

CLASSIC BOOK REVIEW

Judith Butler: Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly

Harvard University Press, 2015

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Judith Butler is an iconic feminist scholar, famous for her advanced theoretical work on gender, sexuality, and queer studies. Her book *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015) reveals important dynamics of public assemblies in a time of growing precarity due to political neoliberal governing. With this book, she connects her earlier writings on the body to practices of resistance.

Butler's work on materialisation in the early 1990s was a turning point in the feminist scholarly field. With her books *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler theoretically did to the body what post-Marxist scholars Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) did to economy. They challenge the notion about a material ground by stating that materiality, such as the body or economy, cannot be understood as the foundation for political systems, political struggles, or culture. Neither can materiality be understood as a surface or an object upon which cultures or discourses impose meaning. Butler, as well as Laclau and Mouffe, argue that it is not possible to separate these entities of culture and materiality. Materiality must be understood as a process and instead of the concept construction, Butler suggests materialisations. She writes in *Bodies that Matter*:

What I would propose in place of these conceptions of constructions is a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter. That matter is always

materialized has, I think, to be thought in relation to the productive and, indeed, materializing effects of regulatory power in the Foucauldian sense. Thus, the question is no longer, How is gender constituted as and through a certain interpretation of sex? (a question that leaves the “matter” of sex untheorized), but rather, Through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialized? And how is it that treating the materiality of sex as a given presupposes and consolidates the normative conditions of its own emergence? (Butler 1993, pp. 9-10)

Materiality, as we know it, emerges through normative reiterations, through our continuous practices and enactments over time. “Sex” is both produced and destabilized through these processes. The materiality becomes; it is not only an object on which discourses act. Butler questioned materiality as having a stable origin that is not affected by culture. She also contested the notion of norms as immaterial things. Norms become part of and inseparable from the process of materialisation. Materiality is something that continuously becomes when it is enacted. It serves as the foundation from which the norms that are part of creating this materiality also derive their legitimacy and naturalness.

What follows is that a materiality is not possible to understand as something ‘in itself’ as a pre-discursive entity, and thereby it is not possible to, as later new materialist scholars may argue, understand it as an original active agent (cf Alaimo and Hekman, 2008). There are no original subjects, neither material nor discursive. However, Butler’s work on materialisation has been important for many feminist scholars of the new materialist turn, even if they give matter a more independent and active role. One connection between the work of Butler and the new materialist theories is the destabilisation of a human subject. Butler addresses the importance of destabilising the notion of a strong human subject and the need to be aware of the normative conditions for this materialised subject (1990). In a diffractive but related way, posthumanist scholars deeply question the centrality of the human. It is not only humans, but also non-humans—such as animals, artefacts, objects, buildings, technologies, machines and nature—that could be seen as resisting materials, with ‘agency’. Also, these materials are involved in the becoming of the world and the construction of a phenomenon (Haraway 1991; Åsberg, Hultman, and Lee 2012). In *Notes*, Butler is influenced

by the new materialists and their interrelatedness with other scholars, for example, Deleuze. But instead of discussing agency, Butler repeatedly points out questions of relations and connections, which are common in post-humanist and new materialist work. Butler writes for example that she to a certain extent follows her colleague Donna Harraway, famous for her posthumanist work:

In asking us to think about the complex relationalities that constitute bodily life, and in suggesting that we do not need any more ideal forms of the human; rather we need to understand and attend to the complex set of relations without which we do not exist at all. (Butler 2015, p. 209).

These many relationships not only extend to non-human animals, but also, she writes, to machines and nature.

Materiality and resistance

Fifteen years after *Bodies that Matter*, Butler's work on materialisation and her writings about the role of bodies and gatherings apply to current resistance practices. We therefore find her work on materiality and resistance of immense importance for resistance scholars. Within resistance studies (Bayat, 1997; Bayat, 2000; Bayat, 2009; Bleiker, 2000; Scott, 1990; Hollander and Einwohner, 2004; Törnberg, 2013), language and symbolism are regarded as highly relevant in relationship to resistance. Or as Roland Bleiker writes: 'The most powerful practices of dissent consist of processes that interfere with the manner in which global politics has been constituted. They work in discursive ways, that is, by engendering a slow transformation of values' (Bleiker 2000, p. 276). In line with this, resistance studies have emphasised less than tangible 'entities such as texts, signs, symbols, identity and language' (Törnberg 2013). Overall, there has been a focus on cultural processes and the establishment of dominant meanings and cognitive authorities, including how these can be understood using the concepts of power and resistance. Butler's work on resistance in *Notes* is one of several possible entrances that can be used to develop these perspectives in resistance studies by embracing matter, and specifically the role of the body, beyond discourse.

