



# JOURNAL OF RESISTANCE STUDIES





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## EDITORIAL:

**We continue to develop resistance studies****Stellan Vinthagen***UMass Amherst*

Welcome to the second year with the *Journal of Resistance Studies*! It has been a privilege to complete the first year and our promised two issues (available for free in digital format on our website). One becomes hopeful when one sees the number of editorial group and reviewers grow in number. This espouses hope since an increase in editorial and review work means that we are more known than before, and should receive more submissions of articles, book reviews, and thematic issues in the future. Even though, we started this work only in 2015 we have already received more than 150 submissions of articles; it clearly underscores the need for a journal that specializes in the critical exploration of “resistance”.

Our efforts in creating a high academic quality have been quickly rewarded. The JRS is already from the first issue classified as a Level 1 Academic Journal by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (Norsk center for forskningsdata, <https://dbh.nsd.uib.no>). This means that a publication in the JRS gives academic points for the author, and research funding is allocated to the department where the author works accordingly.

A new feature for this year is that we are publishing a popular summary of each article on our website written by the author, all in the interest of engaging the public: interested citizens and activists, and others that are not comfortable with the specialized academic discourses used by authors. This is just one of the ways in which we hope to become a bridge and interface for knowledge exchange between different communities.

Activists, or *the professors of the streets*, gather their own and unique practical wisdom, lived experience, know-how, and pragmatic knowledge

of resistance in their particular contexts, but also through ongoing communication and reflection with other activists. This wealth of knowledge is an essential part of what should build resistance studies. However, such subjugated knowledge moves uneasily within the specialized discourses and power infused infrastructure of the academia. Therefore, we have a problematic divide between the street and academia. We need to reflect upon and develop forms of interaction between the professors of the streets and the professors of the universities. In the future we want to find ways of collaborating with critical and reflective activists in the production of some Journal issues. The question is, “how is that best done?”. There are several options and we are not sure what is the best way forward. Therefore, we would appreciate proposals. Some of the alternative collaboration forms we think of are: a special thematic issue, on and by ‘activist-scholars’; a collection of “evaluation reports” of different activist campaigns written by participating activists themselves, and each commented by engaged academics; conventional academic research papers on activist campaigns, which then are commented on by activists from these campaigns; or, co-authored texts by academics and activists. But there are several other options. Please, share your experiences and suggestions of how such collaboration should be done.

Our editorial work is taking form and we are calibrating our routines, learning how to work more efficient and with higher quality. It all takes time, people, and the development of skills. We still don’t have a solution on how to make the economy of the journal sustainable in the long run. The JRS is still fully covered by the endowment connected to the *Endowed Chair in the Study of Nonviolent Direct Action and Civil Resistance* at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. That is not possible as a long-term solution. Right now we only charge for the subscription of the printed copy, not for individual articles or the digital copy of the journal. We will try for a while more to keep the journal open access.

We have started collaboration with the open access service of the UMass Amherst Library to develop a more library suitable digital platform, archive and communication system with reviewers and authors. This will hopefully be a system that is active from the fall. More information on that will be posted on our website: <http://resistance-journal.org>

In order to strengthen our editorial work, this summer we are get-



ting additional support from a graduate student at UMass Amherst, Pukar Bista, who works with proofreading and editorial work that has so far been neglected, like identifying new potential reviewers in different fields, as well as communicating with libraries that want to support open access efforts.

Next issue – Vol. 2, Issue 2 – will be our first thematic issue, focused on *Gender, Development and Resistance*, guest edited by Tiina Seppälä and Sara C. Motta. The call for papers received over 35 submissions from which we selected some promising abstracts for full submissions. Now the full texts are submitted and are out on reviews. Finally, some 3-5 articles will be published in December.

We have a couple of submissions already for future thematic issues and are welcoming more submissions, especially those that cover themes that engage with unconventional perspectives on resistance. It is our goal to broaden the discussion on resistance and include novel theoretical frameworks, types of resistance, methodologies, contexts, and empirical data. Our aim is to have one thematic issue each year out of two issues we print each year. The other annual issue will continue to be an open call for submissions.

We have noticed that submitted articles tend to deal with resistance only implicitly, or they are texts that more comfortably relate to one specialized and already established field – typically social movement studies. However, that is not enough to develop resistance studies. We face a problem that is typical of a new and emerging field, a kind of Catch 22: since the concepts, theories and methodologies of “resistance” are not already well developed; it is hard to develop new concepts, theories, and methodologies. We are however determined to make this development, and we think it is possible, if we keep the focus and collaborate. Therefore, the *Journal of Resistance Studies* encourage submissions that explicitly deal with resistance, preferably in a critical way, and with themes or contexts that are unconventional, that broaden our understanding of this phenomenon. Please, spread calls for such texts in your circles.

On the other hand, in order to develop resistance studies we need more than publications (such as JRS). We also need to meet face-to-face and discuss. Last year there was an international workshop on resistance



studies at Karlstad University in Sweden, organized in collaboration with the Resistance Studies Initiative at UMass Amherst, and this year the University of Brighton, through the Critical Studies Research Group, organized a resistance studies conference. However, it is a sign of how weak and still emerging the field is that we still do not have a regular meeting space in the world. Despite that there are many and a growing number of scholars from different academic disciplines that focus on understanding resistance; and, despite an increasing number of papers and panels at major academic conferences; and, despite that occasional workshops and conferences devoted to resistance studies occur, there is still no regular conference structure for resistance scholars. Some of us are in activist and academic networks that discuss the need for regular conferences that could develop the field. Hopefully that will materialize soon.

In the meantime, be aware that (1) many of us participate in panels at some regular conferences (like ASA – the American Sociology Association, BISA – the British International Studies Association, and ISA – the International Studies Association), and (2) we for many years have different online networks that facilitate the spreading of information and communication between people interested in resistance studies, and where calls for papers and announcements of conferences, collaborations, jobs, and new literature, etc. are posted:

*Resistance Studies Network* (2006-), hosted at University of Sussex, UK: a global community of activists and scholars interested in critical reflections on resistance. Here academics can present themselves and you can subscribe to a global mailing list (with currently 550 members). The organizational core of the network consists of academics based at the University of Gothenburg, University of Sussex, and University of Massachusetts. See: <http://resistancestudies.org/>

*Resistance Studies Initiative* (2014-), at University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA: an academic platform that provides annual graduate and undergraduate courses in resistance studies and a resource site (with a collection of news feeds on resistance, academic syllabuses on resistance, a blog on resistance, key literature collections, and a North American list serve with announcements). RSI also organizes workshops in which activists and academics meet and reflect together. The RSI is the founder

and provider of support to the *Journal of Resistance Studies*.

