedures for the study of resistance and social movements practices in the context of neoliberal academia.

### **Background: research ethics and social sciences**

The situational context in which contemporary understanding of ethics has developed is to be traced back to the establishment of the Nuremberg Code (1947) developed after the Nuremberg trials after the Second World War, followed by the World Health Organisation's *Declaration of Helsinki* (1964), the *Belmont Report* (1979) and the most recent *International Ethical Guidelines for Biomedical Research Involving Human Subject* (1982; 1993; 2002) (Israel & Hay, 2006). These four major ethical statements emerged from the need to regulate specific disciplinary areas, that is, biomedical and behavioural research involving human subjects. The fundamental principles elaborated in these reports – respect for persons, beneficence, justice – have been incorporated by most countries' institutions and universities in the elaboration of ethical frameworks for the regulation of scientific and biomedical research as well as the evaluation of social sciences research practice. However, social scientists have often taken issue with the approach that ethics committees employ for the assessment of their research projects, arguing that these

regulations can constrain their work and limit the possibility to acquire valuable information for our research (Dingwall, 2008; Hammersley, 2009).

There is wide consensus within the social sciences research community that the ethical frameworks adopted by universities are ill-equipped to evaluate projects that employ research methods that differ from traditional ones (Wiles, 2013). This problem often leaves social researchers frustrated in their dealing with ethics committees while we still strive to adopt ethical behaviours for conducting our researches. In fact, most research ethics committees adopt a principlist approach to ethics, that is, they draw on specific principles in evaluating applications for ethical approval such as people's autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence and justice (Wiles, 2013, p. 15). While such principles are undoubtedly noble and indeed constitute an example of good research practice they may, as Rose Wiles points out, "conflict with each other, in which case it is necessary to make a case for which one is chosen" (2013, p. 15). Furthermore, they may constitute a methodological impediment as, for instance, can be the case with the issuance of informed consent. In my fieldwork, I have found that the moment of asking the participants to sign the informed consent form has, in many cases, made participants uncomfortable and suspicious. Many social scientists researching resistance and activism have faced this problem, and this is an issue to seriously address as it can compromise the possibility to establish relations of collaboration with participants.

The problem seems to lie in the tension emerging from applying a principlist model of ethics based on universal ethical principles – principles which, most importantly, have been elaborated to regulate disciplines other than social sciences – to the particularity of situational research.<sup>1</sup> While institutional ethical guidelines need necessarily be very general as they provide a model for assessing research projects, I argue that these should not be regarded as sufficient to ultimately evaluate the feasibility of a study. Indeed, like every other model, the particular ethical framework adopted by university ethics committees can be regarded

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive account of other approaches to ethics see Israel, M. & Hay, I. (2006). *Research Ethics for Social Scientists*. London, UK: Sage Publications.

as having limitations, too. In striving to be as comprehensive and communicable as possible, models usually fall short of including details of specific cases; they approximate and may even lose accuracy. I argue that because research ethics committees have the power to determine which research projects can be carried out and which cannot, with considerable impact on the type of knowledge that is eventually divulged, the particularity of each case requires significant attention. General ethical guidelines may be considered as basic starting points for the evaluation of research projects, but a detailed inquiry into the nature of the specific research under assessment may contribute to better-informed decisions by ethics committees. In this regard, I am not arguing for more specific and detailed rules, which could pose a even greater risk for the study of resistance; rather, a better understanding of the research project under consideration could allow for a more flexible application of the general guidelines. In closing, I argue that research ethics committees may need to rethink their approach toward ethical guidelines and consider them not just as boxes to tick off when assessing research projects, but as flexible principles that can adapt to the specific conditions of situational research. I will further explain this aspect in the next section in relation to the ethical issues raised by the use of participatory action research methods and approaches.

## **Research Ethics, Participatory Action Research and Resistance Studies**

As mentioned above, this section will address the issue of seeking ethical approval for research projects investigating the phenomena of resistance through participatory action research methods within the current institutional ethical framework outlined above. In particular, it will discuss the problematics that often emerge when social researchers using this type of alternative research methods submit their application to the scrutiny of research ethics committees.

The origins of Participatory Action Research (PAR) can be traced back to the 1940s, when Kurt Lewin (1946) coined the term “action research” to describe a research approach that emphasises the importance of practical intervention and action in the host community, which also establishes the guidelines for conducting the research itself. Since then,

there has been a proliferation in the use of participatory action research methods (see e.g. Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007,). PAR approaches and methods can be defined as tentative and have, throughout time, raised numerous challenges to the traditional research establishment and traditional research methods, as well as to the normative understanding of research ethics. In fact, the core principles of PAR approaches challenge mainstream epistemological accounts in research tradition that assume that an objective reality exists ‘out there’ and needs to be discovered, analysed and measured by qualified researchers. PAR further attempts to contribute to the broader challenge of “liberal social and political theories and theories of scientific knowledge [assumptions] that the world is composed of individuals... awaiting or inviting representation” (Barad, 2007, p. 46). PAR approaches, instead, seek to understand the complexity of relations that constitute the field under investigation and, particularly, they advocate for the need to acknowledge the relational nature of knowledge production. Participatory action researchers have a commitment to collaborative research practice and knowledge production, which means that we problematise the relationship between researcher and participants as interpreted in traditional research. The research effort becomes a collaborative enterprise at all stages, which acknowledges and emphasises that multiple interpretations of a single phenomenon are possible by both researchers and participants (Kindon, Pain & Kesby, 2007, p. 13). To do so, participatory action researchers often utilise qualitative methods that are interested in conveying the *messiness* of the experiential and in problematising positivist ideas of *objective methods* (see Law, 2004).

These methods can be conceived as resistant. In advocating for a relational approach to knowledge production that challenges the idea of expertise, these resistant methods contribute to the critical task of resisting and challenging positivist normative accounts of social phenomena. “Stripping the experts” of the academic establishment, in Brian Martin’s words, is part of the broader commitment to critical and socially engaged research that hopes to progressively shift policies and social practices (1991, p. 6).

In problematising the very epistemological underpinning of current research practice, PAR necessarily questions the principles that regulate

its ethical understanding, too. In fact, PAR ethics is at odds with current applied normative ethics. At the core of this clash there is a different interpretation of the main principles of respect for persons, beneficence and justice that are currently interpreted in a limited way (Manzo & Brightbill, 2007, p. 35). In fact, traditional models of ethics tend to assume that the research process is static and that the relation between researcher and participants is hierarchical. These ignore that participants, in fact, play an active role in the co-production of knowledge, and that, as a result of this collaboration, power relations between the researcher and the participants are continuously re-designed throughout the research process (see Gergen & Gergen, 2000). In this way, ethics committees focus mostly on protecting participants from potentially harmful research by anticipating possible risks that may arise in the research process. In doing so, this approach may deny participants agency, and requires that the design and the conduction of the research be outlined in advance by the “experts”. This is difficult to achieve for participatory action researchers who, as explained above, are committed to a relational approach to research and to knowledge production that involves research participants as active agents in the design and conduction of the research itself. It can be argued, then, that PAR demands a broader interpretation of current normative ethical principles. As Manzo and Brightbill have suggested, this alternative view of ethics is based on respecting people by acknowledging them as competent actors who actively and voluntarily contribute to the research process, and autonomously express their worldview that is as well considered of great value for the project (2007, p. 36-39). At the same time, what is formulated as principles of beneficence and simplistically interpreted as “doing no harm” is also considered insufficient for a participatory approach. The principle of beneficence is to be understood in the broader framework of PAR approaches that imply a commitment to take action on the social issues that are investigated. Only in this way can participatory action researchers hope to ensure justice for their participants, that is, by facilitating their self-representations and by sharing with them a commitment to social justice and resistance.

To conclude, I return to the central argument of this article that currently applied normative ethics can be regarded as a regulatory

framework that critically limits the possibility to conduct socially engaged research. In this section, I have outlined how an ethical approach that fails to incorporate a broader understanding of research practice, as elaborated by PAR approaches, is problematic for the study of resistance and social movements that is conducted with these methods. However, this is not the only way that ethics committees can potentially silence socially engaged research, as I will explain in the next section.

### **Neoliberalism, resistance studies and the changing role of tertiary education**

As argued previously in this paper, good research practice is an important aspect of our work and every researcher has a duty to ensure participants' safety. However, I have also explained how the current definition of ethics is disputable, and how social scientists have questioned the utility of ethics boards for decades and challenged them on several grounds. In this article, I have specifically looked at the critique that participatory action researchers have elaborated consisting of challenges to the current model of ethics, claiming it applies inappropriate principles. However other critiques claim that ethics committees can impose unnecessary restrictions, lack expertise or even cause harm to innocent subjects (Schrag, 2011). The aim of this article is not to discuss whether ethics review boards should be abolished or not, or what specific changes they should undertake to better suit the needs of socially engaged research. However, this piece seeks to contribute to the discussion by highlighting how the shift toward a neoliberal model of education and research exacerbates an already difficult relationship between ethics review boards and socially engaged researchers.

In fact, in this last section of the article, I contribute to these critiques by arguing that, in the current neoliberal context in which they function, ethics review boards have the power to censor socially engaged research. I argue further that this subtle censorship occurs at different levels. As explained earlier, the guidelines offered by ethics review boards overlook issues specific to the case of social science and, especially, to socially engaged research. Their reasoning entails not only the possibility for ethics review boards to directly exercise their power by deciding whether or not to stop a research project but also, at a more subtle level

and especially in the case of socially engaged research, it transfers the burden of responsibility of the research from the university as a public institution to the individual researcher. In particular, I argue that within the framework of the neoliberal university, the rationale of current ethics review boards contributes to the implementation of the neoliberal imperative to individualise risk and responsibility within the academy. Here, I address the instances of risk and safety of social researchers on the field by drawing a link between neoliberalism and the current model of university-corporation.

Neoliberalism has primarily been defined as a theory of political-economic practices revolving around principles such as deregulation, privatisation and the withdrawal of social provisions of the state. Neoliberalism can be interpreted as a particular organisation of capitalism which, through changes in policies, practices and institutions, has evolved to protect capital and reduce labour power (Campbell, 2008, p. 187). It tends to present itself as a scientific discipline based on economic facts. In particular, its plausibility rests on the idea that unrestricted trade improves the wellbeing of individuals and offers them the opportunity to improve their situation. However, these anomalies have come to influence many aspects of contemporary social life. As David Harvey points out (2005, p. 11), neoliberalism can be interpreted as a very specific social framework that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (2005, p. 11). Neoliberalism is, indeed, more than an economic doctrine and it can also be interpreted, as Dardot and Laval (2013) argue, as a system that aims to produce neoliberal subjects. Considering the impact of neoliberal policies on the academic institution can contribute to a better understanding of how the bureaucracy at work in the modern university-corporation can hinder the study of resistance practices.

In fact, while ethics review boards have been instituted to formally manage the possible risks that could emerge from the conduction of research – primarily scientific and medical– it can be argued that they have increasingly adopted the features of most bureaucracy. Ethics review boards have expanded and formalised the process of gaining ethics approval

to the extent that they can hinder – if not censor – nontraditional forms of research. I argue that the threats to socially engaged research represented by this process of *ethics creep* (Haggerty, 2004, p. 394) are aggravated by the neoliberal transformation of higher education over the last decades. In fact, the labour processes and the conditions of production of academic knowledge need to be considered in this regard, as precariousness is one of the defining experiences of contemporary academic life (Gill, 2009, p. ). While it is not the immediate task of ethical review boards to consider issues of labour conditions' of researchers within the academy, it is important to highlight how the neoliberalisation of academia, coupled with traditional approaches to research ethics, hinders the study of resistance practices. Ethics review boards facilitate this process by imposing limiting requirements to socially engaged research, as I have previously explained.

Moreover, I content that socially engaged research is at risk within the academy also because of the nature of their fieldwork. Social researchers, in fact, may face safety issues on the field; these issues can range in nature and gravity, from physical and emotional safety to ethical and professional safety (Lee, 1995; Allan, 2017). While they are not always predictable, strategies and trainings can be put in place to minimise the likelihood that they may appear, and their impact on researchers wellbeing. However, in the context of the neoliberal logic creeping into the university that looks at expanding those research areas that are considered profitable, these issues are often overlooked. As Haggerty claims (2004, p. 412):

An unfortunate consequence of these developments will likely be that researchers will choose to employ certain types of unproblematic and often dictable research methodologies rather than deal with the uncertainty and delays associated with qualitative, ethnographic, or critical scholarship which do not fit easily into the existing research ethics template.

I argue further that another consequence of these developments can be, instead, that socially engaged researchers might fulfill the requirements of the ethics review boards in order to obtain approval by silently taking personal responsibility for the possible risks that could emerge on the field. In fact, the encroachment of corporate culture into academia has

introduced several neoliberal mechanisms of governance that shape the way in which employees of the university work. Under the pressure of individualising and governmentalising techniques that are implemented by the introduction of the so-called “audit culture” in universities (and other public sectors), academics often go above and beyond to complete their work and perform to the required standards (Cupples & Pawson, 2012). This is a major issue for the study of resistance and social movements, and for the researchers who study them and are not always sufficiently equipped for the journey. The university has, indeed, a duty of care towards its employees and, regardless of the area that they are researching, it has a duty to guarantee health and safety trainings to its employees and to provide sufficient information to enable them to conduct their own risk assessments. With regard to social research, there is a particular need to formalise and regularise risk-aware trainings as a standard practice (Bloor *et al.*, 2007, p. 42).

Certain qualitative research can involve issues of safety and risk, and qualitative researchers that conduct this type of research have a right and an expectation to receive formal trainings. In this respect, aid agencies and media organisations’ security procedures might constitute a useful example for universities to follow to ensure the health and safety of social researchers on the field (Bloor *et al.*, 2007, p. 55). Risk assessment and management is not to be regarded as the exclusive responsibility of individual researchers or, in the case of PhD students, of individual supervisors. These are issues that necessarily go beyond the relationship between individual workers in the university. Maintaining safety at work is the responsibility of both employers and employees and, while it is impossible to anticipate every danger that may occur on the field, it could certainly be helpful to learn in advance about possible precautions or actions to take in case these emerge.