The focus in *Notes* is on materialisations that do not follow the normative regulations, that appear (even if excluded) in a different way. In *Notes*, this materialisation is potentially enacted by precarious groups. Nearly all of Butler's work focuses upon the constituting force of 'the outside' of discourses and normative materialisations of hegemonies (Butler 1993, p. 2). *Notes* is written in a neoliberal time (and temporality) that is marked by a deepening constitutive divide between rich and poor. It is a divide that is part of the materialisation of a society, where groups of people are abandoned in the name of individualisation and moralisation and excluded from security and sociality. These groups become disposable, and ungrievable, not because, as Butler clearly writes, they do not have any who grieve for them if they die, but because they do not have any supporting structure. She describes those who are excluded from the neoliberal 'we', meaning 'the constitutive exclusion' of people, or the precariat.

In the book, strong normative ideals and conditions about living individualised lives are contrasted with discussions on vulnerability, dependencies, and connections. Butler's understanding of materiality, dependency, and sociality, as well as her philosophical dialogue with Levinas and Arendt (Chapter 3), who both have taken issue with individualism in the classic liberal concept, becomes a context with which to interpret her understanding of resistances through assemblies and gatherings. Dependency is a materiality, and perhaps also, as she states, an unavoidable condition.

The role of precarious bodies is situated at the fore of the book. Butler constantly returns to the precarious, who they are, how precarity intersects with many other social categories, what bodily effects are produced when one, in an era of neoliberal individualized 'responsibilisation', becomes understood as disposable. In this context, she writes about public assemblies and how 'the gathering in itself signifies persistence and resistance' (Butler 2015, p. 23). And as excluded bodies are gathering and become a force, Butler also shows that focusing on discourses alone is not enough. Already in the introduction she writes:

Embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor prediscursive. In other words, forms of

assembly already signify prior to, and apart from, any particular demands they make. Silent gatherings, including vigils and funerals, often signify in excess of any particular written or vocalised account of what they are about (Butler 2015, p. 8).

Important themes of the book are thus the role of public gatherings and the temporality of these assemblies, the ‘transient and critical gathering’, which are far from institutionalised politics. It is an assembly that works against the ordinary reiterations and exclusions, and against the ordinary temporality. The bodies disrupt a performative ongoing materialisation. To gather is also to appear, to come in public, to do politics. Butler claims that the gathered bodies matter here: ‘The gathering signifies in excess of what is said and that mode of signification is concerted bodily enactment, a plural form of performativity’ (Butler 2015, p 8). When bodies act differently, when they, as the constitutive outside, come together and appear, they may threaten the normative materialisation. In addition, those who takes part in the gatherings and change the ongoing materialisation may also, through the many bodies gathering, see and acknowledge the political in their own situation. By analysing these assemblies as plural forms of performative actions, Butler continues to broaden the theory of performativity beyond speech acts to include the concerted actions of the body. Hereby, Butler makes a distinction between forms of linguistic performativity and forms of bodily performativity: ‘They overlap; they are not altogether distinct; they are not, however, identical with one another’ (Butler 2015, p. 9).

Assemblies - acting in concert and alliances

Several times throughout the book, Butler address the need for gender politics to build alliances with other groups who are characterized as precarious (cf Butler 2015, p. 66). Neoliberal individualisation is contrasted with connectedness, as precarious bodies come together in assembly and build alliances for plural rights. They gather as a complex ‘we’ as well as a complex ‘I’. Butler writes how the alliance could be the structure of our own subject-formation, ‘as when alliance happens within a single subject, when it is possible to say, ‘I am myself an alliance or I ally with myself and my various cultural vicissitudes’. The ‘I’ in question ‘refuses to background one minority status or lived site of precarity in

favour of any other'. And she continues: 'The rights for which we struggle are plural rights, and that plurality is not circumscribed through in advance by identity' (Butler 2015, p. 68). Acting in concert is to act in accordance to these complexities, and the 'I' is always related to others.