See: <http://www.umass.edu/resistancestudies/>

RSN mailing list (global): <https://lists.chalmers.se/mailman/listinfo/rsn>

RSI mailing list (North America and New England):

<http://www.umass.edu/resistancestudies/subscribe>

★★

While we will have to do a lot of work to increase the formal structures and institutionalization of resistance studies (with positions, funding, publications, academic conferences, etc.), as it solves a lot of practical problems we live with today and makes the studies of resistance more prominent, we also need to be clear that it will create new problems in the future ... With recognition, growing organizations and activities we will also get hierarchies and competition for resources, and we will encounter forces and people within academia that wants to utilize resistance studies for their own ends. In order for a new discipline or academic field – even if it is a rebellious and interdisciplinary one – to get accepted and integrated into the academia, it will have to compromise, accommodate and live side by side with an academic system that is not only embodying academic freedom and truth-orientation, but essentially is an integrated part of militarism, nationalism, patriarchy, racism, heteronormativity, and academic snobbery – basically the systemic and cultural violence of the nation state and global capitalism. There is no space, also not within academia, that is liberated and free from relations of domination. And that has consequences when we are building a new academic discipline or field. There are of course more or less problematic spaces within academia, and different ways to introduce new areas, and there is much you can influence yourself by adopting skilled strategies. However, we need to be humble and cautious when we look on what happened to, for example, Marxism, Gender studies, Peace studies or Social Movement studies, when they got integrated. They have achieved much, and some of them remain to be critical voices within public debate and academia, but in what way did they succeed to really challenge dominant forces or cleavages within academia? To what extent did they manage to play a role for the rebellious movements from where they once came, or to stay loyal to the radical goals of these movements? Or, was it the other way

around, that the movements become a stepping-stone towards an academic carrier for individuals? Many have done research that points to the corrupting dangers with institutionalization. We, who work on resistance studies also need to take a look on that research.

In our work to promote resistance studies and to build the infrastructure of its endeavor, we need to carefully study the trajectories of our sister movements within academia, especially the problems and contradictions they encountered, and how some of them – groups and individuals – have managed to successfully deal with them. We have something to learn. We will have to be careful to avoid becoming like, for example, Peace studies, a discipline that turned its back to the peace movement, and became so preoccupied with being accepted as a “real” social science that it turned everything into quantified data, and avoided to talk about peace as something more than the absence of violent conflict. Peace studies turned into some kind of “critical studies of militarism” during the Cold War, indeed warranted, but at the same time, today it is far away from the studies of peace. And very far away from the revolutionary aspirations of people like Mohandas. K. Gandhi that once was the inspiration for the founders of peace studies. Some of us that initiated resistance studies are refugees from peace studies, and are therefore acutely aware of the dilemmas that haunt the discipline today.

In our work to develop resistance studies we need to find ways to keep the contention with relations of domination alive and thriving, also when that domination is part of the academia. I do not have the answers to how we need to go about this, but I do know that what made this work possible and created the vision of resistance studies among us PhD-students at a peace studies department at the University of Gothenburg, was informal networks. It was through linking academics, activists, authors, and interested individuals into a network that created activities growing out of desire – despite no one believing it would “work” – that we found the ideas, inspiration and energy to do what we do now. Perhaps, we need to keep creating informal networks also when we create new formal structures. Perhaps the trap is the assumed either-or choice between being a network or being a formal organization? Are the rational organization *and* the network of desire the tandem we need to ride to make resistance studies into more than just another radical attempt



within academia? I have many questions, but few answers. However, it is clear that the challenges ahead of us will demand much more of creative thinking and discussions, and as long as we keep the critical questions and self-critical reflections alive, we have a chance. Thanks for being part of this journey.

# RESISTANCE

## STUDIES INITIATIVE

### Critical Support of People Power and Social Change

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.

[www.umass.edu/resistancestudies/](http://www.umass.edu/resistancestudies/)



# Feminizing Resistance, Decolonizing Solidarity: Contesting Neoliberal Development in the Global South<sup>1</sup>

Tiina Seppälä

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## *Abstract*

*Social movements in the global South have contested neoliberal development, a major cause of forced displacement, already for decades. Since it is usually the poor, low caste women who suffer most from large-scale development projects, they have been active in forming movements that contest neoliberal development and neocolonialism, often struggling also against patriarchy, sexism, and heteronormativity. The phenomenon has been referred to as “feminization of resistance”, and it has been studied from many different perspectives across disciplines. However, in conceptualizing women’s resistance, their political engagement, and activism in the global South, Western theoretical approaches often build on a limited, Eurocentric or Anglo-American perspective, ignoring many aspects that are crucial in non-Western contexts. While especially Western political science is increasingly often criticized for its false universalism, whiteness, and elitism, the demand to decolonize feminism have recently gained more ground in this context. Through an analysis of ethnographic fieldwork with social movement activists in Kolkata, India, and in Kathmandu, Nepal, this article discusses feminization of resistance in South Asia, highlighting the importance of decolonizing forms of feminist solidarity while also reflecting on its potentials and challenges in the context of engaged social movement research. Drawing on activists’ views, critiques,*

<sup>1</sup> I thank the two anonymous reviewers for constructive and helpful comments on the first version of this manuscript. I also extend my thanks to my colleague Sara Motta, as well as Laura Junka-Aikio and Hanna Laako, the two co-founders of our research collective Bordering Actors for wonderful and inspiring discussions which have helped me to express and formulate many of the ideas presented here.