Sadly, modern universities are instead becoming increasingly like corporations, administered and run as a business. Like all other corporations they are risk averse, that is, if risks exist it is expected that individuals – who have made their choice – should bear the burden of any resulting misfortune (Rogermacginty, 2014). By absorbing neoliberal discourses and practices, the modern university tends to decide what kind of research is worth doing based on standards of profitability (see

Giroux, 2002). Furthermore, like any other corporation they tend to maximise their profits while reducing risk or outsourcing it. This rationale can constitute a serious obstacle for the study of resistance in the academy, as explained earlier. In particular, this can be especially difficult for doctoral students who often have limited funding available to conduct fieldwork – and might even self-fund their projects – and time constraints to complete their research projects. There is a specific neoliberal logic behind this reasoning: the market logic by which risks shape a new, self-reliant entrepreneurial academic worker. The process of increasing bureaucratisation and corporatisation of the modern university poses several questions regarding the possibilities to undertake socially engaged research, which do not necessarily fit into the category of “profitable research”. The social and public role of the university, where research should be undertaken to contribute, sustain and develop democratic public spheres, is undermined by the logic of neoliberalism that, instead, values knowledge exclusively as a form of financial capital.

To conclude, the stringent framework of neoliberal education is making the study of resistance and of its practice increasingly difficult within the walls of academic institutions. For instance, it is possible to track how the humanities and the social sciences have come heavily under attack of neoliberal governments and universities’ managerial departments, seeing their funding frozen if not progressively curtailed (see e.g. Sawa, 2015 and Taylor, 2016). This is a reality which is sadly happening at the university where I am currently based (see Taylor, 2016). Within this picture, ethics committees have the power to make decisions about the type of research that will be conducted and, considering the regulatory framework that they apply, the future appears particularly worrying for socially engaged research.

The hegemonic discourse of neoliberalism in the university needs be questioned if we want to remain committed to social justice and political change in our research practice. In these times, when the University’s critical and conscious role is seriously at risk, there is a need to challenge every aspect within these institutions that can further threaten the credibility of socially engaged research and its usefulness for society. However, while acknowledging the need to critically analyse and counter the neoliberal hegemony of safety and risk discourses, as researchers we

cannot and should not pretend that these issues are not real. Hence, while continuing to demand that the institutions where we work account seriously for the possibility of a change of policy, we also need to self-organise, provide support and share recommendations for safe research practice.

## Conclusion

While it can be said that the various types of harm must be considered as a serious issue when participating in social science research, there is a compelling need to also consider the role of ethics review boards in the current neoliberal model of the university-corporation. This model, in fact, can have an impact at various levels on researchers studying resistance and their well-being. In this article, I have argued that while institutional ethics guidelines follow principles that seek to protect research participants from potentially harmful research, these are often inadequate when it comes to evaluating the practice of participatory action research, and fail to consider numerous issues that are specific to the conduct of socially engaged research. At present, the conservative approach of ethics review boards takes a “just in case” approach to managing the dangers posed by research projects, which generates a process that has the potential to introduce ever more regulations to manage potentially undesirable eventualities (Haggerty, 2004, p. 412). This article sought to elaborate on the dangers of such conservative approaches to research review in an academic context that continues to be permeated by neoliberal discourses of profit, risk and responsibility. Hence, I have argued that, in the current circumstances, ethics review boards contribute to the implementation of neoliberal individualising techniques within the academy that tend to responsabilise individual academic workers for their choices of how to conduct research. This is a major issue for the study of resistance, considering that often researchers have little choice over the way they can conduct their projects, given the exacerbation of labour conditions within the academy.

Certainly, the solution can hardly be the bureaucratic proliferation of rules and requirements which would make social research that uses nontraditional methods even more unlikely to happen in the academy. What, then, is left for us to do?

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## EXTENDED COMMENTS

# When Doing Ethnography with Armed Movements: Participation, Rapport, Resistance – And Ethics

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### Introduction

In this text I discuss ethical challenges concerning ethnographic fieldworks and participant observation in resistance movements with armed branches. By so doing, my point of departure will be my own ethnographic fieldwork with the Kurdish movement in Turkey's Southeast that I conducted between May 2015 and January 2016. More precisely, I will discuss a particular instance when I was asked to participate in an unofficial weapon production workshop with militant youth activists in an autonomous Kurdish neighborhood. This situation evoked a series of hesitations, internal questioning and reflections concerning ethics, participation and Resistance Studies that will be addressed below. Although the research interest that brought me to Kurdistan was the movement's experiments with civil forms of *constructive resistance* (see Sørensen, 2016; Koefoed, 2017a) in the context of the movement's ideological paradigm of 'democratic autonomy' (see e.g. Jongerden & Akkaya, 2013), I will in this text focus on violent aspects of the autonomy project, as I find this particularly useful for a fruitful discussion on research ethics.

During the time of my fieldwork, the conflict between the Kurds and the Turkish State escalated dramatically. In July there was a violent attack on a cultural center in Suruç, a predominantly Kurdish town bordering Rojava, Syrian Kurdistan. The center was housing a delegation

of pro-Kurdish solidarity activists on their way to the town of Kobanê with humanitarian aid, hoping to assist in the process of rebuilding the war-torn city. Thirty-two activists were killed, and over one hundred were injured. The incidence shook the entire Kurdish community, and eventually led to the end to the ceasefire between the PKK and the Turkish State. In the wake of the Suruç attacks, a massive wave of declarations emerged from various Kurdish towns, cities and neighborhoods all over Turkey's Kurdish region – announcing 'democratic autonomy' from the Turkish State and denouncing all official Turkish institutions. The logic behind these declarations was a deep sense of mistrust in the Turkish political and social institutions, reflected in the following quote:

The Turkish state is killing, and arresting, thus, we are building up these barricades (...) to protect our neighborhood, we do not accept the laws of the state, their laws permits killings, violence and torture, so why would we accept them? Therefore we are here building up a system of radical democracy<sup>1</sup>, which is based on the ideology of Serok Apo.<sup>2</sup> In this system, it is the people who make the decisions ('Abdullah', movement activist, and member of a Kurdish District Council in an anonymous neighborhood).

Although the Kurdish movement in Turkey's Southeast also includes large scale and widespread civilian branches, civil grass roots initiatives (see Koefoed, 2017a; Tatort Kurdistan, 2013), and legal political parties (see Watts, 2011), it has its historical roots in the armed guerilla warfare of the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) which still play a crucial symbolic and practical role today (see Marcus, 2007). PKK guerillas enjoy enormous social status among movement participants in the civil structures. Martyred PKK fighters are celebrated, commemorated and remembered through rituals, songs, poetry, theatre, photographs, posters, slogans, stories and cinema (see Koefoed, 2017). Urban semi-

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<sup>1</sup> What the Kurdish movement sees as 'radical democracy' is a fundamental component of their experiments with building up 'democratic autonomy'. For further details, please see (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Serok Apo', meaning 'Leader Apo' refers to Abdullah Öcalan, the founding father of the PKK.

autonomous youth militia, formerly known as YDG-H, took the lead in ‘securing’ autonomous Kurdish neighborhoods from interference by Turkish police and military, resulting in long-lasting violent clashes, and also successive long-term curfews in certain areas.

While the importance of informed consent, anonymity, the do-no-harm principle and other box-ticking aspects of ethical research conduct should not be underestimated (see e.g. the papers by Joanna Allan and Massimiliana Urbano in this issue), the aim of this text is to shed lights on some of the more ambiguous, subtle and less clear-cut aspects that I see as related to ethical research conduct. Acknowledging the complexity of research ethics, this text offers no suggestions for ‘best practice’, but seeks rather to engage in a reflexive discussion illuminating some challenges that could emerge when doing participant observation with a movement that also has armed branches. Due to the controversial aspects of the incidence I will discuss below, I have chosen to not only conceal all names of individuals referred to in this text, but also to keep the names of place and dates hidden. I will start out with a brief description of the particular empirical context within which the incidence that will be addressed occurred.

## **A Kurdish Autonomous Neighborhood**

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I spent time in a semi-rural area in a small Kurdish neighborhood which had, a few months earlier, declared itself autonomous from the Turkish state by local movement activists. As the narrative of (democratic) autonomy is the discursive foundation underpinning most of the constructive resistance practices the movement had been establishing since 2005, it was essential to incorporate observations and interviews from some of these areas as part of my field research. I needed empirical data to flesh out the various ways political space was broadened by the movement, even when – as in the case I will address below – that broadening included the use of violence.

In this particular neighborhood, the Kurdish urban youth militia called the YDG-H was particularly strong. They were better organized, and seemed to have more direct connections to the guerillas of the PKK compared to in most other autonomous neighborhoods I had previously visited. I had learned that weapons had been smuggled from

'the mountains'<sup>3</sup> to strengthen their resistance. The local population was persistently organized in 'self-defense' activities on a nightly basis as a way to maintain and protect their newly acclaimed and threatened autonomy. This included a self-organized night watch roster consisting of ordinary civilians, covering all entrances of the neighborhood, informing the YDG-H to mobilize quickly in cases where Turkish police and military attempted to enter. From friends and local news, I knew that ever since autonomy had been announced, there had been regular violent confrontations between the YDG-H and Turkish forces in this neighborhood. Turkish forces had at several occasions attacked the area with tanks and helicopters to suppress the resistance. Also the strictly civil resistance projects, like autonomous Kurdish schools and cultural centers, had suffered from these attacks. The result had been massive violent and non-violent counter-resistance by militant youth and the general people from the local community. Several movement activists had been arrested, detained, and injured in the process, and multiple Turkish policemen had been injured. There had also been incidences of activists being killed, and in such cases, almost always claimed by the State to be members of the PKK.

It was in this particular neighborhood that some friends of mine suggested to take me to the local 'People's House'. People's Houses are buildings where movement participants organize meetings, plan resistance and prepare other political activities. They are also social centers where the community hangs out, people discuss, drink tea, sing, dance, and eat together. They could be seen as unofficial grassroots resistance 'headquarters', normally open 24/7, and essential for the resistance infrastructure.

To get to the People's House we passed self-made 'barricades', made either from piles of car tires filled with sacks of concrete, or large steel gallons filled with stones. In some places, activists had also dug trenches in the ground, deep enough to prevent jeeps from crossing. We passed local 'self-defense committees', consisting mainly of unarmed and lightly armed young adults, some of which had walkie-talkies, monitoring the

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<sup>3</sup> 'The mountains' is a euphemism commonly used by participants in the Kurdish movement to refer to the PKK guerillas (stationed in 'the mountains').

area for potential attempts to interfere by the police. As we walked, we passed political flags with logos of different branches of the Kurdish movement, civil and armed ones. Slogans of freedom, resistance and autonomy were painted in the Kurdish colors on walls of schools, shops and buildings. The atmosphere was filled with hope – and rage.

## The People's House

Posters of Abdullah Öcalan and martyred guerillas from the PKK, YPG and YPJ were covering the otherwise-bare concrete walls of the People's House. On the doors, printouts in black and white reminded visitors to turn off their phones and remove the batteries. When too many phone signals were centered at the same spot, I was told, the probability of being shelled by Turkish helicopters increased. As the Turkish surveillance system included censors that picked up phone signals when they reached a certain number, keeping many phones turned on at the same place enabled Turkish forces to detect movement meetings – in order to facilitate repression of resistance activities. On my question of whether they previously had experienced being shelled due to phones not being turned off, the answer I got was a short 'yes'.

As this was a cold and snowy day, my friends and I ended up spending hours at this People's House. People from the neighborhood came and went, and fresh pots of tea or coffee were constantly prepared on the fireplace. Especially the youth were eager to engage in conversations, and they had many questions about why we were there. They wanted to know what my research was about, where I had learned my Kurdish, what people in Europe thought about the Kurdish movement in general, and about Rojava in particular.

To the soothing smell of boiling coffee from the fireplace and tunes from Kurdish folk songs from a CD player, 'Baran', a guy in his mid-twenties who had been active in the entire conversations thus far asked me, 'so since you got education from the movement' - referring to the language training that I had received at the Kurdish movement's own language school, the Kurdî-Der - 'what are you going to give in return?' Acknowledging how little my research was likely to benefit the movement in any direct or indirect way, I hesitantly proposed that 'my book', as I called my PhD thesis due to the lack of a more precise

Kurdish vocabulary, would document how the movement establishes a new political system based on councils, *jineoloji*, ecology and radical democracy. ‘Hopefully, that could be useful also for other minorities and people fighting elsewhere, including Norway, my native country’, I explained. ‘Baran’ did not seem convinced. ‘Do you see that door over there?’ he asked. I nodded. ‘Do you know what it is?’ he continued. ‘We are making weapons there for the self-defense. It’s like a workshop. I’m going there now. Would you like to join?’

### **Reciprocity, Participation, and Research Ethics**

I was surprised by the directness of such a blunt proposition about this controversial – and illegal – activity, which he not only openly revealed to me that they were doing, but also expected me to join. I was terrified of how to deal with the situation in a way that would not disturb the trust it seemed I had gained.

From an ethnographic methodological point of view, where establishing rapport – trust building – is seen as essential for accessing credible, thick empirical data, ‘Baran’s’ proposition put me as a researcher in a very difficult situation. In one way, his proposition could have been an attempt to ‘test’ how far I was willing to go to support the movement and their work. It could also be an act of social bonding, a confirmative gesture communicating that he had no doubts about me being on ‘their side’ in this highly militarized conflict setting. This was far from self-evident in a conflict where rumors of ‘agents’, secret police and State informers flourished, but essential for my trustworthiness, and therefore also for possibilities of me being included and a participant-observer in the movement’s work, which was crucial for my research. From an access-gaining point of view, dismissing his proposition could hence have been a pretty stupid thing to do.