For Butler, and in a discussion with Arendt in the book, it is important to challenge the divide between public and private, and also here the body is of immense importance. She takes Tahrir square as an example of how the activists not only acted against a powerful regime with words. They blurred the distinctions between public and private by making activities like cooking and creating shelters into political and public acts. On Tahrir square, to act and sleep on the square, to be both demanding and vulnerable, was also, as Butler writes, to 'put the body on the line in its insistence, obduracy, and precarity overcoming the distinction of the public and private in the time of revolution (p.98):

That acting in concert can be an embodied form of calling into question the inchoate and powerful dimension of reigning notions of the political. The embodied character of these questions work in at least two ways: on the one hand contestations are enacted by assemblies, strikes, vigils and the occupation of public places; on the other hand those bodies are the object of many demonstrations that take precarity as their galvanizing condition. After all, there is an indexical force of the body that arrives with other bodies in a zone visible to media coverage: it is this body, and these bodies, that require employment, shelter, health care, and food, as well as a sense of a future that is not the future of unpayable debt, it is this body, and these bodies, or bodies like this body and these bodies, that live the condition of an imperilled livelihood, decimated infrastructure, accelerating precarity (Butler 2015, pp. 9-10).

The bodies deliver bodily demands for liveable lives (Butler 2015, p.11). Butler calls attention to the fact that we are now faced with an idea that some populations are, as she writes, disposable.

To conclude, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* is an important contribution to resistance studies. In a time when precarity is increasing, when people become excluded for different reasons, it is vital to learn more about possible transformative resistances, about the

performative role of assembly in alliances in squares and streets. Gathering bodies are not dispersed. They resist, demanding to be recognised and valued. *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* is therefore a book that, through its theoretical work, makes it possible for us to understand materialisation as a part of not only normative regulations but also possible resistances. It is a book that, in spite of all, produces hope. Hope is, we argue, an essential dimension in resistance.

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The UMass Amherst Resistance Studies Initiative

the first of its kind anywhere in the world, supports unarmed struggles against all forms of exploitation and violence. A generous donation from a Quaker activist family has underwritten the Initiative and the creation at UMass of an Endowed Chair in the Study of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance.

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

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BOOK REVIEWS

Kevin Van Meter: Guerrillas of Desire: Notes on Everyday Resistance and Organizing to Make a Revolution Possible

AK Press 2017

Reviewed by *Sarah Freeman-Woolpert, JRS*

Thoroughly researched and powerfully written, Kevin Van Meter's short and compelling book, *Guerrillas of Desire: Notes on Everyday Resistance and Organizing to Make a Revolution Possible*, sets out to explore "how everyday resistance is a factor in revolution." It does this with two primary points of investigation: refusals of work and practices of mutual aid, from the time of slavery through the age of industrialization. This expansive subject matter, covered in just 160 pages, is a challenging, thought-provoking read, but Van Meter makes his analyses accessible to a range of readers through the use of frequent narratives, adding human faces to the theoretical explorations within the text. This begins at the book's outset, as the author describes his early experience canvassing a low-income Hispanic neighborhood, and realizing how out of touch his fellow organizers were with the people they sought to organize. From the beginning, the author's voice gives *Guerrillas* a distinctive and memorable tone.

The three main sections of this book can be read in different orders, as the author notes memorably at the outset ("Politics is about choices. So is reading"). The first section, in chapters 2 and 3, explores the overarching themes of the book through the lenses of anarchism and Autonomist Marxism, and expands on the metaphor, guerrillas of desire, on which this book is based. The second section – chapters 4, 5, and 6 – explores acts of everyday resistance within different historical periods, from slavery until the industrial period. Finally, in chapters 7 and 8, the author examines current trends in radical organizing within the U.S. and ends with an examination of possibilities for future research.

Two important aspects of what this book offers lie in its terminology: both the metaphor presented in the title, “guerrillas of desire,” and the linguistic roots of the Latin word for ‘power:’ *potestas* and *potentia*. Van Meter explains the difference between these two notions of power as the difference between state power of domination and the power people hold to influence and take action – or ‘power to direct’ and ‘power to act.’ The guerrillas of desire, as a metaphor, seeks to engage the reader’s imagination, referring to those who refuse the imposition of work while also striving for self-assertion and forging a new way of being.