*conceptualizations, and suggestions, this paper argues that taking into account their perspectives, that is, learning from movements – while simultaneously trying to unlearn one’s own academic privileges – creates potential not only for enriching and broadening the theoretical debate on feminization of resistance, but, can also contribute to efforts of decolonizing Western political thought and feminism.*

Keywords: *Feminization of resistance, social movements, neoliberal development, decolonization, feminist solidarity*

## Introduction

Questions related to political subjectivity and intersections of gender, class, caste, race, and ethnicity lie at the heart of a broad spectrum of contemporary struggles in the so-called “global South”<sup>2</sup> where women’s participation and political engagement has increased and intensified in a wide variety of social movements. In the theoretical debate, this has been referred to as “feminization of resistance” (e.g. Motta 2013; Motta et al. 2011), corresponding to the fact that “it is the bodies and labour of women and girls that constitute the heart of these struggles” (Mohanty 2003: 249). As a phenomenon, feminization of resistance is considered interrelated with feminization of poverty: neoliberal policies implemented in the global South have had a devastating effect on women in terms of impoverishment and dispossession, which has inspired them to become increasingly active in social movements (Motta 2013: 36; also Mohanty 2010; Roy 2009). While some of these movements struggle against neoliberal development projects that displace thousands of poor people, others contest new forms of colonialism that have resulted in conflicts over land, forests, and water, causing forced displacement and migration on a massive scale. Many movements work broadly for causes of social justice, equality, and dignity; some concentrate on women’s rights, and

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<sup>2</sup> Although my focus here is on South Asia, the categories of “global South” and “global North” do not have to be understood in the traditional, geographical sense, but rather as positions in relation to capitalist power for global South can exist in the global North through the racialized underclass subjects such as refugees and migrants, and vice versa, global North can exist in the global South through the transnational and local elites, both economic and political (e.g. Dirlik 1997; Mohanty 2003: 226–227).



struggle against patriarchy, sexism, and heteronormativity – all intimately intertwined with capitalism and colonialism, always raced, always gendered (e.g. Lugones 2010). Importantly, as suggested in postcolonial, decolonial, and intersectional feminist analyses, these struggles can potentially transform the nature, meaning, and subjects of resistance: subjects who simultaneously face multiple oppressions are in a position to re-imagine emancipatory politics, produce and embody difference, and to create and experiment with new subjectivities (Motta 2013; 26, 36). Viewed from this perspective, the feminization of resistance raises many important epistemological and political questions, pointing toward a re-conceptualization of resistance and political agency. As argued by Sara C. Motta (2013: 35), we urgently “need to recognize a feminization of resistance that is historically distinctive”, and that has the potential to challenge “masculinist conceptualizations of political and social transformation”.

The extent to which feminization of resistance is connected to feminism varies substantially. During the past couple of decades many social movements in the global South, especially in regions such as South Asia have creatively combined elements from different feminist perspectives drawing on both their non-Western and Western traditions. Feminism as a philosophy and as an everyday practice has become manifested in diverse ways in a broad range of movements providing feminist approaches more visibility in the global South than perhaps ever before. This has resulted in feminist movements in postcolonial contexts attracting more attention also in terms of research (although, they still do not receive nearly as much interest in the Western academia as their continental European or American counterparts). A challenge in this is that while there exists a great variety of practices in movements across the world that can be interpreted as feminist from the Western perspective, these movements would not always characterize themselves explicitly as such. In other words, from within the Western academia it might seem reasonable to label some movements as feminist on the basis of their discourses, actions, and values – despite the fact that not all of them identify themselves as feminist.

In many countries in the global South it is not an easy or simple choice for movements to declare or define themselves as feminist. The



increasing engagement of women in social movements, together with the growing role of feminist movements, for example, in South Asia has been met by a sharp increase in state violence, surveillance, and intimidation. Social movements and activists are disciplined and punished, marginalized, and represented as being against progress and development (Roy 2009: xiv). Direct violence is used regularly for silencing female activists – they are raped, kidnapped, tortured, and abused. In other words, the dark side of feminization of resistance manifests itself in giving birth to new technologies of rule, governance, and domination over feminized and raced bodies. Additionally, in the mainstream discourses and media representations in the global South, feminism is often attached with highly negative connotations (which is also often the case in the global North). Partly, this can be due to the fact that feminism as a concept is misunderstood due to the power of the patriarchy (Motta et al. 2011: 2). In the global South feminism is viewed negatively also as a result of the hegemonic role of Western feminism, which is sometimes considered to be a form of cultural imperialism (Mohanty 2003: 49–50). In recent years, the premises of Western feminism have not only been critiqued by postcolonial and black feminists, both within and outside the Western academia, but increasingly often also from within social movements in the global South. Some of these critiques are not familiar to Western mainstream audiences. Although feminists of color such as Chandra Mohanty Talpade have written about the discursive colonization of lives and struggles of women of the global South already for 30 years, for many it still seems to come as a surprise that outside the Western world feminism can be regarded as a Eurocentric, highly theoretical, and even elitist philosophy or ideology which serves “the narrow self-interest of Western feminism” (ibid.: 222–223).<sup>3</sup>

One of the main criticisms is that mainstream feminism often reflects white, bourgeois, and liberal frames of feminism while not taking sufficiently into account questions of race and class. While Mohanty and other South Asian feminists have denounced especially Eurocentric and falsely universalizing methodologies in feminist cross-cultural scholar-

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<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that it is just as difficult to speak of Western feminism as a singular, homogenous entity as it is to make generalizations about feminisms in the global South (Mohanty 2003: 17, 46).