At the same time, accepting his offer would cross all sorts of boundaries for acceptable ethical research conduct. Do no harm. Academic distance. Lawfulness. Unforeseen – and in this case even foreseen – consequences. Even if I had not been there to conduct research, there was no doubt in me that participating in producing some kind of weapons, for whose purpose I did not even know, in a conflict setting where people were

imprisoned and often tortured, injured, and even killed, would have been absolutely out of the question.

However, from a resistance perspective ‘Baran’ had a point. I had received six months of language training at the Kurdi-Der from Kurdish movement activists who volunteered as teachers as a mean to promote Kurdish culture, and to resist cultural and linguistic assimilation. But what was I giving them in return? I had been taken under the wing by Kurdish movement members who gave me crucial insights into their fascinating work, and by so doing, enabling me to write a PhD thesis that clearly would benefit my own career and open up future employment opportunities. Unlike my Kurdish movement interlocutors, I was even getting paid in the process. The situation illuminated the fundamental lack of reciprocity in this researcher-interlocutor relation. And I did not like to see myself as a person engaged in social relations lacking reciprocity. A wave of shame washed over me.

Unable to categorically reject the underlying criticism that ‘Baran’s’ proposition entailed, I hoped my answer would satisfy him when I hesitantly suggested that ‘my book is my weapon’, in a voice that involuntarily sounded thinner than usual, and with a smile that I noticed failed to evoke any sense of confidence. I pointed my finger towards the notebook that I so eagerly had taken notes in during the last hours of hangout with the youth. ‘I cannot join you making those weapons, because my book is my weapon’, I reassured, hoping my answer would be convincing enough for him to drop his proposition.

As soon as I had heard myself speak, a sensation of emotional and intellectual unease again entered my body. Strictly speaking, the reason why I did not want to join was not *because* I saw ‘my book’ as my weapon. As a matter of fact, I was painfully convinced that the PhD thesis in itself would have limited, if any, direct usefulness for activism. I could still vividly recall a senior researcher at my department in Sweden who, during my first PhD year, trying to convince me that ‘nobody will read your PhD. Not even your supervisors will read your PhD in its entire length. Not even you will bother to read your entire PhD from the beginning to an end. I never read mine. Doing a PhD is like obtaining a driver’s license. It is what comes afterwards that matters’. I still had some faith in academia’s potential of producing societally-relevant ideas,

useful for activists and movements, especially when it came to Resistance Studies. But it would be a bold exaggeration to say that I saw my own research as ‘a weapon’. And that was part of my problem. From an ethical point of view, could I really justify going to a conflict zone like Northern Kurdistan and ‘taking’ insights and knowledge from people who actually do resist, which additionally would benefit my own career, but without giving something in return?

‘Baran’ gently swept the notebook out of my hands and laughed in a mild but weary tone. He shook his head and looked down towards my book in his hands. ‘I used to think like you. I was a journalist student before. Back then I also thought that my book was my weapon’. He looked up from my book straight at me. ‘But then my brother was killed by the State. Then I quit my studies, and went to the mountains<sup>4</sup>. And now I do not think that my book is my weapon anymore. Now I am making *real* weapons’.

‘Baran’s’ narrative could provide an interesting entry point for further conversations about why some activists in conflict settings sometimes decide to leave nonviolent resistance in favor of armed guerilla warfare. However, that was not my main concern at that moment. Rather, I was deliberating how to maneuver between ethical research conduct and the expectations of participation from the movement, when the movement also has violent branches? How to balance between maintaining trustworthiness in the eyes of the movement, and my own moral principles of right and wrong? How to balance between the requirement of some level of ‘academic distance’ – and social reciprocity while doing participant observation in Resistance Studies?

I could have taken a middle ground solution, refusing to participate in producing the weapons but accepting to enter the ‘workshop’ to observe how they were being made. In that way, I would not be directly involved in the weapon production myself, while simultaneously not completely rejecting his gesture of inclusion, thereby potentially also passing his ‘test’ to some degree, if that was what it was. But even the thought of entering the room made me uneasy, and I felt as though it would traverse an

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<sup>4</sup> In this context, ‘going to the mountain’ is another way to say ‘joining the guerilla’.

emotional boundary I was not comfortable crossing. It was as though, just by entering, I would offer a gesture of approval for what they were doing; this would implicitly legitimize whatever future actions they were planning, hence potentially legitimizing violence.

At the same time, the potential act of entering to observe could provide me with knowledge that could be harmful if it ever came out. Was that a responsibility I would be strong enough to carry on my shoulders? There would be individuals, particular individuals, who could get into serious trouble with the authorities if they learned what they had been doing. I recalled my friend ‘Ferat’ and his stories of torture from a Turkish prison, where the police used brutal strategies to make him give them information and names of movement members. Perhaps it was better not to know these controversial things, I thought. What about those situations in which we as researchers gain information so sensitive that it could be seriously harmful, and how do we deal with that information in a way to ensure do-no-harm? I had no clear-cut answers to those questions.

Eventually, it was not so difficult to finally reject any sort of participation in ‘Baran’s’ ‘workshop’ proposal. ‘Baran’ and I discussed a bit back and forth in a friendly tone based on what I experienced as mutual understanding. It was not hard to make him see that for me, joining his weapon producing workshop would simply cross my boundaries for what I was willing to do on a personal level.

Two days later, the Turkish police did manage to enter the neighborhood despite the barricades and trenches, and despite the monitoring work of the ‘self-defense committees’ and the YDG-H. Huge fights emerged as expected, and many Kurdish activists were detained and arrested. The morning after, I went back to the neighborhood to learn how the community dealt with the situation. Just a few meters outside the People’s House where ‘Baran’ and I had had our conversation a few days before, parts of a completely destroyed Turkish police car were spread on the ground. When I asked what had happened, I was told that someone from the movement had placed a home-made bomb in the ground under the car, and that the whole thing had exploded. The car had been empty, and no individual had been injured in the process.

Doing ethnographic fieldwork in Resistance Studies with movements that have armed or militant branches may clearly create situations evoking peculiar ethical challenges, not likely to be an issue in other fields of research.

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# **Doing Fieldwork at ‘Home’: Ethical and Emotional Considerations on the Academic-Activist Relationship**

## **Christina Hansen**

### Introduction

Activism is an affective field charged with emotions. It is bodily experience, a sensory involvement, particularly when involving collective action in public space, such as demonstrations. All your senses sharpen. You keep attentive. Walking in a middle of a crowd, people chanting, laughing, singing, clapping. Sound crackers being thrown. Flags waving above you. At times you bump into the person in front of you. You exchange glances with a feeling that you are both part of something shared, something bigger. If people start running, will you run too? You see police dogs with muzzles, hear their choked barks. You see people on the sidewalks watching you, sitting in cafes, looking down from private apartments, and through office windows. You wonder whether they know why we are protesting, perhaps they don't support our cause, or are annoyed by us, the noise we make. Us causing traffic jams. Or those that smile at us and clap their hands, nod their heads, give us the peace sign or thumbs up.

Emotions or felt processes of this kind have a revelatory potential in fieldwork (Henry 2012; Trigger et al. 2012). Placing myself bodily in the same situations as those I study gives me a deeper understanding of their world than if I restricted myself to verbal inquiry (Savage 2000, p. 331). The researcher's lived experience can be recollected after the event, thus the body also becomes a source of memories.

For researchers employing ethnographic methods like I do, researching activism raises questions about positionality, impact, possible overidentification with the people or groups studied, distinctions between theory and action, and epistemology. The boundaries between research, advocacy, and everyday life are blurred when researchers become heavily involved in the social setting of activist groups (Davis 2003; Petray

2012), and this is why the researcher needs to reflect on the relations between research and activism, and one's role as a researcher in the field of activism.

Duncan Fuller (1999), geographer, considers the potential role of the 'researcher as activist' and attempts to illustrate how the maintenance of a critical, multi-positioned (and repositioned) identity can be seen as a beneficial, reflexive learning experience for researchers within ethnography, and for the research itself:

In our daily lives, we are constantly repositioning and renegotiating our identities and personalities in line with different situations, different spaces and different people, and we seem to do so relatively unproblematically; we are different people in different circumstances, we have different identities or roles in different spaces or places. When confronted with the seemingly straightforward task of moving between academic and activist identities or activities, however, a range of concerns seems to come to the fore. (Fuller 1999, p.223)

These concerns are partly due to the fact that shared physical experiences are likely to develop collectively-shared but individually-constituted sets of emotions between my research participants and me (Petray 2012). This sort of immersion in the field – which is first and foremost participation, while the observation part of the participant observation method is done subsequently, in a self-reflexive manner – requires considerable practical and intellectual effort from the part of the researcher.

In my case I also share national citizenship, ideological sympathies, activist experiences, city and city district, among other things, with many of my research participants. Shared nationality and local experiences are considered aspects of an insider position (McCurdy & Uldam 2013). The mentioned aspects, together with my personal relations with some activists, were of great advantage when accessing the field. However, there are no clear cut positions in the form of insider and outsider as a participant observer – but these roles are negotiated on a continuum in shifting field sites with varying degrees of the aspects I share, and don't, with my research participants (ibid). The question of where I find myself

in the insider/outsider continuum will be a continual process of critical reflection throughout fieldwork and research.

Ethnographic fieldwork always includes engagement in the lives of those being studied, within the context of their daily lives, and over an extended period of time. And because I am writing about real people in real life in my ethnography, my words have potentially profound consequences for the people I write about (Kahn 2011, p.181). As an ethnographic writer I feel anxieties about the potential risk to upset my research participants.

In this short text I will discuss and raise uncomfortable questions concerning the activist-academic relationship and positionalities, and the ethical and emotional considerations they entail. If we join the activists in their struggle, is it for the mere purpose of gaining access, or to join the common struggle for social change? What is the role of the researcher as citizen jointly challenging the broader social system? What responsibilities do we as researchers have with regards to the activists’ struggle? I write based on my own experiences of fieldwork among activists in Malmö, a city in southern Sweden.

### **Doing fieldwork at ‘home’**

My research explores the conditions for and the consequences of urban activism, with special regard to the creation of new identities, changes of urban space, and activism as one pathway of migrant emplacement. To do this I have interviewed and followed activists in Malmö, a city in southern Sweden. The activists are organised in local leftist extra-parliamentarian groups and networks that arrange meetings, campaigns, demonstrations and other collective actions in public space as well as online. The groups are part of a larger network of activists in Malmö, other cities in Sweden as well as abroad, which struggle for urban and social justice. Their activism concerns migrant and asylum seekers’ rights, anti-racism, and ‘right-to-the-city’ struggles, and moves in between the fields of charity to advocacy to more radical forms of direct action.

I chose Malmö because it is a city marked by high levels of immigration, urban restructuring and activism. Thereby it is a city where we can observe the manifold interconnections of those processes

as they are impacting – and being impacted by – specific local histories and activities, with political leftist activism being an entry point to the understanding of those interconnections and impacts.

I did fieldwork at ‘home’ in two respects: My history in relation to Möllevången and Malmö (where I lived for 10 years), and the leftist extra-parliamentary activist scene in the city. I had personal acquaintances with activists and previous experiences of the activism milieu in Malmö when starting my PhD project; however, I did not consider myself to be heavily involved, since I was not a member of any group at the time, although I did become involved soon after.

I conducted fieldwork among activists between 2013 and 2016. All interviewees were introduced to the content and purpose of my research and their participation is based on free and informed (oral) consent. However, participant observations have been done without me publicly announcing that my observations might be used for research purposes. And this is where my emotional and ethical anxieties come in. To clarify, I will provide a short background to this.

I knew about the formation of Action Against Deportation (AMD), a ramification of the Malmö-based Asylum Group, in 2009. AMD started organizing actions against detention centres and deportation of migrants. These kinds of actions were not previously well known in Sweden. When Reva (*Rättssäkert och effektivt verkställighetsarbete* (Rule of Law and Effective Work Enforcement [my translation]) – a police operation aiming to locate and deport undocumented migrants more efficiently<sup>1</sup> – became big news in the Swedish media during spring of 2013, AMD mobilized thousands of people to protest against it. It was at this point that I actually became involved directly in the group for some three months, for several reasons. First, I wanted to do something concrete and learn more about how activists plan for actions, their aims and strategies, and see how I could contribute. Secondly, I was curious as a researcher,

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<sup>1</sup> REVA is a collaboration between three state authorities: The Migration Board, The National Police Board and The Correctional System (i.e. prisons). The operation was commissioned by the Swedish government in 2010 and piloted in Malmö the same year (<http://www.polisen.se/Aktuellt/Nyheter/Gemensam/jan-mars/Polisens-arbete-med-inre-utlanningskontroller/>).

although I got active before I knew that this very network was to become part of my study. Therefore I decided to approach the group (as a possible case study) as an activist, in order to show my commitment to the cause and to gain the deepest possible understanding of the group. I attended meetings and helped with organizing demonstrations and other kind of actions. It was a bit later that spring – after I got enrolled into the MUSA programme (Migration, Urbanization and Societal Change) at Malmö University in February 2013 – when I started to take field notes about what I saw and experienced.

As a researcher, I immersed in the activities and observed them from a different position and with an ethnographic lens. Nevertheless, I believe that efforts to separate the professional and the personal are not only difficult but rather illusory (see Amit 2000, p.5). The sense of “leaving the field” is also illusory, since one cannot help taking the field along, because ‘the field’ is being incorporated into one’s biography, understandings and associations (Amit 2000, p.9).

Even though I was committed to the activists’ political cause, I could not get away from the fact that this was my ‘job’ in the first place, which made me at times feel like a ‘fake’ in the activist milieu. At the same time, if I am to make science out of their struggle, the least I can do is to join and contribute practically.