One of the most valuable contributions of *Guerrillas* is the three historical chapters on everyday resistance from slavery to peasant politics and the industrial era. These sections analyze the creation of ‘counter-communities’ during each period, examining aspects like solidarity, communication and mutual aid, and the ways people resisted a dominant capitalist class through various means, from sabotage, strike and theft to suicide and assassination. These examples illuminate instances of everyday resistance that are often overlooked, such as the way Br’er Rabbit stories allowed enslaved people to communicate about tricking slaveholders. It offers much food for thought about how everyday resistance is constantly taking place in the world around us, whether we notice or not.

From the perspective of nonviolent resistance, this book provides an opportunity for discussion and reflection on nonviolent action within a broader context of mutual aid and refusal, from strikes and boycotts to worker slow-downs and solidarity actions across many generations and understandings of the ‘working class.’ What is interesting, in examining this book’s discussion of nonviolent resistance, is that it does not explicitly analyze these actions as nonviolent resistance per se, but situates them within a context of resistance that is both nonviolent and violent, including sabotage, murder, violent rebellion, self-harm and suicide. It explores the relationship between everyday resistance and this “larger revolutionary tradition,” grounding the labor struggles of today within a much longer and broader history than many other works. Thus, scholars of nonviolent resistance gain insight into their own field through a broad lens of resistance, one which examines worker resistance without added emphasis on nonviolence as a unique tool in these efforts. In some ways, this is a missed opportunity for the book to explore the specific

attributes or shortcomings of collective nonviolent action by worker movements. Yet the anarchist and Autonomist Marxist lens expands our understanding of how nonviolent action is situated within a wider context of resistance, particularly when examining nonviolent action of workers and nonviolent resistance to an exploitative capitalist system.

What does appear striking is Van Meter's references to concepts relating to nonviolence, like his brief mention, and dismissal, of the notion of 'speaking truth to power' when he writes, "Much of the contemporary Left continues to believe that speaking the truth in itself has power, even after years of screaming themselves hoarse to no avail. Slumlords, bosses, and elected officials do not respond to truth, they respond to force." Here, Van Meter's concept of truth is a narrow one, and his discussion of nonviolence as a critical underpinning of much historical resistance is left incomplete. Instead of entering the debate on the efficacy of violence versus nonviolence, joining those who say a 'radical flank effect' could make nonviolent protesters appear more reasonable, or that violence is necessary when the only alternative is cowardice and capitulation, Van Meter stakes his position without, it seems, any concern that he would need to convince his readers of the necessity of 'force.'

In many ways, this book explores important aspects underlying nonviolent action and resistance, particularly the way that guerrillas of desire imagine a new society that rejects capitalism and the subjugation of labor to state or corporate control. In aiming towards this alternative reality, this book details the historical examples of creating 'counter-communities' in resistance to potestas through expressions of solidarity and collective action. This ties into one of the most powerful aspects of nonviolent resistance: the power to prefigure an alternative to current realities of violence and oppression.

Yet from the lens of nonviolence, I see a key difference between the creation of counter-communities of resistance, and what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. referred to as the 'beloved community.' While nonviolent action can be used in the face of oppression to resist injustice and establish alternative communities, nonviolence itself aims to extend a hand across division in an ever-striving effort to build a unified community. As we look out at the gaping divides that segment our societies into small, self-reinforcing echo chambers, our resistance must strive toward establishing

that 'beloved community' if we are to ever forge the way forward to the just and peaceful society we desire.

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

University of Minnesota Press 2017

Reviewed by *Ryan Rybka, UMass*

The Nishnaabeg became worried when the Waawaashkeheshiwag, Moozoo, and Adikwag (deer, moose, and caribou) were nowhere to be found. For about a year, the Nishnaabeg had not seen any trace of the Hoofed Clan, leading them to become anxious, hungry, and guilty. One day, the Nishnaabeg decided to try and stop this helpless cycle by coming together in prayer, song, and offerings. They sent their fastest runners to seek out members of the Hoofed clan to understand what had happened. One runner found and talked with a young deer who explained how her relatives had left due to feeling disrespected by the Nishnaabeg who had not been sharing their meat and had been killing without necessity. From this information, Nishnaabeg elders, diplomats, and mediators went to the Hoofed clan seeking resolution, culminating in a negotiated agreement that the Hoofed Clan and the Nishnaabeg would honor each other in both life and death. This story demonstrates the core of Nishnaabeg teachings, closely adhering to responsibility, reciprocity, relationality, and reverence. Beyond these core teachings, Simpson shares this story to reflect upon the contemporary realities of settler-colonialism in Canada. The deer, like the Nishnaabeg people, have directly experienced years of injustice, violence, and exploitation. Simpson urges the Nishnaabeg people to similarly partake in this radical practice by turning away from the Canadian state towards Indigenous ways of being.