ship, similar critique has surfaced also among black, queer, and working class feminists who have reproached mainstream feminism for “silencing and sidelining of their experiences, voices and strategies” (Motta et al. 2011: 2; also Motta 2013: 37; Collins 2000; Frankenberg 1993; Roediger 1998). Here, an important source of criticism is that considerable sections of the feminist movement, both inside and outside the academia, have become professionalized and institutionalized, and are therefore “easily assimilated within the logic of late capitalism” (Mohanty 2003: 244), which raises questions of how well they can understand and support struggles against neoliberalism by poor and marginalized women (Motta et al. 2011: 1; Mohanty 2003: 248–250). This relates to another broad aspect that has been debated extensively: the complex relationship between the researcher and the “researched” that takes various forms in local and global networks of power relations. Traditionally, scholars from the global North, whether feminists or not, have been welcomed to study and take part in the struggles of social movements in the global South, but currently academic privileges of Western researchers are being increasingly challenged by movements and activists, including women’s groups and indigenous communities (e.g. Casas-Cortés et al. 2008; Lugones 2010; Tuck and Yang 2012). This is due to their realization that hegemonic Western approaches are problematic due to their tendency to segregate “the knowledge from people, from its contexts and local histories” (D’Souza 2011: 236–237; also Mukherjee et al. 2011), and because they do not often have much to offer in terms of contributing to the actual struggles for social justice taking place on the ground (e.g. Bordering Actors 2014). Especially, the high level of abstraction in feminist theorizing – which is considered to have increased due to the popularity of poststructuralist theory – has been denoted as a problem. According to the criticism, the deconstruction of the subject of “woman” has resulted in academic research detaching itself from women’s actual struggles, thus, depriving “feminist politics of the categorical basis for its own normative claims” (Motta et al. 2011: 11–12; also Mohanty 2003: 6; cf. Butler 1990; Haraway 1985)<sup>4</sup>. In this context, postcolonial feminists have

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<sup>4</sup> Moreover, as Mohanty (2003: 107) importantly notes, “[o]ne problematic effect of the postmodern critique of essentialist notions of identity has been the dissolution of the category of race” as it has been “accomplished at the expense of a recognition of racism”.





stressed the importance of centralizing the experiences and struggles of poor and marginalized women whose histories have previously been considered “deviant, marginal, or inessential to the acquisition of knowledge” (Mohanty 2003: 200, 231–236). This means bringing forward the voices of women who are “excluded and delegitimized by the universalizing and violent power dynamics of patriarchal colonial capitalism” – and doing it in a way that does not disregard contextual differences, produce them as “a singular, monolithic subject” (ibid.: 17), and does not “overlook the concrete agency and experience of those subjects” (Motta 2013: 37; also Spivak 1988).

Although some of the above presented critiques mainly concern research on feminist movements, it is important to note that also in studying feminization of resistance in the global South many of the most popular analytical tools and concepts – such as “agency”, “subjectivity”, and “resistance” – are heavily influenced by continental European tradition, and often closely connected to Western political theory. In an important sense, the imperative to decolonize feminism advocated by postcolonial feminists bears resemblance to demands by Western feminists to “queer” mainstream political science and International Relations (IR) theory (e.g. Ticker 1997; 2011; Enloe 2007; Sylvester 2007)<sup>5</sup>. During the past few decades, many inspiring proposals for decolonizing academic research have been made, and many methods and strategies have been experimented with (e.g. Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Gaztambide-Fernández 2012). One of the most recent and interesting ones is outlined by Motta (2011) in her article on “prefigurative epistemologies”<sup>6</sup> in which she encourages researchers to unlearn their academic privileges, that is, to relinquish part of what we have been taught about our roles as social scientists in the Western academia in order to widen our understanding of movement-relevant research, learn from the practices of social movements, and transform our practices. What in particular needs to be challenged is the presumption that the researcher has “the epistemic privilege of producing theoretical knowledge” as it fails to recognize that also

<sup>5</sup> On decolonizing political science and IR, see e.g. Gruffydd-Jones 2006; Seth 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. discussion on alternative, black feminist epistemologies (e.g. Collins 2000).



movements can create theoretical knowledge (Motta and Nilsen 2011: 21–22). According to Motta (2011: 194–196), theory is not produced individually but collectively, “via reflection, within political struggle, based upon the lived experiences and struggles of excluded and marginalized communities”, and consequently, research that is done “in solidarity with such struggles for social justice” must build on “a horizontal relationship of mutual ‘learning’ in which abstraction is based upon closeness as opposed to distance from lived experience, and in which epistemology becomes a prefigurative practice of everyday life”.

In the context of women’s movements and women in movements, applying this approach means that the realities of poor, impoverished, and marginalized women must be taken seriously in order to learn and “engage in solidarity with the complexity of feminized political subjectivities being formed and the contradictions and tensions in this process” (Motta 2013: 49). Drawing on this perspective, I will discuss and seek to develop further the concept of what Mohanty has called “feminist solidarity” (2003), and what I here refer to as *decolonial feminist solidarity*<sup>7</sup> which, as an approach, has much in common, firstly, with intersectionality as it stresses the importance of recognizing different social and cultural categories and their interactions on multiple and often simultaneous levels (e.g. Collins 2000), and secondly, with the idea of “border thinking” by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and Walter Dignolo (2000), developed further by Maria Lugones (2010) in her “feminist border thinking”. All of these can be thought of as methodologies privileging “those on the margins... without reifying or homogenizing their positionalities and struggles” (Motta 2013: 50). In seeking “to break down conceptual and theoretical categories of knowledge by speaking from the epistemological margins of modernity, be they within the margins of the West or on its margins in the global South”, they encourage – or, in fact, require – a “dialogue between different places and experiences on the margins” through which

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<sup>7</sup> Whereas solidarity can be defined in terms of “accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities”, decolonization is a practice, a historical and collective process that “involves profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures” (Mohanty 2003: 7).



it becomes possible “to further, in solidarity, our struggles” and to bridge “our experiences, struggles, theories, and lives, transgressing the borders of capitalist coloniality that seek to divide us” (Motta 2013: 37; also Anzaldúa and Keating 2002: 3).

Through an analysis of ethnographic fieldwork conducted with social movement activists in Kolkata, India, and in Kathmandu, Nepal, this article discusses feminization of resistance as well as the above mentioned critiques and suggestions, reflecting on the potentials and challenges of decolonial feminist solidarity in the context of engaged scholarship. In Kolkata, I have worked with activists involved in local movements contesting neoliberal development projects which result in aggressive policies of land grabbing and forced displacement in both rural and urban areas (Seppälä 2014). The research material was collected via ethnographic methods during my six month field visit in 2011–2012. The material consists of in-depth interviews and shorter discussions with 26 activists, peasants, fishers, and villagers involved in local anti-land acquisition and anti-eviction movements. In Nepal, I have collaborated with women’s rights activists as well as women activists involved in the local slum-dwellers’ movement defending the rights of over 50 slum communities which are under a constant threat of forced eviction due to urban development projects that are closely connected with the rapidly rising value of land in the city as well as environmental projects taking place in the Kathmandu valley. The methods of data collection have included research-activism collaboration, different forms of participation, and observation in events and campaigns, as well as joint projects planned and implemented together with activists of the local slum dwellers’ movement during two periods of fieldwork (three months in 2012, two in 2014). Both cases are part of my ongoing research project “Governance, Resistance and Neoliberal Development” which studies struggles against development induced forced displacement in South Asia.