Furthermore, long-term ethnographic fieldwork can generate close and enduring social relationships (Trigger et al. 2012), and I believe it is possible to sustain friendships and acquaintances that constitute and transcend my fieldwork engagements without jeopardizing the quality of my research. I can even go so far as to say I used “friendship as method” (Owton & Allen-Collinson 2013) in ethnographic research encounters. The friendship approach seeks to reduce the hierarchical separation between researcher and participant, it encourages a dialogical relationship and an ethic of caring that invites expressiveness, emotion, and empathy between researcher and participants (p. 285).

Being an insider geographically (to the place) and ideologically (leftist activism), and having personal friends and acquaintances among the activists, requires transparency concerning the production of my material and documented reflexivity concerning the premises for analysis.

## **Reflexivity, responsibility and insecurity in ethnographic research on activism**

Reflexivity on the part of the researcher is important for all forms of research. It refers to the ways in which the products of research are affected by the fieldworkers and their process of doing research. Moral and ethical decisions arise at all stages of the research process, from selection of the topic to the final writing-up and presentation of results (Akeroyd 1984, p.137). Reflexivity is nevertheless particularly central to the practice of ethnographic research wherein the relationship between researcher and research participants is normally long-term and more intimate.

The feeling of dishonesty came to me during the period of 'transition', from being 'only an activist' to becoming both an activist and researcher. There was no sharp line in between, but rather a slow process. I was an activist at the same time that I would maybe use it in research later on, although I at the time was not sure myself. I was only scanning the field, and learning what it was to be an activist. Later on in the research process I realized that some of the first activist meetings and public actions I attended could be interesting to write about and use as empirical material. Since I was not clear about my own roles at the time, I was not honest and clear towards my activist peers with my double intentions.

However, I interviewed some of the key activists in these groups, and they were therefore aware of my doctoral studies, although I believe they identified me first as an activist in their network. It was of course my, and not their, responsibility to make clear what my roles and intentions were.

From the beginning, I felt insecure about acting as a researcher among the activists, not knowing what they would think of me doing research on them and their work and whether I would meet opposition towards my dual roles as academic and activist. To build trust is crucial in the process of gaining access. If the activists think I am doing something that might harm them or their work, they would not talk to me. This meant that joining their struggle, if only partly, was crucial in order to do ethnographic fieldwork.

My insecurity was based in a desire to be seen as a useful activist as well as a useful researcher in front of my activist peers. Whatever 'good intentions' I had with the research, it might not have generated the same level of excitement among the activists in Malmö. Also, I realized I was not going to do what many critical activist scholars suggest, namely "to make strategic interventions collectively with the social movements we belong to" (AGC) in order to achieve social change, in line with Participatory Action Research (PAR)-approaches. PAR would not enable me to explore activism ethnographically with the research questions I had set out to investigate.

I was still worried about whether they would consider me as "operating in a parasitical relationship to those who are doing the real work and have made financial/lifestyle sacrifices" (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010, p.252), while I have full salary and in addition becoming "an expert" on the subject in the eyes of the academy (ibid). Even though I have not been personally criticised with such comments, they do contain elements of truth, and this has made me think and re-think about the motives, ethics, and intensions of my research. I strongly felt I did not want to be one in the row of academics who happily built their careers on the backs of researching the oppressed but rarely join with them in their 'struggle' (Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010, p.247).

Nevertheless, I noticed discontent towards academics from one of my research participants. She mentioned how dozens of under- and postgraduates and senior scholars had gotten in touch with them, conducted interviews, and then never again heard from them. This made her unwilling to collaborate with academics. With such experiences, I am not surprised if activists have the idea of academics as capitalising on activists' activity for their own career development. She still decided to talk to me, since she already knew me and had some level of trust in what I was doing, and because I was doing a PhD, not just an undergrad thesis. She said she did prioritize and participated according to the academic level and relevance of the study.

So far, my research topic has been met with positive reactions and encouragement among my research participants. One female activist said she thought my research seemed interesting. "Those topics are valuable for us to know more about. We don't have time to think about

them ourselves”. Another activist said how important my work is, since “no one is writing about the autonomous movement and its history”, saying that their work in Malmö is not being documented or recorded academically. These statements are also a reminder of the possibilities of misunderstandings and even disappointments on the part of the activists. Informed consent can’t stop this from happening. My research findings may result in insights they are not pleased with, and writing activists’ history in Malmö is not my primary goal.

In the end, the most important ethical consideration is how I will eventually write and publish the material. To represent your research participants ethically is perhaps the most complex problem facing ethnographic writers (Kahn 2011). Hence, the writing-up process will in particular require critical reflexivity on my part as a researcher. A way to compensate on my initial confusion is to send the activists my written drafts and see what their reactions are and respect requests not to reveal certain details.

## Conclusions

In summary, the critical engagement I pursue in my research involves transparency and a continual questioning of my positioning in the research process (in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, profession/employment status, life in the neighbourhood and so on), in addition to the physical location of my research, my disciplinary location and my political position and personality. Put simply, as a researcher, I need to learn how to move between my various identities, and to be aware (and to be able to read) the effects of these movements on my research as a whole. I develop such skills throughout the research process, in dialogue with and support from my supervisors, which I see as an integral part of the learning and documentation of ethnographic method.

My aim is to reconnect my empirical chapters with my informants, discuss them and, if relevant, include their reactions in my final draft.

As I see it, the emotional stress that I have described here is part and parcel of ethnographic fieldwork. Marx (1843) described shame as a revolutionary emotion, an emotion that leads to do good. In the same way, I believe emotions in general and anxiety and insecurity in particular

in ethnographic method and writing can contribute to an in-depth and ethically responsible account of our experiences and the people we have met along the way.

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## CLASSIC BOOK REVIEW

## Reflections on Kenneth Boulding's Three Faces of Power, in retrospect, and with the benefit of hindsight

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When I was contacted by the editors of the Journal of Resistance Studies regarding a possible contribution to a series describing seminal books in the field of resistance studies, my thoughts quickly gravitated to Kenneth Boulding's (1989) book on the *Three Faces of Power*. This may at first seem a surprising choice for this journal. It would definitely be a stretch to say that Boulding's book has had a large influence on how actual resistance movements operate. The book has not seen anything approaching the attention to other more prominent contributions such as Gene Sharp's (1973) *The Politics of Non-violent Action*, which has been disseminated and popularized in a number of subsequent training manuals published in different languages, and arguably influenced popular movement such as the Arab Spring. Moreover, although Boulding's 1989 book has received positive reviews and some attention in academic circles, it can hardly be deemed a classic or a game-changer, and indeed, other books by Boulding have received more attention and greater prominence. For example, although citations are not a perfect measure of influence, the *Three Faces of Power* has about 800 citations in Google Scholar as of July 2017, while Boulding's 1962 book *Conflict and Defense: A General Theory* has over 2500 citations. Other books published in the same time period have received more citations; there are for example over 1300 citations Todd Sandler's (1992) much more technical volume, reviewing and discussing formal models of collective action and what has been learned since Olson's (1958) original work. However, I will argue that the *Three Faces of Power* deserves a wide readership as it provides a very useful

analysis of the concept of power, very prescient at the time that it was written, and with enduring relevance and much to offer people interested in resistance and dissent.

I will start with a brief overview of the book and its core thesis. Boulding's main purpose in the book is to understand the role of power in social systems. He notes that the common definition of power as the ability "to get what we want" is very encompassing, and hides many subtleties. For example, what we want depends on our preferences, and this in turn begs the question of what shapes our preferences and views on particular outcomes. Many types of possible behavior and actions are not limited by any obvious technical feasibility or what we could do in principle, but rather constrained by social norms and other non-material inhibitions. Finally, most decisions and outcomes ultimately result from complex interactions between individuals and collective actors such as organizations rather than individual preferences or decisions alone. There is a common tendency to associate power with specific sources of power, such as coercive military capabilities (as in Mao's famous quote that "power comes from the barrel of a gun"). At the same time, it is also widely acknowledged that many actors such as the Pope can be influential and powerful, even if Stalin is rumored to have insisted to the French foreign minister that the Pope could not be influential as he did not possess any military units (for a more contemporary analysis of the influence of the Vatican, see Genovese 2015).

As the title suggests, Boulding proposes that our understanding of power can be advanced by distinguishing between distinct types of power. Boulding's terminology at this point becomes somewhat less clean and three-partite than the book title suggests, as he distinguishes between both the consequences of power and characteristics of behavior. In terms of the former, he distinguishes between destructive, productive, and integrative power. Destructive power basically encompasses the ability to remove valued things, such as traditional military threats. By contrast, productive power means the ability to produce, or to create valued things such as improved technology and welfare. Finally, integrative power can be thought of as the ability to foster solidarity, which in turns influences the ability for collective action. This typology maps – if not perfectly – onto three types of characteristic behavior, namely threat power, exchange

power, and love. Threat power is the ability to get people to do things based on threat, while exchange power can be thought of as creating contracts or agreements whereby one actor does something in exchange for something else, while “the power of love” is the ability to get people to do something through identification, respect or legitimacy. Although the terminology shifts over time and the categories are not fully unique, the core distinction between destructive, productive, and integrative power is at least conceptually clear and analytically very helpful.

In an interesting and perceptive review of Sharp’s 1973 book and the associated “consent theory of power”, Boulding (1974) argued that Sharp placed far too much emphasis on threat power, and not enough on integrative power and the dynamics of legitimacy. One of Boulding’s core points in *Three Faces of Power* is that each type of power is normally not sufficient on its own, and that integrative capacity is often more important than threat power. For example, military power alone is unlikely to be effective if integrative capacity approaches nill, yet actors with sufficiently strong integrative power can be influential, even without notable military power. Armies are built on threat power, but is the ability to make people collaborate or fight as teams that ultimately make armies effective (see, e.g., Stouffer 1949; Turchin 2006) In a memorable section, Boulding notes how the extraordinary integrative power had helped the Jews survive as a group under extreme circumstances with low military power, while Israel’s growing military power and responses to external threats have arguable decreased community and integrative power (pp. 50-51). Boulding’s claim that the impact of war had been overestimated by historians must have seemed preposterous to many during the height of Cold War, when most of the material in this book was written, but astonishingly prescient after its first publication in 1989. The end of the Cold War emerged as a transformative event arguably as important as World War II, yet not clearly reducible to any clear changes in military power or threat capacity.

My own thinking about power and my core research interests have very much been shaped by this book, but not in a simple or linear fashion. I believe I first read the *Three Faces of Power* when I started my PhD in the Fall of 1995. I must confess that I at the time probably picked up a copy of the book in a second hand book store mainly since I was a PhD

student affiliated with the Program on Political and Economic Change at the Institute of Behavioral Science at the University of Colorado, which originally had been led by Boulding himself. Yet, I think I came to the book at the right time, both in terms of the salient events that the book helped me make sense of, and my own subsequent research interests and focuses.

Like most people, my own understanding of power started from the traditional view that power is defined primarily by resources and that more thus is always mightier. Indeed, I can recall having rather conventional and conspiratorial views about social issues, with a tendency to assume that “powerful” actors inevitably dominate the world, and that bad outcomes must reflect their entrenched interests and overwhelming resources. But this was difficult to reconcile with my knowledge that non-violent resistance often had been much more effective than violent resistance against dictatorships. This was informed by both older historical examples – such as the Norwegian non-violent resistance during World War II (see Gleditsch 1997) – and also seemed to be confirmed by the role of popular mobilization leading up to the end of Socialist dictatorships in Eastern Europe that I had seen unfold around me while growing up in the late 1980s.

Reading literature on non-violence such as Sharp (1973) and Martin (1991) helped me realize that power ultimately rests on some kind of compliance, and that leaders and autocratic regimes could collapse when this was successfully withdrawn. However, these were less helpful when it came to understanding what influenced collective responses and the ability to motivate or prevent people from acting.

After starting to study Political Science in 1992 I came to understand the broader implications of collective action problems, beyond the standard examples such as underprovision of public goods or the tragedy of the commons. In brief, shared interest is not enough to foster collaboration or common action, especially if individual action is costly (e.g., Olson 1958; Sandler 1992). This helped me understand barriers to collective action and why achieving political protest and change is difficult, even when dissatisfaction is widespread. More generally, I also came to appreciate how many “bad” outcomes and social dilemmas may not actually clearly benefit anyone very much in particular, but it is

simply not in any single individual's interest to change her or his behavior under the status quo, and difficult to get coordinated collective responses that allow people to reach feasible outcomes that are better for all.

In short, I learned much that was helpful for understanding the barriers to collective action, and why this is difficult, but not so much about positive influences that could enable collective action, especially when conventional threat power defined by military coercion is low. This is where Boulding is helpful in suggesting exchange power and integrative power as possible components that can make actors potentially powerful. It is easy to see the relevance of potential integrative power in terms of in-group solidarity and out-group distinctions. Shared identities and symbols that create solidarity and capacity for collective action, such as ethnicity and nationalism, can clearly help create effective movements. These ideas informed much of my subsequent thinking about mobilization in ethnic civil wars (see in particular Cederman et al. 2013), and they are also helpful for understanding many of the nationalist movements that brought down Socialism in Eastern Europe, even if we may regret the exclusionary nature of many nationalist movements.

However, the role of exchange power is also helpful for understanding prospects for political change, and these ideas in turn shaped my work on democratization and the diffusion of transitions, including Gleditsch (2002) and Gleditsch and Ward (2006). In principle, non-material common ideas such as democracy and political freedom could help provide a common platform, but motivation is often not enough, and some observers cast doubt on how widely-held such ideals actually are among participants in anti-regime uprisings (see, e.g., Beisinger 2013 for discussion of evidence from Ukraine). However, the concept of mutual gains from exchange provides a helpful way to think about how rules for political competition can serve as a rational compromise and response to conflict between heterogeneous and diverse actors (e.g., Olson 1993; Vanhanen 1990). Consent and legitimacy often arise not because of the specific content of a decision or the outcome, but because people accept the process leading up to it as fair, and the loser has a fair chance to win on another occasion (e.g., Anderson et al. 2007). Beyond process, material incentives matter in the sense that bystanders and individuals on the side of opponents can be won over if you can offer them tangible benefits or

the promise of making them better off. In this sense, the revolutions in Eastern Europe happened to a large extent because opportunistic elites defected as they came to believe that socialist rule was unviable, and many of the same individuals that had held power before later returned to political influence.