As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance (2017) by Dr. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Nishnaabeg scholar, is a critically engaging reflexive “manifesto” that seeks to highlight

the realities of contemporary Nishnaabeg life. Simpson's central tenet is a call to action around indigenous nationhood, which she describes as "a radical and complete overturning of the nation-state's political formations" (10). This non-violent, direct rebut of settler-colonialism, which Wolfe (2006) describes as a structure of creating a new world atop of another in pursuit of land, the "irreducible element," is envisioned through radical resurgence movements.

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

Chapter three focuses on settler-colonialism, which Simpson understands to be a structure bent on Indigenous dispossession and confinement by the state. Settler-colonialism has been practiced through the removal of Nishnaabeg bodies directly from the land by treaty, violence, assimilation, and erasure. Chapter four is centered around Nishnaabeg internationalism which differs from Western versions through its adherence to grounded normativity being that one's nation is not confined to the protocols of the defined nation-state, but rather composed of "a series of radiating relationships" (58) that include all life forms- peoples, land, water, spirit, animals, etc. Chapter 5 is a reflection and critique of capitalism. Simpson makes a bold claim by positing that Indigenous peoples "have more expertise in anti-capitalism and how that system works than any other group of people on the planet" (72). She defends this position by expressing the thousands of years Indigenous Peoples have lived without capitalism and the more recent hundreds of

years they have collectively resisted its ill-effects. Simpson argues that Nishnaabeg rejection of capitalism is not due to their lack of intelligence or technological incapability, but rather a decisive choice adhering to grounded normativity.

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

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

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

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

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

Mitchell (2018) and Alfred (2009) both describe the necessity of warriors in indigenous rejuvenation, resistance, and decolonizing efforts. A warrior is rooted in community, and instilled with values and ethics, the same that Simpson defines as grounded normativity. Mitchell (2018) argues that the lack of Indigenous warriors today is due to communities not investing in their children through land-based teachings; instead, indigenous youth are being trained "by those operating and maintaining the broken systems that are brokering our death" (155). A central purpose for Simpson's text is to engage with these "broken systems" to which Mitchell alludes, such as capitalism, heteropatriarchy, extraction, and settler-colonialism. All of these systems are absolutely enmeshed within one another and it is difficult to separate and isolate one from the rest. Mining efforts however have caught the attention by many around the world, particularly during the crisis at Standing Rock last year.

In an interview with the social activist and filmmaker Naomi Klein, Simpson describes resource extraction (mining) as being more than just a

process of taking material from the earth, but as a mindset that has direct impact on how people understand their relationship with the earth. Mining encompasses all of these “broken systems” such as its reliance on capitalism in which life becomes, exploited, commoditized, and profit producing (Dokis 2015), or assimilation in which life is removed from its pre-colonial state and forcefully incorporated into a colonial one.

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

As We have always done culminates with a discussion about constellations that Simpson defines as networks of people or communities that are centered around grounded normativity. Simpson beautifully explains how “constellations in relationship with other constellations form flight paths out of settler colonial realities into Indigeneity” (217). Based on the previous discussion about resource and academic extraction, it is critical to reflect on the appropriateness of particular communities with whom to “constellate.” Simpson shares a repeated anecdote in which at every talk she delivers, a well-meaning white person asks how he or she can be part of resurgent projects. After much thought, Simpson states that “there is virtually no room for white people in resurgence” (228). In the entirety of this text, Simpson has made it clear that her audience is not liberal white academics. This work is a manifesto calling for Indigenous nationhood and so she writes to build connection and constellations with like-minded and experienced communities- Indigenous, Black, and

brown. However, if indigenous efforts are made that “refuse” to center whiteness, “real” allies regardless of race will show up.

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

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Lester R. Kurtz and Lee A. Smithey, ed.