The rest of the article is divided into four sections. I will start by introducing the movements that I have been working with, discussing the ways in which their struggles can be interpreted from the perspective of feminization of resistance and how feminism is embodied and reflected in their political philosophy and everyday practices, also reflecting on the broader context of their struggles as well as gendered challenges that the





activists face in different contexts. I will examine themes such as gender and forced land acquisition, women's resistance contra state repression, patriarchy within the movement, conflicts of interest between different groups of women, activists' critiques of Western feminism, and the relationship between feminism and anti-capitalism. I argue that taking into account these perspectives, learning from the movements – while simultaneously trying to unlearn one's own academic privileges – creates potential not only for enriching and broadening the theoretical debate on feminization of resistance, but, can also potentially contribute to efforts to decolonize Western political thought and feminism. The article concludes by discussing the relevance of the findings from a broader theoretical perspective, that of decolonial feminist solidarity.

The fact that I, as an outsider, as a privileged Western researcher will make certain analyses and interpretations of the movements and activists is problematic in the sense that it can be considered, at its worst, yet another arrogant Western endeavor “from above” – especially because not all of the activists cited here explicitly identify themselves as feminists (Seppälä 2014; 2016a). Despite this risk, I hope to be able to contribute, firstly, to the theoretical debate on feminization of resistance by drawing attention to the ways in which social movement activists in South Asia conceptualize the causes of their subordination and strategies in their political struggles against the patriarchal, neoliberal state, liberal governance, and global capitalism. The analysis goes beyond the individual and the personal as the women's narrated experiences and stories also reflect, and touch upon broader socio-political structures and power relations. Secondly, I hope that bringing forward some of the critiques presented within these movements would enable a critical, but, an indulgent evaluation of the foundations of feminism in the Western context, opening it up for transformative perspectives and processes of learning as well as unlearning. Thirdly, by shortly discussing my own position and unpacking some of my privileges I seek to reflect on the transformative potential of unlearning privilege, not to engage in “confessing” or “declaring” privilege as such (Ahmed 2004; Smith 2013).



## Governance, Resistance, and Neoliberal Development in South Asia

“Development” is currently considered one of the main technologies for governing “surplus population” that is “superfluous” to the demands of the market and whose “skills, status or even existence are in excess of prevailing conditions and requirements” (Selmeczi 2012: 45; Duffield 2007: 9, 18). A growing number of development scholars argue that instead of helping countries of the global South, many international development projects are implemented and designed with the unstated, yet explicit aim of securing the dominant system, keeping it stable (e.g. Chatterjee 2004; Baviskar 2004; Duffield 2007). Due to pressure to “develop”, many countries in the global South have become indebted to foreign capital, and often social and political rights in these countries are weakened as a result of structural adjustment programs required by international institutions: while trying to demonstrate foreign creditors that it can repay its debts, the state has to “play an increasingly repressive role, keeping the working classes in line and preventing social unrest” (Baviskar 2004: 36).<sup>8</sup> In countries such as India, national elites together with foreign investors have appropriated natural resources such as land, forests, minerals, and water for commercial purposes (ibid.: 36–37; Roy 2009: 32, 152). Although development projects are justified by referring to public and national interest, they often end up diminishing poor people’s possibilities to use natural resources, especially in rural areas (Baviskar 2004: 32, 36–37, 224; D’Souza 2011: 242). Indeed, the struggle for land lies at the heart of the debate on development (Roy 2009: xiv). In rural India lands are being forcefully grabbed from peasants many of whom, after losing their livelihoods, are forced to move to metropolitan cities where they end up living either in legal or illegal slums (Mohanty 2010: 245).

Development projects are the main cause of forced migration and internal displacement in the world. While around 40 million people are displaced due to conflicts, violence, and natural disasters, over 200 mil-

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<sup>8</sup> The mechanisms of governance work also through national poverty reduction programs designed by these same institutions, extending their scope to systems of education, health, and social policy (Motta and Nilsen 2011: 18).

lion people are displaced due to development projects (UNCHR 2013; Basu 2011; Jha 2011). Globally, India is among the countries with largest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Despite the United Nation's Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement, usually when poor people such as slum dwellers are displaced or evicted, they do not receive any compensation, and in most cases they are not offered rehabilitation or resettlement, or are resettled in remote colonies located on the outskirts of mega-cities (Jha 2011). Paradoxically, displaced people who live in shanty towns are increasingly often being evicted also from slums due to the rapidly growing value of urban land in metropolitan cities. This new form of ghettoization, "new urban apartheid" legitimizes the asymmetries of power between the rich and the poor (ibid.: 1–2; Roy 2009: 122). Displaced people confront many serious problems such as unemployment; police repression; and lack basic sustenance, proper shelter, basic health care, and access to education. In resettlement colonies, women are in risk of being exploited and trafficked, and face gender-based violence and sexual abuse (Ghimire 2011: 30; Basu 2011: 17, Jha 2011: 4). The effects are far greater than just material impacts: displacement always represents "a wider loss of cultural autonomy, knowledge and power" (Baviskar 2004: 36).<sup>9</sup>

Given this condition, as well as many other social, political, and ethical problems generated by the neoliberal development paradigm, it is not surprising that various forms of resistances have surfaced against it. Since, it is usually the poor and the low caste women who suffer the most from large-scale development projects – mainly due to forced displacement and loss of land and livelihoods – they have become very active in forming movements that contest neoliberal development (Mohanty 2010: 239, 244, 254).<sup>10</sup> While some of them co-operate with state authorities and political parties, a burgeoning number of social movements, including women's rights and feminist movements refuse to collaborate with

<sup>9</sup> Displaced people are not only helpless victims: their power and ability to handle and "transform difficult situations into new social conditions" must be recognized (Canuday 2009: 264).