The strengths of the conceptual focus of the *Three Faces of Power* and its ambitious scope is perhaps also its greatest limitation. The book is full of examples, but all of these are rather selectively chosen, and there is little attention paid to systematic empirical analysis or how the different sources of power may be measured empirically. This, in turn, limits the direct applicability of concepts and insights from the analysis. Although the book starts in the social sciences, and probably should remain there, Boulding is unable to resist the temptation to extend his perceptive eye to look for analogies between the three types of power and evolution in the natural sciences. This discussion is entertaining and insightful, but does not help advance the coherence of the book.

However, my rereading of the book for this essay helped bring out new sides of the analysis and rediscover the richness of the analysis. Boulding's book also has much to offer current students and practitioners in resistance, in particular with regards to recognizing the diverse sources of power in many strategic settings and the complementarity between the faces of power. Boycotting companies with practices that we do not like might make us feel good, but we can be more effective enacting change if we use exchange power productively to innovate, enlist, and reward alternative practices, and make these profitable. Accentuating our disdain for "baskets of deplorables" may help us achieve a greater sense of community, but focusing on highlighting differences alone is unlikely to win over opponents. *Three Faces of Power* may not present all the answers, but it certainly does help to pose several very good questions.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

## The Tea Party Warrior's Field Manual

As right-wing regimes gains ground in the United States and throughout Europe, ordinary people are forging new forms of resistance against state power and stand in solidarity to oppose repressive government policies. In the Trump era, resistance in the United States is drawing inspiration from unexpected places—including the conservative Tea Party Movement. Former congressional staffers created *The Indivisible Guide*, a manual for resisting the Trump Presidency based on Tea Party tactics that were used successfully to pressure members of Congress to reject President Obama's agenda.<sup>1</sup> The Guide deems the Tea Party's ideas "wrong, cruel, and tinged with racism" but advocates using their tactics to promote the values of "inclusion, tolerance, and fairness."

Yet those resisting the Trump administration may share more with conservative activists than a guidebook on obstructionist tactics. Republican town halls erupted across deeply conservative parts of the United States, from Utah to Iowa and Kentucky, as constituents condemned their representatives for planning to repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The resistance mounted in these town halls contributed to the failure of the health care repeal, dealing an embarrassing blow to one of Trump's campaign promises. This is not the only example of conservatives advocating similar positions as liberal voters. One of the Tea Party movement's founders, Debbie Dooley, has emerged as a prominent leader in the fight for clean energy and environmental justice.

These instances provide an indication that in a political landscape that seems hopelessly polarized, there may be more opportunity to find common ground than first meets the eye. It is therefore worthwhile, both for the field of resistance studies and progressive activism as a whole, to consider a primary source document produced by Tea Party members and analyze the tactics and principles advocated therein as means of civic mobilization and nonviolent resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.indivisibleguide.com/guide/>, Accessed 20 April 2017

In this review, I examine the online “Tea Party Warrior’s Field Manual”<sup>2</sup> as a guide for conservative activists to mount nonviolent action for social change. As Gene Sharp writes in *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, “Whatever the issue and whatever the scale of the conflict, nonviolent action is a technique by which people who reject passivity and submission ,and who see struggle as essential, can wager their conflict without violence.”<sup>3</sup> This review highlights the ways in which the Tea Party’s Field Manual can broaden our understanding of conservative resistance, while also criticizing aspects of the Manual that I find most inconsistent with the principles of nonviolence.

The Manual is hosted on a larger website, *Patriots Tea Party* (www.teaparty-patriots.com). Claiming to speak for the “Silent Majority” of Americans, the site promotes the need for “patriotic rallies and public awareness” to prevent excessive government spending and hold politicians accountable. Under the page titled “Our Mission,” the site promotes “taking action by calling, writing, emailing, and faxing our representatives so that they know the overwhelming will of the people for whom they work.”

Although it must be acknowledged at the outset that the Tea Party movement, as the authors of the Indivisible Guide characterized it, has promoted a conservative agenda with racist or xenophobic undertones, the website focuses on three main objectives of the movement: reducing government spending, advocating a smaller role of government overall, and making politicians more accountable to their constituents. These aims are not, in themselves, at odds with nonviolent resistance as long as they are advocated using nonviolent discipline.

Much of the website’s content appears to be outdated, with most appearing to have been written in 2010 before the midterm elections but with some updated information encouraging people to vote in the Presidential election and strongly backing Donald Trump’s candidacy. The website itself promotes numerous conservative political aims, from 2nd Amendment rights of gun ownership to vehement opposition to

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.teaparty-patriots.com/field\\_manual.htm](http://www.teaparty-patriots.com/field_manual.htm), Accessed 15 April 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Gene Sharp, “Power and Struggle” in *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, 2013, The Albert Einstein Institute p. 18

the Affordable Care Act (deemed “Obamacare”) and denouncing the mainstream media as the “*enemy*.”

Beyond bombastic graphics of the American flag and Bald Eagles, and patriotic in-your-face slogans proclaiming “GOD BLESS AMERICA”, the section labeled as the Field Manual consists of 12 points for taking action, which I have categorized into three broad categories: Increasing community involvement, becoming more informed on the issues and terms, and voicing grievances to elected representatives.

The first four points outlined in the Tea Party Warrior’s Field Manual focus on the importance of organizing their friends and community members to take action. First, the Manual calls on Tea Party members to “Spread the Tea Party message to everyone you know.” The author elaborates,

Even after hundreds of protest rallies, many conservative people still have never heard of the Tea Party Movement, or have only a vague idea what it’s about. Who are these political couch potatoes? They are among your friends, neighbors, relatives and co-workers. Some attend your church. Others coach your daughter’s soccer team, cut your hair, fill your prescriptions, repair your car, or service your furnace. Most live nearby, but some reside in other cities or states. Make a list of everyone you know, excluding only those you’re sure are committed Democrats. (...) Plan in advance what you’re going to say. Tell them about the Tea Party Movement, and remind them that bad things can happen when good people sit idly by.

Expanding this initial appeal to start building a network, the second point tells members to create a longer list of e-mail contacts to spread their message “beyond the choir.” It urges them to “add two new people to your list each week until you’ve reached a total of ten.”

When deciding which messages to forward, remember that political jokes and unflattering pictures of President Obama and Nancy Pelosi may be funny to some, but will do nothing to gain converts to the Tea Party Movement. Conservative arguments against the Democrat’s socialist agenda can be won on their merit, so never forward anything

that is sarcastic or disrespectful. Finally, remember one of the cardinal rules of effective e-mails: less is more. (...) Taking time to make sure that the e-mails you send are as concise and uncluttered as possible will pay big dividends on the receiving end.

This point adds strategic considerations for spreading a message effectively and trying to draw new people into a movement from different walks of life. The third point encourages readers to help older Tea Party members boost their “e-skills” to increase the use of electronic communication by helping them learn how to add new people to their address book, set up a Tea Party e-mail group, search on Google, and bookmark website of conservative media sites. It urges members to “explain how things like Podcasting, Face Book and Twittering are an increasingly important part of political communications.”

Finally, the fourth point focused on community organizing and capacity building tells members to form a Tea Party political discussion group in their homes and bring other members, along with their “open minded friends and neighbors,” to talk about “the unsettling changes that are occurring in Washington.” The Manual says that the agendas for discussion group meetings should be set by the members and supported by relevant source materials, including newspapers, magazine articles, and video clips. It cautions readers,

Going to protest rallies is important, but unless conservative activism also is brought into the heart of our local neighborhoods, those who claim that the Tea Party Movement is a flash in the pan will be proven right.

From a resistance standpoint, the community organizing methods advocated in the Field Manual are reflect many nonviolent organizers’ descriptions of “people power” and grassroots organizing. Tea Party activists look to build capacities by broadening their network and increasing older members’ technical skills. They attempt to reach across the aisle to include “open minded” people who don’t belong to the movement, including “buyers-remorse Obama voters.” The Manual advocates strategies that will increase stakeholders in their movement and bring people in. An important aspect of this is where the author

mentions, in the second point, that members should avoid using “sarcastic or disrespectful messaging” and to let their messages speak for themselves, so as not to alienate people from their core goals.

The next three points in the Field Manual have to do with educating people to better understand what they are fighting for and against. These points urge readers to “arm yourself with information” in order to be more effective in selling the Tea Party’s message to others and stay informed in the context of a “heavily biased media.” It recommends sources for information like Fox News and the Wall Street Journal, and urges people to subscribe and support these information outlets. The Manual concludes this point by cautioning readers, “If you don’t take the time to stay well informed about what’s happening on the political scene, you won’t have the information you’ll need to convince others that they should join the Tea Party Movement.” Knowledge is power, this message implies, and recruiting people to a movement requires you to come prepared with a persuasive argument.

The Manual goes on to highlight the importance of knowing the difference between the “isms” – Marxism, socialism, communism, fascism, and capitalism. The definitions are heavily biased and not cited from scholarly sources (Marxism is defined as “a form of socialism that foments class envy for the purpose of forcing the creation of a classless society”). However, including this point shows that the Manual’s authors place value on being able to distinguish, at least superficially, between the central ideas that underpin their argument.

The final point on being informed instructs Tea Party members not to believe information from the mainstream media, deemed “the enemy.” An important insight into how the Manual characterizes the mainstream media’s portrayal of their movement is found in this excerpt:

Modern “journalists” don’t give fair coverage to conservative ideas because they view conservatives as morally-defective people whose ideas don’t even merit consideration. Rather than reporting the Tax Day Tea Party event for what it was — a peaceful grassroots protest by ordinary citizens exercising their constitutionally-protected right to express their grievances against government — the mainstream media aired numerous reports that characterized “tea baggers” (look that one

up on UrbanDictionary.com) as a fringe group of mostly old white people (read: racists) who are bitter that a black man is president, an obscenely false characterization.

The language shows a strong reaction against a perceived misportrayal of conservative grievances and Tea Party members as a whole, and shows that the author considers events like the Tax Day Tea Party rally a form of nonviolent civic mobilization. The author goes on to encourage people to cancel their subscriptions or cease contributions to news sources that do not report fairly on conservative views, including National Public Radio, the New York Times, and Newsweek.

These three points advocate nonviolent resistance tactics, like an economic boycott against liberal media outlets, and principles such as using information to your movement's advantage, which are central components of nonviolent struggle. While employing militaristic language of knowledge as a "weapon" and media as the "enemy" detracts from the Manual's applicability to nonviolent civil resistance, the issues and tactics promoted are still consistent with the principles of nonviolent action by encouraging readers to stay informed, engage in grassroots organizing, and withhold their money as a form of protest.

Lastly, the Manual advocates four tactics for taking direct action to affect political change. These include donating to grassroots organizations that support the Tea Party Movement, registering to vote and convincing friends and family to do the same ("For the ones who aren't registered, be persistent in politely staying on them until they have"), and regularly contacting elected officials to make their voices heard.

The Manual encourages members to contact their representatives at least twice a month, "remembering to make your comments concise, and to always maintain a respectful tone." It reassures first time callers, "It's no disgrace if you're don't know the names of all three people who represent you in Congress, but it will be if you allow that situation to continue. Finding their names and contact information is easy -- just click on *Contacting the Congress*."

This approach gives practical guidance to engaging in civic participation (although not entirely accurate, as only seven states have three Congressional representatives at the national level). The guide also

aims to make beginners feel welcome, telling them not to feel ashamed or embarrassed if they haven't contacted their representatives before. By emphasizing the importance of voicing grievances to those in power and letting them know that "politicians will take notice if enough voters speak out," the Tea Party Manual evokes one of the core principles of nonviolent action, as written by Gene Sharp, that "the sources of the rulers' power depend intimately upon the obedience and cooperation of the subjects."<sup>4</sup>

Despite advocating a conservative agenda, *The Tea Party Warrior's Field Manual* provides a new perspective on civil resistance and nonviolent action as implemented by conservative activists in the United States. If liberal activists and academics can separate their disagreement with the Tea Party's political ideology from the tactics and strategies it uses to pursue that agenda, primary source documents produced by Tea Party conservatives can provide an important window into understanding the American right, as well as offering food for thought on whether our methods of social change are so very different from those on the "other side" afterall.

*Sarah Freeman-Woolpert, Journal of Resistance Studies*

## **Stellan Vinthagen: A Theory of Nonviolent Action – How Civil Resistance Works**

**(ZED Books, 2015)**

For over 40 years Gene Sharp's seminal work on "The politics of Nonviolent Action" has built the theoretical basis for nonviolent action and civil resistance scholars. Two years ago, in 2015, Stellan Vinthagen published "Theory of Nonviolent Action" with the aim to "develop a conceptual

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<sup>4</sup> Gene Sharp, "Power and Struggle" p. 7 in *How Nonviolent Struggle Works*, 2013, The Albert Einstein Institute

framework and a new theoretical framework of what ‘nonviolence’ is” (page 3). However, it seems that the book has not received the attention it deserves so far.<sup>5</sup> To change this, I will discuss the main arguments of Vintagen’s book in a teaser-like review (the book is actually too rich to fully cover it in short).

The author Stellan Vinthagen is one of the key figures within the community of resistance studies. He is founder of the Resistance Studies Network, editor of the *Journal of Resistance Studies* and, last but not least, owner of the Inaugural Endowed Chair in the Study of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance at the University of Massachusetts. Considering Vinthagen’s solid background as an activist on the one hand and as a well-read sociologist on the other, the book promises a lot.

Vinthagen’s overall goal laid down in the introduction is to develop a “sociological perspective to interpret and conceptually describe nonviolent moments in conflict situation” (6). Therefore, he starts with the ‘forefathers’ of nonviolence, Gandhi and Sharp.