*The paradox of repression and
nonviolent movements*

Syracuse University Press 2018

Reviewed by *Majken Jul Sorensen, Karlstad University*

The stated goal of “The paradox of repression and nonviolent movements,” edited by Lester R. Kurtz and Lee A. Smithey, is to focus on the factors that facilitate mobilization in spite of repression. Additionally, the ambition is to have a book which is relevant both to academics and movement participants themselves. This promise is fulfilled, since the 12 chapters include many insights for both audiences.

The editors themselves have contributed several chapters, and start out by introducing their relational understanding of power and broad definition of repression. To them, repression is much more than the beatings, bullets and other direct violence perpetrated by the police and military. In chapter 8, they present repression as a continuum which goes from “overt violence” to hegemony, including “less lethal” methods, intimidation, manipulation and soft repression. With an overall term they refer to this as “smart” repression as an allegory to the military term “smart” bombs. The idea of the continuum is worth pursuing, but it would have been even more interesting if it had been used to analyse actual cases. For instance, the contributors could have investigated how Brian Martin’s work on backfire could be transferred to the area of smart repression. Instead, most chapters focus on how to deal with violent repression.

In chapter 7, the editors of the book focus on the connections between culture and repression management. By “repression management” they mean how activists strategize about how to deal with repression, including how to prepare for it and make the most out of the backfire effect. Cultural aspects are an integrated part of the analysis of repression management and not treated as opposite to strategic choices as one can sometimes observe in literature about culture and social movements.

Drawing on framing theory and previous work on cultures of resistance, they use a number of illustrative examples to discuss the different ways cultural aspects are important when organising to face repression.

In several chapters, the authors emphasise maintaining nonviolent discipline when facing violent repression in order to maximize the potential effect on backfire. This is the standard way to talk about the paradox of repression or “political jiu-jitsu,” as Sharp called it in 1973. However, in the chapter on Egypt this belief in the power of nonviolence seems to have led to misrepresentations. Obviously, the author has a great respect for Sharp and his emphasis on nonviolent discipline and has learned much through ICNC and CANVAS, international organisations offering trainings and workshops in strategies and nonviolent action. However, this seems to reflect the author’s personal experience rather than the average participant in the Egyptian revolution. Secondly, it seems to be a distortion of the story of Egypt to claim that the protesters maintained nonviolent discipline, since riots and burning of police stations undoubtedly played a role in the 2011 revolution. It is also outright wrong to call the revolution “bloodless,” given that many protesters were seriously injured and killed. These shortcomings draw attention away from an otherwise very interesting analysis of why the Egyptian military refused to obey orders to shoot protesters when they were called in after the police had failed to contain the protests. The author suggests the military quickly learned from the police’s mistakes and were determined to prevent the repetition of a backfire effect similar to what the police had triggered.

Kurtz and Smithey themselves are nuanced about nonviolent discipline and emphasise that it is all about legitimacy and how protest and repression are perceived, something which points towards important future work. As pointed out by Benjamin Case (2018) in the previous issue of this journal (vol. 4, no. 1), the connection between riots and nonviolent actions is an under researched area. It might very well be that nonviolent discipline is an important factor as theory predicts, but empirical studies based on cases that includes riots should be carried out. Rachel MacNair’s chapter in “The Paradox of Repression and Nonviolent Movements” about defections from police and military indicates one area where riots have a disadvantage, at least in theory, compared to a

movement that maintains nonviolent discipline. It sounds reasonable that repressive forces are less likely to fear for their own lives and less likely to fear revenge from a nonviolent movement that clearly poses no threat to the soldiers and police. As MacNair point out, fear is one of the factors that makes solidarity among those under threat more likely, decreasing the likelihood of defection. This chapter is especially interesting since defection is an area which holds so much potential for nonviolent movements. The author takes us through what is known from the field of psychology about what strengthens and weakens the likelihood of violent repression. Drawing on classical social-psychological experiments like the Milgram experiment and the Stanford prison experiment, MacNair asks what nonviolent movements can learn from these when it comes to defections, and presents some tentative ideas about what movements could do to persuade soldiers and military to defect. This is another area where further research based on interviews with people who have actually defected during a nonviolent revolution would be a valuable contribution to the field.