<sup>10</sup> In India, development projects have been contested especially in rural, forest, and hill areas, both during the colonial and post-colonial period (Baviskar 2004; Nilsen 2011).



any institutionalized actors (ibid.: 239). This is due to ever-growing skepticism towards mainstream politics controlled by political and economic elites. In many countries, movements are facing increasingly aggressive mechanisms of state control, surveillance, and violence. For example, the state of India strongly disciplines and punishes social movements and activists, trying to marginalize them and to represent them as being against progress and reform (Roy 2009: xiv). Violence is common – there are countless examples of police beating, abusing, raping, and even killing activists (Baviskar 2004; Roy 2009; Mohanty 2010: 242–243; Nilsen 2011: 116; Mukherjee et al. 2011: 175; Banerjee and Roy 2012: 41). This demonstrates “the ugly side of development” as well as “the lengths to which the state can go to pursue it, even if it means curtailing the most fundamental of people’s rights, the right to life” (Mohanty 2010: 242). Simultaneously, it is common that the state, fearing that it will lose the subaltern consent completely, not only resorts to coercive force but seeks to establish “clientelistic” relationships between subaltern groups and the elites in an effort to generate dependency of the former on the latter (Motta and Nilsen 2011: 18–19). These new technologies of rule that emphasize “participation and good governance” (Nilsen 2011: 109) are utilized with the aim of turning certain population groups into responsible, self-governing subjects.

How are then these kinds of techniques and mechanisms resisted by social movements in countries such as India and Nepal, and to what extent can we talk about feminization of resistance in this context? How is feminism embodied and reflected in their political philosophy and everyday practice? What kinds of gendered problematemes and challenges activists face in different contexts, and also within their own movements? Next, I will reflect on these themes by, firstly, drawing on my case study that examines resistance to the Rajarhat New Town Project in Kolkata, an urban development project that has displaced hundreds of families and deprived local peasants of their lands and livelihoods. Secondly, but to a significantly lesser extent in this particular article, I will draw on my case study in Kathmandu where the local slum-dwellers’ movement struggles against forced evictions of their communities.

Starting with the Kolkata case, the Rajarhat New Town Project has been one of the most controversial and politicized urban development



projects in the city of Kolkata, the capital city of West Bengal. Even though, the project started in mid-1990s, it became an object of wide public debate only in 2006. Rajarhat used to be a vital agricultural area providing livelihood to hundreds of families. After the project begun, most farmers were forced or duped into selling their lands very cheaply, or handing them over even without any compensation. Later, in the hands of private developers, land prices skyrocketed. While the government and corporations made a good profit, there were no plans for rehabilitation of the displaced people. (Banerjee and Roy 2012: 178–192.) Many farmers had to start collecting and selling garbage for their living, although they had been promised, falsely, that the construction of a new township would create employment in the area. Many fishermen also lost their livelihood as water bodies were put under the project. In addition, due to lack of work, some women were forced to engage in prostitution. (Interviews, Kolkata, 23 February and 18 March, 2012.) In their resistance, the people of Rajarhat, together with activists, have stressed that instead of building shopping malls and residential complexes for those who are already well-off, development projects should benefit the vast majority of people, the poor, who need basic things – work, food, water, schools, and hospitals. (Interviews, Kolkata, 17 and 18 March, 2012.)

The New Town Project has resulted in very critical views of development among the affected people and activists, who believe that it is explicitly designed for the elites and middle-class at the expense of lower classes. In the words of one activist: “What kind of development [the] government wants? [They] are killing farmers and developing some buildings for rich men” (Interview, Kolkata, 1 March, 2012). The Rajarhat peasants have lost much of their independence due to the loss of their lands and livelihoods. Yet, some of them consciously defy the state by refusing to move off their lands, and by continuing to cultivate they try to remain autonomous from the state. A process of growing antipathy towards mainstream politics has clearly taken place, which is not surprising given that all major political parties support neoliberal development, which has become “an essential governmental tool in the hands of the contemporary Indian rulers” (Banerjee and Roy 2012: 60, 130). Instead of benefiting the poor, neoliberal development is believed to serve “the rising demands of the new aristocracy” (Roy 2009: xiv, 38),



becoming a method of “grabbing all the resources” and “having ownership in the hands of a few” (Interview, Kolkata, 17 March, 2012). As a result, the idea of autonomous resistance has become increasingly popular among farmers, low caste people, and the urban poor. In their view, problems generated by neoliberal development must be solved by struggles in the streets, villages, and forests. It is believed that social movements allow people to create new forms of participation and to make up new rules and alternatives on their own – a process which enables transformative practices. Local organization and autonomous decision-making are considered essential forms of people’s democracy. (Interviews, Kolkata, 14 January, 8 February, 1, 17, 18 and 27 March, 2012.) In other words, movements not only resist and oppose, but, they also aim at transforming existing power relations by “not engaging” as well as by actively creating new practices. When refusing to act as “good liberal citizens”, activists challenge normalizing practices, and constitute new kinds of subjectivities (Seppälä 2014).

Often, also the “civil society approach” is considered a part of the problem. Some activists in Kolkata argued that since NGOs are “based on humanitarianism” they cannot challenge “the logic of development” but rather act as “safety guards” of the neoliberal system and state power. (Interviews, Kolkata, 14 January, 8 February, 17 and 26 March, 2012.) In short, the “NGOization” of civil society was considered a process of de-politicization, which makes developing countries increasingly dependent on aid (Chatterjee 2004: 67–68; Roy 2009: 41). At the same time, it was very difficult for many activists to sustain themselves economically, but then again, activism was not regarded as a profession or job but a way of life – a personal and political responsibility of which no glory or benefits, whether social or economic, are to be expected. Rather, it was presumed that hardships would automatically follow the chosen path. This was most evident with activists who “financed” their activist lives by working in the academia. For example, a female activist was suspended from her position as a researcher when the university board found out that she had been arrested taking part in a protest and a break-in organized by the movement. (Interview, Kolkata, 27 March, 2012.) Another activist had faced problems in his work as a university teacher as he was under constant surveillance by the police. He also found it difficult to



manage his time, as activism took up time from his academic work. He considered giving up his university position, which would have put him in a precarious financial position. (Interviews, Kolkata, 14 January and 8 February, 2012.)