The first chapter “nonviolent action studies” is a commented review of literature on the topic, where Vinthagen summarizes and criticises the rival approaches of Gandhi and Sharp completed by some illustrative historical examples. He tries to ground Gandhi’s “theology of liberation“ on sociological theoretical grounds rather than on religious and moral motives and criticizes Sharp’s approach to nonviolence as “problematically reductionist” theory of power (44). However, he relies his theory on Sharp’s strategic approach and develops it further by including critiques of the cultural turn. In doing so, Vinthagen returns to the sources of Gandhi and establishes as synthesis a third position where he describes nonviolence as social pragmatism “beyond moral high priests of nonviolence and anti-moral strategy generals” (8). This very ambitious claim aims to bridge the decades-old chasm between strategic on the one hand and principled nonviolence on the other hand or, in other words, between ‘Gandhians’ and ‘Sharpians’. This third position advanced here is based on the assumption that every social group has a

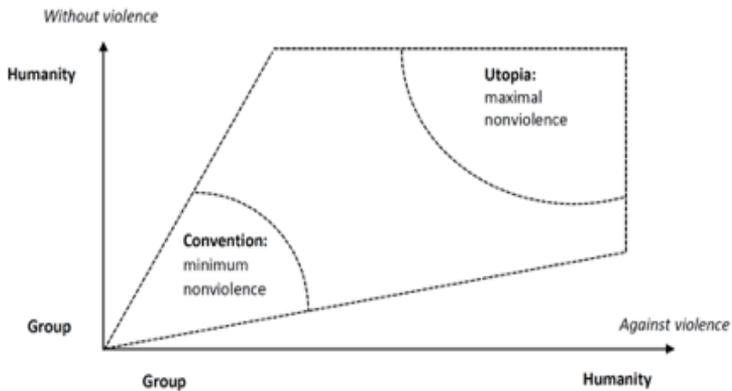
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<sup>5</sup> Not sure if this can be called a valid indicator but the book has since 2015 only ten citations on google scholar. I also found only one review (by David M Craig) on it as well.

normative structure (10) so that, consequently, even the purest form of pragmatism is driven by norms, in this case, the norm of goal rationality. In turn, principled nonviolence follows the goal of norm conformity and norm rationality. In this sense, pragmatism and principled motivations can be understood as expressions of different forms of rationality and not as antagonism. After this reasoning, Vinthagen comes to a definition of the term nonviolence. Contrary to most one-dimensional definitions that focus only on the means and neglect the goal, Vinthagen here follows Gandhi and propagates the unity of ends and means and brings nonviolence to the formula of “without violence + against violence”. According to Vinthagen, nonviolent action furthermore displays the following characteristics: Norm violation, vulnerability and normalisation (20). This means in short, that nonviolent action breaches norms in order to normalise a new behaviour and to establish new norms, even at the risk of exposing oneself to violence. Furthermore, Vinthagen introduces the idea of truth seeking, suffering, and a constructive program, an element that can also be found in the philosophy of Gandhi, and which will play a crucial role in his own approach.

The second chapter departs from the definition of nonviolence as “without violence + against violence” and elaborates the concept of nonviolence as an antidote to violence. According to Vinthagen, two aspects have to be considered here: the fact that there are different definitions of violence ranging from physical to structural and cultural violence, and the question to whom nonviolence applies (the own in-group, the own nation, all human beings etc.). Vinthagen understands nonviolence as universal, meaning that both the group of people concerned and the definition of violence have to be broadly understood. As, in reality, groups tend to set their group-boundaries and their definition of violence differently, these boundaries and definitions have to be widened constantly (see below).

Thereby, constant nonviolent ‘work’ is essential meaning that “the construction of social structures, institutions and practices, that replace those being fought against” (73) become a core concern for nonviolent movements.



In theory-laden chapter three, Vinthagen introduces the idea of nonviolence as a multi-rational action in conflicts. Vinthagen emanates from Habermas’ idea that human action follows four different kinds of rationalities: Goal rationality (if a certain action is undertaken because it works), dramaturgical (if it is undertaken to express something aesthetic or a symbolic meaning that goes beyond the action), communicative (if it is oriented towards an understanding or towards an agreement) and norm regulated rationality (if guided by group’s norms, institutions or morals). In contrast to Sharp, who perceives nonviolent action only as a strategic, goal-rational action, Vinthagen perceives it as multi-rational action following different rationalities at the same time. Thereby, each type of action has its own potential to contribute to social change – or, in other words, to make nonviolence work: Following a communicative logic, nonviolent action can facilitate dialogue with the “enemy” (see chapter four). In its goal rational dimension nonviolent action has the potential to break given power structures (see chapter five). In its dramaturgical logic, it can “enact” utopian visions (chapter six). Last but not least, in its norm regulated dimension it has the power to contest norms and to claim and uphold new ones (chapter seven).

The following chapters each describe in detail one of the dimensions of nonviolence and its underlying rationality.

## Chapter four: Truth seeking and dialogue facilitation

In this chapter Vinthagen introduces what he calls the communicative rationality of nonviolence and its dimension of dialogue facilitation. Therefore, he brings together Gandhi's philosophy of Satyagraha and Habermas' theory of communicative action. He argues that both share the belief in the existence of a mutual truth. While Gandhi's truth is absolute, Habermas follows the idea that one can find a commonplace through deliberation. In both concepts, the "opponent" is the essential element to come closer to the absolute truth or to reach a higher level of communicative rationality. Furthermore, both approaches claim that violence such as the killing of a person makes a dialogue impossible and thus prevents from gaining a deeper understanding of the 'truth'. Importantly, Vinthagen understands the 'ideal speech situation' as utopian ideal, which is nevertheless meaningful to constantly widen the real sphere of dialogue facilitation. In this sense, Vinthagen states that "Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' presupposes Gandhi's 'nonviolent resistance' in order to be meaningful in a world characterized by power and violence" (160), which leads us to the next chapter "power breaking".

## Chapter five: power breaking

In chapter five Vinthagen introduces the goal-rationality and the power breaking dimension of nonviolence. Since this is the most studied dimension of nonviolence, the chapter mainly reviews and criticises Sharp's strategic approach and its consent theory of power. As Vinthagen rightly states, Sharp's approach to power ignores nearly all theoretical innovations that have been brought in by the cultural turn. Following Foucault, he argues that power affects the individual in softer and more structural forms (e.g. via culture, structures of knowledge and by habitus) than Sharp's simple relation of command and obedience. Accordingly, Vinthagen states that „[n]ot even the will, body and mind of the resistance fighter is free from power“ (197). While highlighting this important structural dimension of power, Vinthagen points as well to the aspect of agency in stating that "even if power is everywhere, it is not everything" and it is "not total" (167). In this sense, he states that resistance or "obedience (like all human acts) implies choice" (172). Nonviolent resistance, as a goal-rational action, has proven to being able

to break power relations and bring even more powerful enemies to the negotiation table.

## Chapter six: utopian enactment

In this chapter Vinthagen develops the innovative dimension of what he calls “utopian enactment”. Once again Vinthagen keeps his straight sociological perspective and draws from Mead’s and Goffman’s symbolic interactionism to explain the self-expressive and dramaturgical rationality of nonviolence. According to Vinthagen “[u]topian enactment is focused on an individual’s relationship to the other, the opponent, and it attempts to counter prevailing images, emotional predispositions and attitudes towards the activist” (213). This means that refrain from violence and dialogue facilitation open up and uphold channels of communication to start a discourse. Furthermore, and that is the utopian aspect, nonviolence can be an “as if” action (237) in the sense that it can embody an attractive possibility of living together in respect and mutuality (213). The idea is that the action of the resisters already mirrors the goals. Thereby the dual aspect of nonviolence – refraining from violence and “self-suffering” – plays a key role since it helps to make this utopian vision mutually attractive and at the same time expresses authenticity and commitment of the activists.

## Chapter seven: normative regulation

Departing from the observation that we live in a world where violence is hegemonic, Vinthagen introduces normative regulation as a concept to overcome this hegemony of violence. Similar to Gandhi, who argues that we do not build the new society out of the ashes of the old but have to develop a “constructive program” to establish alternative institutions, norms, and practices in parallel to acts of resistance, Vinthagen argues that we have to “normalise” nonviolence. In his conception nonviolent training becomes a cornerstone to internalise nonviolence until it becomes a part of one’s routine practices or one’s own habitus. However, Vinthagen has to admit that normative regulation also includes sanctions so that “[e]ven if a nonviolent community tries to apply less violent sanctions [...] [it] might still feel violent to those affected” (273).

The book's eighth chapter brings together the previous paragraphs and merges the different theoretical aspects into "A theory of nonviolent action". For readers who are in a hurry or for readers who are familiar with current debates of nonviolence and the sociological concepts described, this chapter can be read separately from the others.

After having sketched out the contents, I want to critically discuss the book in pointing particularly at three problems that I see in Vinthagen's theory on nonviolence:

### **The problem of widening and upholding the consensus of nonviolence**

The question how to transform in time and space fragmented nonviolent movements into more persistent and global units and phases of nonviolence is a pressing one. As a reader, I therefore cannot thank the author enough for daring to take up this mostly unexplored field. However, that does not mean that the topic is not controversial:

Although it is not empirically self-evident, we can easily imagine a relatively small social entity like a family following a very maximalist definition of nonviolence. Furthermore, we can imagine that most cultures on earth share the same basic normative consensus that killing others is not the preferred way of living together. However, widening the group of people concerned and the definition of violence at the same time poses some fundamental problems: We have to prioritize in one way or another. Furthermore, what can we do to "defend" the achieved level of nonviolence and to advance it further? Which level of violence is acceptable to prevent people from deviating from the nonviolent consensus?

The current system of national states could be seen as one form of compromise. According to social contract philosophers like Rousseau the national state promises the pacification of the people living within its borders by the establishment of the monopoly of violence and the rule of law. The group of people concerned is the nation; the definition of violence is more or less physical violence. State organs like the police enforce the monopoly of violence and the rule of law by using limited violence. The people accept these measures as a smaller evil to avoid the danger of

physical violence via the imagined social contract. Theoretically, however, the problem is that new members of the community have never signed this contract and have to submit themselves under the existing rules. Furthermore, a given state of nonviolence will probably set in motion a logic to defend it: The more valuable an asset, the more are people ready to accept all necessary means including violence to defend it. This furthermore makes it difficult to widen the group of people concerned as newcomers can be perceived as potential threat to the existing order. The current attempts to limit migration to Europe and the US somehow reflect this problem.

### **The problem of normative regulation**

Normative regulation is Vinthagen's response to the above mentioned problem of upholding nonviolent consensus, especially under the premise of constant widening.

Normative regulation can maybe best be compared with a police force. While the latter is legitimized to use physical force to enforce the laws and ultimately to prevent more violence, the first uses nonviolent sanctions and, as last resort, exclusion from the movement to uphold the "consensus". The comparison between both, the police and normative regulation in movements, discloses that normative regulation works on a lower level of violence, but mostly within a smaller group of people concerned. Normative regulation, however, also includes violence at least in a wider sense. If nonviolence means "without violence and against violence" and the normative goal of nonviolence is to widen the group of persons concerned (from family members and close friends to a whole society of the world population) as well as the definition of violence (from direct physical to structural and cultural violence), sanctioning deviant behaviour seems contradictory. In a purely nonviolent thinking, the group can only be widened by convincing people to submit themselves voluntarily under the rules they choose to obey. This is not about demanding anarchy (without authority) but *autonomia* (in the sense of self-legislation). If there is nothing but the free submission under self-given rules and, at the same time, the group of people concerned is widened, the potential risk of non-conform behaviour rises. Every step to control the norms and to create institutions to defend them against non-

conformists, however, would be a step in the direction of the established state system. Vinthagen states that the hegemony of violence must be replaced by a hegemony of nonviolence. Therefore, nonviolence needs to be incorporated into the habitus of the people. However, neither hegemony nor habitus are concepts built on agency or the free choice of the people, but belong to more structuralist theories that emphasize limited choices and persistence of power. It therefore seems contradictory that the key to a reduction of submission should lie in a renewed submission. In other words: If the hegemony of power is replaced by a hegemony of nonviolence, it still is a hegemony. If nonviolence becomes incorporated in our habitus, it isn't longer a free choice. If it isn't a free and conscious choice, it is unconscious submission.

### **Clear-cut sociological perspective at the cost of interdisciplinarity**

Vinthagen originally intended to name the book “sociology of nonviolence”, which would have been, in my eyes, the more fitting title since it is a straight sociological take on the phenomenon of nonviolence. Furthermore, the original title would have been a call for interdisciplinary complementation. In this sense, the actual title is a little bit misleading as it does not include additional perspectives on nonviolence, all foremost a psychological one. Proposing a sociology of nonviolence, Vinthagen criticises Sharp for his focus on agency and his neglect of structural (cultural) constraints of the free will. He nevertheless follows the assumption that nonviolence is a choice of the actor, however limited. Thus, he assumes that we have to change existing normative standards and establish a culture of nonviolence across the globe. In following a uniquely sociologist approach, Vinthagen is taken in by a general weakness of the sociological literature on nonviolent resistance, namely its neglect of other explanations of violent behaviour as, for example, aggression. If violent behaviour is not only a matter of choice and outcome of established normative orders and practical training, but influenced by psychological factors, how then do we tackle aggressive behaviour? To advance the field further, a stronger interdisciplinary collaboration with other fields like psychology is very urgent. Sadly, however, up to now

psychological studies on nonviolence only played a marginal role (Gregg, Pelton and Moyton are the rare exceptions).