It was a pleasure to see several chapters focusing on how to overcome fear. One of these is Jennie Williams' story about how women have organised to overcome fear of repression in Zimbabwe. It is a powerful account of how the women in WOZA have organised to protest the conditions that affect their everyday lives. In spite of brutal beatings and the terrible conditions they face when in custody, the women consider themselves the mothers of the nation who have to take responsibility for the family of Zimbabwe. Moving the concept of "tough love" from the private to the public sphere, they consider it their duty to correct the family members who have gone astray, such as the police officers who beat peaceful protesters. Among the factors Williams mentions as key to dealing with fear is planning the protests carefully, and having leaders who are on the frontline of protests, being the first to get beaten.

In the chapter on Thailand, Chaiwat Satha-Anand offers an analysis of what happened after a violent repression of the so-called red shirts in 2010. He explains how the creative and nonviolent Red Sunday movement developed in the wake of the violent repression of the partly violent Red movement. Satha-Anand includes an interesting analysis of how the arrest of the leadership supporting violence left an empty space

for a new leader with very different ideas. The creative and symbolic actions he led were designed to overcome the participants' fear at the same time as it was difficult for the regime to frame them as protest.

To sum up, while the editors are mainly investigating smart repression in their three chapters, all the major case studies deal with cases of violent repression. Thus, the book tries to do two things without being fully dedicated to either. Nevertheless, it is great to see the important topic of repression management in book format and the volume is certainly worth reading.

Arlie Russell Hochschild: *Strangers in Their Own Land*

The New Press 2018

Reviewed by *Matthew W. Johnson, freelancer.*

Acclaimed sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild has produced a compelling portrayal of Red State America in *Strangers in Their Own Land*, centered in the bayous of Louisiana during the latter half of the Obama administration. What it lacks in scope it makes up for in depth as it attempts to answer key questions the 'elites' of the political Left may have about their southern, rural countrymen — such as why do they vote/support policies against their interests? She calls this the “Great Paradox.”

She avoids stereotypes, generalizations, and over-simplifications while humanizing her research subjects by allowing them to speak for themselves and contextualizing their attitudes toward government, industry, work, family, and religion. The “deep story” she constructs in order to understand and validate the real emotions of her subjects is perhaps her most important contribution. It allowed a Marylander like myself to find similarities in my own clan's “deep story” despite the automatic tendency, given my Left leanings (which are more due to education and lived experience than upbringing), to reject the elements of southern pride that are inconsistent, counter-factual, and/or ahistorical.

Hochschild's thoughtfulness and sensitivity allowed me to move beyond my own "empathy wall." It is my great hope that the gritty, passionate activists she befriends will one day force the state to strike a far better deal between environmental and business interests.

However, understanding and empathizing with the other will not by itself produce the kind of radical change that Louisianans desperately need to live healthier lives — not to mention the rest of us. As the reader I am left with this (perhaps elitist) feeling that I care about the people of the bayou more than they care about themselves. This, too, is a "Great Paradox," but it is based not on ignorance and ideology but on Hochschild's careful dismantling of far-Right policies that cripple local habitats, governments, and economies while (seemingly) upholding the "honor" of the same people whose lives they destroy. This concept of "honor" without health care, clean air, and clean water is lost not only on me but also most of the Left. An individual would be met with much derision if he were to attempt to argue for or against policies based on "honor" in Leftist circles, especially if this included the positioning of white men as victims of liberal politics. Hochschild does us a great service by elucidating the roles of manhood and honor in the "deep story" of the South. Her labeling of still-candidate Donald Trump as the "identity politics candidate for white men" (23) is spot on — as is her analysis of the South's *laissez faire* attitude toward regulating white men and the businesses that they dominate while promoting strong regulation of women and people of color (in the areas of immigration and reproductive rights in particular). Now-President Trump is the embodiment of this schizophrenic ethos.

Returning to the question of white male victimhood in the South, the answer that Hochschild fails to glean from her subjects is class struggle. Why see God or big oil as your savior when you could take a Marxist view of history and organize your working-class neighbors against the oppressors? Hochschild presents the Tea Party as the most popular conduit of white working-class activism in Louisiana at the time, but in the context of revolutionary change, the Tea Party failed both on tactical and ideological grounds. On tactical grounds, it allowed itself to be co-opted by the very career politicians that it claimed to oppose and accomplished nothing more radical than pushing the Republican Party