It was only in these and similar kinds of situations where I slowly started to understand how categorically different my own position was from the people with whom I was working with. To be sure, this is not to “declare” or to “confess” my privilege (e.g. Ahmed 2004; Smith 2013), but to explain that from the perspective of starting to unlearn some of my academic privileges and to understand the idea of decolonial feminist solidarity it was important for me to realize the facts: I was a fully funded, privileged, white, feminist Western researcher-activist who had been financed to travel to a developing country to do fieldwork – asking sometimes quite stupid questions; studying a struggle that was someone else’s; not having to struggle everyday to make a living or to be afraid of getting into trouble because of my work but instead, very likely to gain more academic opportunities and privileges precisely because of it. This was a realization that enabled me to transform some of my research practices as I started to address and discuss the above mentioned, and other related ethical questions, with the activists. These themes – Western privilege, elitism, and hierarchies of power – will be analyzed in more detail in the following section, together with the activists’ views on issues such as gender and forced land acquisition, women’s resistance contra state repression, patriarchy within the movement, and conflicts of interest between different groups of women.

## **Feminization of Resistance: Learning from the Movements**

### **Forceful Land Acquisition, Women’s Resistance and State Repression**

One of the reasons why women, specifically in countries such as India and Nepal, have become active in social movements that contest development projects is because the burden of forceful land acquisition and development induced displacement is mostly felt by them. According



to women activists involved in the anti-eviction and anti-land acquisition movements in Kolkata, one of the main problems is that when the government acquires land and gives compensatory land to the affected families, the ownership is automatically granted to a man or men in the family – even if the acquired land had originally been owned by a woman or women of the household:

Many women in India are attached to [the] land economically and socially...If land is gone, if the government...will give a job to one person, [it] will be for either her husband or...her son. The women don't get any jobs...When she is working on a field...she is earning independently...I [used to] get money from this land, now my husband or my son will get the money. So, what about me? I am not going to get the money. Now, I have to be dependent under my son or my husband. (Interview, Kolkata, 17 March, 2012.)

In this way, the neoliberal Indian state draws on patriarchal traditions in its land policy created during the era of colonial rule when the colonial state, having an economic interest in keeping landholdings stable to ensure revenue collection “actively discouraged unmarried widows from partitioning landholdings” (Mohanty 2003: 62). The result is often negative for women: the activists stressed that when women own land, they are more independent and can contribute directly to the well-being of the family while also having more social contacts outside the family: “When you are staying at home that takes away a lot of freedoms. Independence, the freedom to move around, to meet people, that is also being cut” (Interview, Kolkata, 28 March, 2012). When women become displaced due to forceful land acquisition, they often lose connections to their social groups and peers, which makes their everyday lives more difficult:

There are some school[s] where children are going to study. There is some doctor or hospital that they know they can go. But in this shift to new place, they will not be knowing. And whatever money will be given in general, small or large, it will go in the hands of men. So [the women] will lose their independence. For them, it is kind of life which





is going away from them. It is not only livelihood but their right to life is also being snatched away from them. (Interview, Kolkata, 28 March, 2012.)

These everyday problems caused by gendered government land acquisition and compensation policies play a major role in the feminization of resistance and on women becoming active in movements that contest development. This is especially the case in rural areas but in recent years the participation of women has intensified also in many urban movements. The activists in Kolkata considered this partly due to the role of gender in the social structure of the semi-feudal Indian society. The questions of safety and security were of significant concern to both the rural and urban women as state violence and repression tend to increase wherever land acquisition takes place. (Interview, Kolkata, 26 March, 2012.) In this context, rape as a specific form of state violence was brought up often in the discussions, and it was usually linked to the violence conducted by the ruling class:

There was...a woman...crying...[Krishna] asked what happened to her. She didn't reply but the others told her she had been raped... That's when [Krishna] told her that rape belongs to mental violence of the ruling class. Just like your fellow...has been shot...you have been raped. So, you should not feel ashamed of it. It is their shame who have done it, not your shame. (Interview, Kolkata, 27, March, 2012.)

Despite of the ever present risk of being abused, raped, or even killed, the women activists in Kolkata stressed that they were ready to resist evictions and forceful land acquisition, bearing on their bodies whatever hardships would follow. Many of them were also willing to accept the ramifications and difficulties that their family members might face due to their political activism. After returning back home, I learned that one of the activists I had interviewed had been arrested and imprisoned for several months, which, again, highlighted how different my position was, being able to freely come and go without having to fear for my personal safety.

According to the activists, it is common that the government accuses the movement of consciously putting female activists in the forefront





during protests in order to prevent the police from physically reaching the male activists. Many of the women activists considered such acquisition to be “nonsense,” as women themselves had made “a conscious decision to take part in the movement” in this particular way. (Interview, Kolkata, 27 March, 2012.) In many protests, they had stood in the forefront with brooms, kitchen knives, and other tools. Although they had not used any violence themselves, often they had become physically insulted and abused by the police. Yet, some activists told that they had sometimes consciously utilized the fact that “men do not know what to do with women activists” (Interview, Kolkata, March 26, 2012):

Whenever we have a [protest], we just let our women loose. They are very good at that... They don't resort to violence. It is really difficult for the police to handle them... because they tend to talk, they are coming in [the] forefront, they may use abusive language... It's peaceful resistance. It is very difficult for the state to handle that. While men... tend to turn into a shouting match and pretty quickly it turns into violence... It is really difficult for the state to handle that, to become repressive in turn.

This indicates that although women activists often face gender-based violence in protests, they have also developed nonviolent counter-strategies, which they utilize in their resistance – sometimes more, sometimes less effectively. This is the case in the context of their struggles against patriarchy also within movements as the following section will illustrate.