Stellan Vinthagen's "Theory of Nonviolent Action" is definitively the most important theoretical contribution to the field of nonviolent action and resistance studies since Gene Sharp laid the theoretical groundworks in 1973. In my eyes the conceptualization of nonviolent action as a multi-rational action in conflict is convincing and well-grounded in sociological theory. Furthermore, the framework has indeed the potential to reach the ambitious goal of reconciling the two camps of Gandhians and Sharpians. Last but not least, the dimensions of dialogue facilitation, utopian enactment and normative regulation open up new barely covered fields for research and, at the same time, offer some important theoretical guidance for it.

As the criticism mentioned above shows, the book cannot answer all questions, but it provides an excellent, theoretically rich starting point to deepen the theoretical debate on nonviolence or to expand theorizing to related fields and disciplines. I would recommend the book for every student and scholar who is familiar with the actual debates within nonviolent resistance studies. Due to its demanding theory, it is, however, not very suitable for those who want a short and easy introduction.

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## **Dustin Ells Howes: Freedom Without Violence: Resisting the Western Political Tradition**

**New York: Oxford University Press, 2016**

The soldiers are off to war—to defend freedom. This is a common theme in popular explanations of war. For example, the usual script is that the Allies had to fight World War II to oppose fascist oppression. After invading Iraq in 2003, the US government claimed it was necessary to liberate Iraqis from Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. On the other side

of the ideological divide, numerous liberation movements have justified armed struggle as necessary to free oppressed people from colonialism.

Advocates of civil resistance argue that nonviolent methods are more suited than armed struggle for creating lasting freedom. This has been argued on grounds of plausibility: armed struggle involves a military command system that, even when it succeeds, creates a tendency for autocratic rule. In civil resistance struggles, a much broader cross-section of the population is directly involved. This is an empowering experience that builds capacity that can be used to resist future oppression. From the perspective of Gandhian nonviolence, a key principle is that ends should be incorporated in the means: a militarised revolution is likely to lead to a militarised society whereas a nonviolent revolution is more likely to lead to a nonviolent society. Then there is the empirical research showing that civil resistance is more effective than armed struggle in overthrowing repressive regimes and leading to a society with civil liberties in the following years. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's book *Why Civil Resistance Works* is widely cited.

However, despite good arguments and considerable evidence, advocates of nonviolent alternatives have had a hard time changing the mindset of governments, militaries, the media and the general public. The idea that violence is valuable, even essential, to defend freedom seems deeply entrenched. Why is that so?

For answers, *Freedom Without Violence* by Dustin Ells Howes is an essential source. Howes, a political scientist, examines ideas about freedom and violence from the ancient Greeks onwards. His study is a fascinating and challenging journey through the history of ideas. One of the surprises is that the strong linkage between violence and freedom is relatively new. However, to establish this involves careful analysis. For example, Howes summarises one distinction, which he examines in detail, this way:

... for the ancient Athenians, the ability to dominate others in warfare was an *expression* of their capacity for self-rule. However, the idea that a republican or democratic government could use violence to *defend* or protect freedom is a relatively recent development. (p. 43, emphasis in the original)

Freedom Without Violence is highly effective in drawing attention to issues not often addressed in writings about nonviolence. What is freedom exactly? The usual formulations refer to political freedoms, for example of speech and assembly, economic freedom, religious freedom and so forth. But what happens when freedom comes under threat? How is it to be defended?

The problems with using violence to defend freedom soon become apparent. It might seem sensible to fight to defend our freedom and our way of life, but what about the freedom of those on the other side? If enemies are killed, surely their freedom is destroyed, or is meaningless.

Howes tells how the plebs in Rome defended their freedom: they refused military service. This is a dramatically different approach than the usual one today. Howes sets himself the task of explaining how ideas of freedom changed from the ancient world of Greece and Rome to contemporary societies, in particular how they became ever more entangled with violence—and how nonviolence offers an alternative.

Much of *Freedom without Violence* is a detailed history of ideas. Howes scrutinises the views of ancient thinkers including Socrates, Pericles and Aristotle, of later figures including Edmund Burke and Karl Marx, and a number of modern writers including Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt. This analysis is fascinating in showing how ideas of freedom, free will and rule changed over the centuries. This is a history of western thought—and Gandhi.

Howes shows the shortcomings of the usual formulations that involve defending freedom via violence, and the efforts (and intellectual contortions) of thinkers who sought ways around the problem that using violence, against enemies or as a component of ruling, inevitably involves curtailing someone else's freedom, indeed their lives.

The emergence of the modern state involved the idea of sovereignty, which became linked to military means. Liberal thought, which has claimed a particular affinity to concepts of individual freedom, became entwined with assumptions of the necessity of using violence. In the aftermath of the American Revolution, for example, sovereignty in the United States meant the rule of white settlers over African Americans and Native Americans.

The rise of the modern state was soon challenged or accompanied by nationalism, involving a new set of ideologies. Freedom from alien rule seems a worthy cause, but in most cases the means involved violence. Nationalism became especially toxic with the rise of fascism. There was also the parallel development of ideas of socialism, most of which were also tied up with violence.

Howes addresses these developments primarily through the ideas of key thinkers, showing how ancient ideas about freedom were forgotten or transformed into the modern ideas that assume freedom needs to be defended with violence, both inside societies (via police) and outside (via militaries). Howes also pays attention to a contrary tradition: the use of nonviolent action as a means of defending freedom.

Of special interest is the workers' movement, with the strike— withdrawing labour power—as a key tool. Workers through their struggles demonstrated a different way of pursuing freedom. Howes says strikes are fundamentally nonviolent. He examines the ideas of several theorists who addressed the strike and workers' struggles more generally—Walter Benjamin, Georges Sorel, Rosa Luxemburg and Hannah Arendt—some of whom saw strikes as violent and some who didn't.

Howes' special interest is in what he calls “nonviolent freedom.” He sees the use of nonviolent action as an alternative route to freedom, avoiding the contradictions and traps involved in pursuing freedom using violent means. The key figure intellectually, as well as practically, is Gandhi.

Along the way, Howes examines what is called free will, addressing how the will is expressed individually and politically, via the ideas of Arendt, connecting them to those of others, including Albert Camus, Buddhists and Gandhi's idea of *swaraj* (self-rule).

For Howes, *swaraj* offers an alternative to the usual equation of freedom and violence. Gandhi conceived of freedom as having both an individual and collective dimension. At the individual level, freedom for Gandhi meant not licence, namely absence of constraints, but came with the requirement for having self-control. Individual self-control enables living together with others without the necessity of the application of violence for policing. At the collective level, Gandhi envisaged a system

of local village direct democracies linked to others in ever larger networks on the basis of equality rather than hierarchy. Gandhi's vision thus overcomes the usual contradictions in the western political model that derive from exercising violence to defend one's own freedom but at the expense of others'.

Gandhi's model of village democracy is all very well, but are there any signs of how it can operate in practice? Howes points to two options. One is community justice systems based on shame and reintegration. Rather than punishment being imposed by the state, with imprisonment for serious crimes, community justice procedures put the offender face-to-face with victims and community members in a cooperative process to reach an agreed resolution, with the offender making amends. In practice, imprisonment may be involved in some cases.

Howes' second option is civilian-based defence as a replacement for military systems. This involves an empowered population trained and prepared to use methods of nonviolent action to defend against foreign invaders, and to deter aggression in the first place. Howes draws largely on the work of Gene Sharp in his book *Civilian-Based Defense*. Howes' argument would be considerably stronger if he had tapped into the wider body of research on what is also called social defence, nonviolent defence or defence by civil resistance. Sharp's approach is oriented to national defence, namely defence assuming the very system of sovereignty that Howes finds problematical. Other writers in the area see social defence more broadly as a defence of community or society, and just as concerned about defending against one's own government as against foreign enemies. Writers in this area include Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, Robert Burrowes, Theodor Ebert, and Johan Niezing. Burrowes in particular takes a Gandhian approach in his book *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense*, which ties into Howes' picture of nonviolent alternatives. Howes seems unaware of community-level initiatives to promote nonviolent defence, though admittedly these were never prominent and have faded away since the 1980s.

Nonviolent activists might be frustrated with Howes' book given its focus on the arguments of high-level theorists about freedom and violence and its lack of obvious application. It is very well written, yet challenging to read due to its careful and complex argumentation. Nevertheless,

*Freedom Without Violence* serves several important functions. It points to a crucial assumption underlying most of the western political tradition, namely that violence is required to defend freedom, and shows the many shortcomings of this assumption. Nonviolent activists and scholars regularly confront disbelief about alternatives to violence. Howes, through his detailed historical examinations, shows that the connection between freedom and violence is largely a modern creation, and that there is a different way to think about things, namely by looking to nonviolence theory and practice. Howes demonstrates, in great detail, that trying to reconcile freedom and violence inevitably leads to contradictions that have exercised the minds of leading thinkers, without a solution within the standard paradigm of state sovereignty. This can be an inspiration for campaigners to develop better ways of identifying and challenging assumptions about freedom, for example that being prepared to kill and torture others to defend our freedom means denying their freedom, and that this tension cannot be resolved by more violence.

Howes shows most of all that today's ideas about freedom were not held in earlier centuries. According the sociology of knowledge, the prevailing ideas in a society are in part a reflection of systems of power. Howes has shown this in a practical way: ideas about freedom and violence have evolved not according to logic and evidence but in a way that reflects the evolution of social structures. In particular, with the rise of states, militaries and armed police, it is very convenient to justify the use of violence by saying it is necessary to defend freedom. For promoting nonviolent alternatives, Howes points the way to recognising both a different way of defending freedom and the need to think of freedom in a different way.

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# **M.S. Wallace: Security Without Weapons: Rethinking Violence, Nonviolent Action, and Civilian Protection**

**Routledge 2016**

In *Security Without Weapons: Rethinking Violence, Nonviolent Action, and Civilian Protection*, M.S. Wallace conducts a thorough and intriguing examination of how nonviolent intervention can disrupt or prevent violent conflict. The book places particular empirical focus on the role discourse and moral frameworks play in the perpetration of violent conflict, compelling readers to rethink constructed categories of evil villains waging violence against innocent perpetrators. The book provides a theoretical exploration of the legitimisation and efficacy of violence, as well as the power of nonviolent intervention to coerce or transform an opponent away from perpetrating violence. It then presents empirical data which examines discourse and media representations of violence conducted by both sides of the Sri Lankan civil war between the Government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam, or Tamil Tigers. Having unpacked many ways in which individuals make sense of their own participation in violence, Wallace then uses the final chapter to explore an example of nonviolent intervention, or unarmed civilian peacekeeping (UCP), with the Nonviolent Peaceforce Sri Lanka (NPSL), the subject of her ethnographic fieldwork in 2008.

One of the stark take-aways of *Security Without Weapons* was Wallace's presentation of a psycho-discursive theory of civilian protection, in which challenging discourses that rationalise or justify violence is a central and indispensable component of other approaches to civilian protection. As Wallace writes, deterrence is an important mechanism for nonviolent intervention, "but it is only necessary when perpetrators are still able to justify their actions to themselves." She argues that,

“the most effective and sustainable tools for protecting civilians (and for preventing violence more generally) are going to be those that most radically challenge the stability of the discourse within which perpetrators are interpreting their actions and/or that weaken - in an effort to create cognitive dissonance - the particular psychological mechanisms that are doing most of the work to enable their violence (and particularly their violence against civilians).”

This argument opens space for a more nuanced view of how violent conflict can be addressed through nonviolent intervention based on a deeper understanding of how those engaged in violent conflict understand the conflict and their role within it.

Although many aspects of this book would be useful for academics and practitioners of nonviolent intervention, peacebuilding, conflict resolution or security studies to examine in depth, in this review I will give a brief outline of the book's three sections, offering reflections what I consider the most important contributions as well as critiques. I will then conclude with a brief analysis on the applicability of *Security Without Weapons* to studies on resistance, and how a psycho-discursive approach of nonviolent intervention could contribute to resistance movements and conflict transformation in numerous cases.

The book begins with a theoretical exploration of several key factors pertaining to violence and nonviolence. First examined are the distinctions drawn between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” violence through existing moral frameworks, of which it takes just war theory and the concept of *jihad* in Islam as examples. Analysing these two moral frameworks through which violence can be justified both by the state and by a religious doctrine, Wallace shows how two opposing sides in a conflict can believe their actions are legitimate within their own given tradition, perceiving their opponent as having violated basic tenets of justice. I find the choice of *jihad* a problematic example here, as it has become a loaded term that often misattributes the actions of terrorist groups to a deep adherence to the Islamic faith. Yet for Wallace's purpose, the juxtaposition of two examples demonstrates that two sides in a conflict may believe they are engaging in a just, moral, or defensive war, and thus opens room for more understanding of how nonviolent intervention

can transform the actors in a violent conflict. Adding to this, Wallace examines the moral uncertainty involved in the perpetration of violence to illustrate the merits of nonviolent intervention, citing the example of Gandhi's principle of *satyagraha*, in which the irreversibility of violence is condemned because human beings can never fully grasp truth and thus even seemingly-justified reasons for killing another person may be based on false information. Within the constraints of divergent conceptions of legitimacy and uncertainty, then, Wallace argues that it is the means and not the ends from which legitimacy must be derived in cases of violent conflict.

The book then examines the efficacy of violence itself, showing several examples of how nonviolent intervention is a more effective tool for coercion because it holds the potential to transform the will of the perpetrators of violence to execute violence, thereby making the violence itself untenable. Nonviolent coercion is more likely to shift opponents and regime sympathisers into allies. The theoretical presentation of these arguments is convincing and draws heavily on the works of Gene Sharp, although it would have been strengthened by more use of the Sri Lankan context in to illustrate these points, rather than drawing on cases like *OTPOR* in Serbia and the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa.