further to the Right. Ideologically, it offered no means of liberation for its disaffected (mostly white) supporters other than to become even more ardent minions of capitalism. One can only hope that if there were no Marxists to be found in rural Louisiana then there may have at least been a few supporters of Bernie Sanders, whose proposed policies would have done more for the South in material terms than both the false promises and reality of Trumpism. Based on the prevailing attitude of Hochschild's subjects, the monetary slogan should be changed to "In Rugged Individualism We Trust." Men base their social status on their distance from government aid (113-115) while the middle class "identifies up" with the wealthy planters/oil barons rather than with those a half-step below (222). And this is no divergence from the rest of the United States. In Hochschild's wealthy hometown, Berkeley, Ca., acceptance of racial minorities and gender equality triumphs concurrently with neglect for the poor.

As much as Hochschild helped me recall, with admiration, the qualities of hard work, personal responsibility, and perseverance that define the rural South, I cannot help but doubt whether these values will ever form the bedrock of sensible and sustainable politics. Time will only tell.

Dawson Barrett:

***The Defiant: Protest Movements in
Post-Liberal America***

NYU Press 2018

Reviewed by *Matthew W. Johnson, freelancer.*

I applaud Dawson Barrett's detailed and engaging account of the most recent, unheralded period of U.S. protest movements. While many can recall the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s, the Women's and Black Power movements of the 1970s, and the accompanying anti-war movement, large-scale activism did not stop in the late 70s. Yet, results were mixed at best due to the rise of neoliberalism, which complicated

the relationship between government and corporations — which in turn complicated the focus of protest movements. It remains to be seen what will be achieved by current grassroots struggles as neoliberalism adapts and intensifies.

While not a comprehensive study of modern American activism, Barrett effectively captures the essence of protest movements from the 1980s onward in less than 200 pages by magnifying a few representative examples from each decade. These examples serve as small case studies, covering progressive responses to rightwing attacks on culture, the environment, workers' rights, and world peace.

Barrett contextualizes these movements far better than the mainstream media — and even other pro-movement sources — by carefully outlining the political context in which protest actions took place and how activists were forced to adapt accordingly. His introduction briefly summarizes movement politics during the pre-1980s 'liberal America' and contrasts the overall political trend of that era with what he calls "post-liberal America," the major focus of his book, and he compellingly positions the 2011 Wisconsin uprising within this framework in his Prologue. Nothing exists in a vacuum within this book's pages. This ensures that someone unfamiliar with contemporary U.S. movement politics could readily follow the author's reasoning and judge his conclusions.

He connects seemingly unrelated events under the umbrella of neoliberalism vs. the people at large. This is a useful dichotomy because it would not otherwise be clear how the goals of Earth First!, ABC No Rio, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, and United for Peace and Justice converge. A common pitfall for U.S.-based activists is to assume a shared understanding of the current milieu. Disparate and sometimes contradictory messaging (on signs) at protests provides evidence for this claim. While it is bad enough to confuse or alienate a fellow activist, to the lay person, the word "neoliberalism" — not to mention the wide array of campaigns designed to confront it — defies recognition.

A common pitfall for those writing in favor of U.S. protest movements is to at times exaggerate their influence or neglect the influence of culture change, adjustments in strategy or goals by the movement's

opponents, and other factors outside the movements' control. It would be wrongheaded to assume that there are no moderating forces within the power structure (government, major corporations, etc.) and to treat the status quo as an unadaptable monolith. On page 161, Barrett clearly addresses the limitations of activism in post-liberal America, but these limitations are not as clearly addressed within the case studies. Moreover, he does not address the changing nature of protest movements from an internal, organizational standpoint. While "the peace movement of the early 2000s and the brief Occupy Wall Street movement a decade later" (162) were likely comparable to the movements of the 1960s in terms of numbers, they were likely not so comparable in terms of organization and cohesion. These days it is difficult to get progressive activists to agree on goals let alone strategies and tactics. Even under the most rightwing administration in memory, the opposition is divided. The grassroots Left is far removed from the Center's (Democratic Party's) strategy to contain Trump through the Mueller investigation and other inquiries into the criminality and corruption of his advisers. Notwithstanding major one-or two-day demonstrations, the streets have been largely silent. Meanwhile, much energy and many column inches have been spent fixating on President Trump's idiosyncrasies and other minutiae rather than illustrating a better vision for the country. I hope that Barrett's *The Defiant* provides both activists and mainstream citizens with food for thought — and for action.

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