In the second section, Wallace examines the official discourses and legitimisation of violence in the Sri Lankan civil war and counterinsurgency. The chapter draws on empirical examples of discourse, examining three ways in which the conflict is portrayed by different actors: how prominent leaders of the Government of Sri Lanka and the Tamil Tigers portrayed themselves, their cause and their opponent in public speeches; media portrayals of violent events; and a video archive and transcriptions of interviews with Sri Lankan women detailing their experiences in combat and describing the conflict from their perspective. For the first group, the author analyses the discourses employed by the Government leader President Rajapaksa and the Tamil Tigers leader Prabhakaran. Notably, this demonstrates the way Rajapaksa seeks to portray the government's position as representative of all Sri Lankan people and vilifying the Tamil Tigers as terrorists, tying the government's struggle into a wider global discourse surrounding the "War on Terror." Prabhakaran, on the other hand, seeks to justify the need for liberation from a terrorist state,

characterised as a colonial power, and also employing a discourse of legitimacy as a “people’s movement.” Both seek to justify their own use of violence using international norms advocating the humanitarian crisis or need to act in self-defence. Illustrating what was theoretically explored in the first section, therefore, Wallace finds that both sides highlight the necessity and legitimacy of their violence and escalate that violence in response to the violence of their opponents, exacerbating a cyclical pattern of retribution.

Adding to these characterisations by prominent figures on each side of the conflict, Wallace goes on to examine how and whether stories of violence are reported in the media by sources representing each side’s perspective, noting the way language can seek to evoke more sympathy for one side’s cause by portraying a victim as a “family man” or, in portraying violence perpetrated by one’s own side, to leave the attribution of responsibility ambiguous rather than openly naming the perpetrators’ affiliation, as often done by the news portal TamilNet. Finally, the second section concludes by analysing the discourses of ten female combatants on both sides of the conflict, examining how they make sense of their own acts of violence and their relationships with members of the opposing forces. A notable finding was the difference between soldiers in the Sri Lankan Army, who gave vague or personal reasons for joining the forces, and those fighting for the Tamil Tigers who cited political motivations for fighting. Examining the discourse of divergent actors adds empirical weight to Wallace’s theoretical backing of how different actors within a violent conflict perceive their own involvement and the situation itself from different moral vantage points, thus finding ways to legitimise and justify their own violence while condemning that of their opponent.

Lastly, the book concludes by presenting a psycho-discursive theory of civilian protection and violence prevention, examining ways in which the moral justifications for violence can begin to crack and crumble when challenged. Much of this final section looks at hypothetical scenarios, asking what could have happened if a refusal-to-fight campaign had been mobilised in the Sri Lankan civil war rather than an escalation of violent military confrontation. Surprisingly, it is not until the final chapter that the author elaborates the case of the Nonviolent Peaceforce Sri Lanka (NPSL). As the reader, I had expected this section to come much

earlier in the book as it provides important context for the relevance and applicability of the book itself. At the outset of the chapter, Wallace recalls an anecdote of her field experience in Sri Lanka, one which would have been an excellent opening paragraph for the book as a whole rather than waiting until the very end to present such important and engaging content to the reader.

The chapter goes on to detail the direct and indirect ways the NPSL contributed to protection of citizens and organizations, by accompanying young men through security checkpoints for example, or giving people a sense of empowerment to challenge soldiers. It also played a role in preventing violence between communities as well as between the security forces themselves. The NPSL played a role in both coercive and transformative change, which Wallace analyses both through rationalist and psycho-discursive perspectives; she articulates the role the NPSL played in direct deterrence and discourse shifting, as well as the grey area between the two. In one example, Wallace illustrates the importance of discourse by describing how “NPSL staff members often used the positive aspects of armed actors’ discourse to draw out inconsistencies between their self-representations (...) and their actual practices on the ground,” casting them in a positive moral frame to allow the perpetrator to save face while shifting away from violent behaviours. This is an important point and a key takeaway for enacting resistance to violence by understanding how to use a perpetrator’s self-image to shift their behaviour and beliefs away from violent conduct.

*Security Without Weapons* is an interesting and informative read for scholars and practitioners of peace and nonviolence work, providing as it does a more nuanced understanding of the diverse moral frames and discourse employed by opposing groups in a violent conflict. A psycho-discursive understanding of violence, and the role nonviolence can play in countering violence from this perspective, is an important and often-neglected aspect of nonviolent action and intervention. This is a crucial contribution of Wallace’s work, and elaborates a perspective which can allow for more nuanced understanding and practices in countering other violent conflicts around the world today, from the Rohingya refugee crisis to the global rise of the far-right, as well as contexts like civilian protection

in the Syrian war and civil resistance in indigenous movements, about which Wallace has written on numerous occasions.

In my view, the book would have been more engaging and widely accessible to a non-academic audience if it had been structured differently, with greater integration between theoretical and empirical findings and a much earlier introduction of the case of the Nonviolent Peaceforce in Sri Lanka, rather than leaving it for the very end. By the time the reader reaches the end of the book, the author has built a strong and well-argued theoretical framework to understand the case study, but the story of NPSL gets somewhat lost in the theory; affording more time and attention to the case itself would give greater practical context to the argument and provides an opportunity for further writing on the subject. Nevertheless, *Security Without Weapons* bears significance to the broader field of resistance studies because it teaches us not only to understand why people engage in violence, but how nonviolent intervention in armed conflict can play an important role when it engages with perpetrators as complex, reflexive human beings who are often capable of changing and transforming into agents of resistance to violence themselves. The book is therefore a contribution not only for resistance studies to grow in its conception of how to take nonviolent action, but for resistance movements to grow their membership by understanding how opponents and perpetrators can be transformed into resisters of violence themselves.

*Sarah Freeman-Woolpert, Journal of Resistance Studies*

## **Sarah Van Gelder: *The Revolution Where You Live: Stories from a 12,000-Mile Journey through a New America***

**Berrett Koehler, 2017**

*The Revolution Where You Live* came out at an important moment in the United States, shortly after Donald Trump was elected President and when police brutality, the Flint water crisis and the movement led

by Standing Rock Water Protectors had brought an increased sense of urgency and publicity to local resistance movements around the country. It offers ideas and inspiration in a time when so much of the context surrounding global resistance movements is undergoing dramatic flux. Most importantly, the book challenges readers to rethink the importance of place in resistance, and the creative and collaborative energies that are uniquely rooted at the community level. In an increasingly globalized world, an understanding of locally-rooted resistance struggles is necessary for building transformative campaigns for social change.

The book itself documents the journey by Sarah Van Gelder, cofounder of YES Magazine, who traveled by van across the United States in a quest to answer three questions:

1. Is anti-racism work best done in communities?
2. Is local activism the way to both stop extraction and transition to a sustainable future?
3. Can we build a new economy, rooted in our communities, that can support us and protect the natural world?

I was skeptical upon reading Van Gelder's questions. They struck me as having been posed rhetorically, seeking to affirm what the author already believed rather than to examine and explore the questions themselves. My initial critique was that beginning any journey with a set of "Yes" or "No" questions, rather than posing open-ended queries such as, "How are community-based approaches uniquely poised to advance anti-racism work?" sets a narrow lens for what you are expecting to find, and limits the audience for your findings to those who would already have agreed with the points you set out to prove.

Aside from the seemingly self-affirming nature of the journey itself, the book provided a diverse and engaging set of stories detailing activist struggles and community endeavors to build local resistance to the structures of capitalism, racism, neocolonialism and environmental destruction that devastate indigenous communities and marginalized populations in the United States today. From Montana to Kentucky, Detroit to Newark, *The Revolution Where You Live* explores how local resistance campaigns have been led by a range of actors, from ranchers to indigenous leadership councils, seeking to combat issues like coal mining,

racial injustice and worker exploitation. The author's reflections on her own journey make the book an enjoyable, easy read, and drawing together such a diverse collection of issues demonstrates the interconnectedness of resistance struggles to systems of exploitation and oppression today.

As it applies to resistance studies, a critical view of *The Revolution Where You Live* would portray the story as a stark example of what Abu Lughod referred to as the "tendency to romanticize resistance" (1990), in which the focus on explaining resistance steals attention from examining the structures of power being resisted. At the risk of romanticizing the projects and initiatives she learned about along her journey, Van Gelder nevertheless offers substantive examples of how small groups of people speak truth to power and challenge systems of oppression by creating alternative systems, thus exposing weaknesses of those in power when they are met with a well-organized, determined community. Contextualized within her journey across the United States, the quote Van Gelder employs by Archimedes - "Give me a place to stand and I can change the world" - offers an important insight for resistance today. Emphasizing local resistance not only has implications for bringing indigenous and community-led struggles to the forefront, but highlights some of the challenges that can be faced in global movements and among activists who lack a strong attachment to a place or community of their own. Although it's important not to discount the role of transnational support for local movements, Van Gelder's journey shows how locally-rooted resistance struggles have a particular role to play in causing ripple effects of lasting systemic change. In educating and inspiring activists to seek local solutions to global problems, *The Revolution Where You Live* has potential to make ripple effects of its own.

*Sarah Freeman-Woolpert, Journal of Resistance Studies*

# **S. M. Farid Mirbagheri: War and Peace in Islam; a critique of Islamic/ist Political discourses**

**Palgrave MacMillan, 2012**

War and Peace in Islam is a well written introduction of the complexities and the diverse understandings of the Islamic faith. The author presents multiple arguments on political Islam and its relation to the question of peace and war. For those who seek to know the basic questions of what is Islam and the political discourses, then this book will provide much insight and sheds a light on the development of these discourses.

The critique and arguments the author developed are centred around his understanding of Islamic gnosticism, which is not necessarily where Islamic/ist fundamentalist are coming from. While peace in Islam is tightly linked to the spiritual aspect, political islamic/ist discourses are realist in their approach and (mis)interpretation of Quranic verses. Although the author attempted to discuss the different views of both Islamic and “western” on political discourse in relation to peace and war, I find it lacking in presenting the fundamentalists argument and its impact on understanding of these discourses.

Many parts of the book are compact and filled with information, while the questions of the book are big and require so much, this may dissuade readers from continuing but I encourage you to continue reading as the book leads to the Question of Jihad it will become more interesting. The question of Jihad part explains from various angles what Jihad means in islam and how it is viewed and understood by scholars, but how it is used and misused by fundamentalists. I especially liked the part where the author divides Jihad in outer and inner, where self-struggle connects to the struggle of the community. Jihad/ struggle is written about here in both the violent and non-violent sense and I wish the author would have written more about the non-violent struggle in Islam with modern examples.

In the post script, the author touches briefly on the sweeping changes in the Middle East at the centre of these changes is his claim that is due to political Islam and the dogmatic ideology rather than a complex set of reasons and that the solution starts with the self as in a spiritual awakening. Six years after 2011 I am certain he would have written it differently but it is always interesting for to read what scholars wrote and thought of 2011.

*Asma Khalifa, Khalifa-Ibler Institute*

## **Mark Hertsgaard: Bravehearts: Whistle-blowing in the Age of Snowden**

**New York: Skyhorse, 2016**

Edward Snowden is the world's most famous whistleblower. Working for a contractor for the US National Security Agency, he became aware of a massive US spying operation, including collecting information on electronic communications by US citizens. Snowden collected a vast quantity of information about the illicit spying and in 2013 leaked it to journalists. It became headline news around the world.

Snowden's saga has inspired numerous accounts, among them Mark Hertsgaard's book *Bravehearts*. Hertsgaard, a journalist, undertook numerous interviews with key figures concerning Snowden's disclosures. One of Hertsgaard's important stories is about Thomas Drake, like Snowden an NSA whistleblower. Drake followed the official procedures for reporting his concerns about computer security within the NSA and as a result was arrested and threatened with a lengthy prison sentence. Snowden learned from Drake's experience: reporting problems internally was probably not going to be effective.

Hertsgaard also tells, for the first time, the story of John Crane, who worked for the NSA's inspectorate-general, set up to handle internal disclosures. Crane, whom Hertsgaard calls "the third man," did what he

could on behalf of Drake and, as a result, came under extreme pressure himself.

The Drake and Crane stories are important counterpoints to the account of Snowden as hero. They are also heroes in their own way, but not as well known.

Another part of the story is the role of whistleblower supporters. In Drake's case, the key organisation was the Government Accountability Project or GAP, the most prominent whistleblower advocacy group in the US. Bravehearts provides an insightful account of GAP's operations, drawing especially on the experience of Tom Devine, GAP's central figure for many years.

GAP receives information about numerous whistleblower cases and selects a small number of these to pursue. After carefully checking the facts, GAP mounts legal actions backed by a media campaign. Without support groups like GAP, most whistleblowers would lack the capacity to make any difference at all.

Whistleblowing can be considered a form of resistance to authority, though its relationship with resistance studies is complicated. Most employees who report corruption, abuses or hazards to the public are loyal and conscientious. They do not set out to challenge authority, and many say they are just doing their job. They assume managers will investigate and, if anything is wrong, will address the problem. Many of them are shocked to discover, when they experience reprisals ranging from petty harassment to dismissal, that they are seen as the problem. Thus many employees who are called whistleblowers do not set out to resist authority. Instead, they have an unwarranted trust in the benevolence of bosses, senior management and outside appeal bodies. Their resistance is less often by intention than by speaking truths that turn out, often to their surprise, to be unwelcome.

Snowden is a prominent example of a more conscious and well-informed form of resistance. Snowden, unlike most whistleblowers, realised that using internal reporting channels was a recipe for failure. Instead, he aimed at getting his information and his message to wider audiences. Furthermore, Snowden took careful note of how the mass media dealt with disclosures and decided not to approach the mainstream

US media such as The New York Times. Instead, he approached Glenn Greenwald, who wrote for The Guardian.

Whistleblowers have much to learn from Snowden and much to learn from resistance studies. A key message is to check out what happened to others who spoke out and to check out avenues for getting the message to wider audiences.

Bravehearts is valuable for showing that, in relation to whistleblowing, resistance can occur in different ways. For every Snowden, there are many Thomas Drakes who suffer after following the rules for disclosures. There are probably many John Cranes too, inside supporters of whistleblowers. But few of the John Cranes of the world ever receive recognition. Hertsgaard has done a service in telling one of the stories of courage behind the scenes.

*Brian Martin, University of Wollongong*

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