## Women Activists and Patriarchy within the Movements

Women activists in Kolkata described how they did not only suffer from violence and harassment by the police and state authorities but within the movements there were many problems as well. Some of the problems are due to the patriarchal system. Typically, movement culture is socially dominated by men, only rarely there are any female members in movement committees, and usually women are not given any role in decision-making: “When the [movement] leadership call[s] us, they say that you have to do rally, or you have to do barricade... The women are always in the front position... but... never inside committees, and they don't have



any power in...those.” (Interview, Kolkata, 17 March, 2012.) Some activists told that many women do not dare to challenge these patriarchal structures and hierarchies. Although, it was considered a positive sign that many women take part in movements, the negative side of it is that they do not always remain active for a very long period of time. While men may allow women “to take liberty”, and to participate because their effort in the movement is considered crucial, when the struggle is over, men often ask women “to go back home” (Interview, Kolkata, 23 February, 2012). The activists also described how the female body becomes a political tool for the patriarchal system: men are mobilized on the basis of the slogan that it is their “male duty” to protect their sisters, mothers, and wives. Another challenge mentioned was that women activists do not necessarily dare to challenge the family structure or broader gender politics in society. Instead of challenging the oppressive system, many women as well as men end up supporting it. One activist pointed out that this happens even in revolutions: it is argued that gender issues can be addressed and tackled only after the revolution has taken place. Among the activists, however, it was a common view that any revolution is always going to be incomplete if patriarchy will not be challenged from the very beginning (Interview, Kolkata, 27 March, 2012). Especially women activists were very critical of the fact that not even in socialist movements gender issues are taken seriously. Some male activists, too, gave examples of violent effects of patriarchy within the movement:

There was an activist...I developed a friendship with him...On one day I went...and found that he was not at home...I saw his wife. She had a bandage over her head, over her arms, and she was sitting silently...in the corner of the house...He [had] beat[en] up his wife...so hard that she had to take stitch[es]...I told him: “How can you... do this? You were just seven days ago beaten by the police in a demonstration, and how do you feel about the policeman beating you, and in your home you are doing the same thing? You’re beating up your wife...a woman who has nowhere to go.” To my questionnaires his response was: “You talk about movement, you talk about what is our next program but you leave those family affairs. Don’t mix politics with the family”...I was angry, I told him that... “Next time if you beat your wife, what can I



do? I know she will not protest. I am not talking, that is the only thing I can do, I will not talk to you”...He said it in his own simple term[s]: “These petty family matters, these are outside...of politics”. (Interview, Kolkata, 1 March, 2012.)

The activist had then tried to explain to the man that domestic violence is not outside of politics, stressing that that while “the corporate, the police...are exercising their power on us”, as an activist and a husband it was unacceptable to do the same to his wife. He had emphasized that activists struggling against exploitation should oppose domination anywhere it takes place, also within their own families. (Interview, Kolkata, 1 March, 2012.) Indeed, it is very common that same gendered dynamics that are dominant in the society at large are operational also within social movements. Women activists confront continuously patriarchal power and gendered practices in movements as well (Motta et al. 2011: 2). Sometimes they are able to challenge the gendered divisions at the movement level but might be suffering in their everyday lives and relationships in which they are usually “expected to play the traditional role of wife and mother” (Motta 2013: 49). For this same reason, many women activists in Kolkata criticized the movement as well as state leaders who were considered not interested in challenging patriarchy but only in enhancing their own power. It was often argued that the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, although female, neither advanced women’s issues nor paid any heed to the feminist agenda. Other female leaders such as Indira Gandhi and Sonya Gandhi were also mentioned as examples of women who have not promoted feminism in India but instead supported patriarchy, becoming male-like “dictators” themselves. (Interviews, Kolkata, 23 February, 1, 17, 18 and 26 March, 2012.)

In some instances, religion was mentioned as playing a role in women’s participation in the movement. One activist told about a woman who wanted to give a talk in one of the movement’s public meetings. Her religious community, led by men, did not give her permission to speak, but she decided to deliver her speech anyway. That day when she returned home, she was seriously beaten up by her husband who is also an active member in the same movement. (Interview, Kolkata, 17 March, 2012.) Another activist described a protest against land acquisition, characterizing the event as an example of “a bamboo division” in which the



men were on the one side, and the women on the other due to religious reasons. Considering this separation problematic, some activists decided to make an ultimatum: “Until this partition is removed, we cannot protect your land”. After that, women were allowed to take part in the movement more actively than ever before. (Interview, Kolkata, 23 February, 2012.) There had also been efforts to support women in gaining a more prominent role in decision-making, for instance, in some villages it had been decided that fifty percent of member of the people’s committee (panchayat) should be women. According to the activists, this did not, however, guarantee that the women would be heard, because the general tendency is to render them silent. (Interviews, Kolkata, 14 January and 8 February, 2012.)

These examples demonstrate common tensions between patriarchy, religion, and resistance in women’s struggles. The problems women activists experience in their private lives indicate that more attention should be paid to the tensions and contradictions they face in context of their family lives and their public roles in movements (Mohanty 2003: 76–77; also Collins 2000). The lack of recognition of gendered norms of female political subjectivity – not only at the level of the state but also within movements – can result in the lack of understanding of what Motta (2013: 49) has called “a multilayered and contradictory political subjectivity” of women who, on the one hand, create “dignity, agency, solidarity, and collective power” but who “carry the triple burden of paid, domestic, and political work”, on the other. In many cases, it is exactly these contradictions and tensions, in regard to the position of the women, that “concretize the links between struggles against patriarchy and struggles against capitalism” (ibid.).

## Conflicts of Interest between Women, Critique towards Western Feminism

The fact that power relations and hierarchies exist everywhere, between male and female in movements, but also between different groups of women, is one of the reasons why many women activists in Kolkata said that they very actively and consciously tried to avoid imposing their own ideas when working in solidarity with other women, especially in rural areas. Between the women in the movement one of the most obvious



conflicts of interest was said to exist between the middle class, working class, and the poor women.

With women of other classes and the working class it is not always confrontational... One has to build [on] that, and with a conscious working class in a conscious feminist kind of [a] group. It is quite easy to do that. It depends a lot on consciousness... These women who are feminists are socialist... left in their thinking. If they are not, [then] it is very difficult. (Interview, Kolkata, 26 March, 2012.)

Although the activists did not always consider the conflict of interest among different classes of women serious, they reflected on this issue quite often, and from several different perspectives. This highlights the importance of recognizing the complexities of political differences between women of different social classes instead of conceptualizing women as a coherent group with similar interests. As Mohanty (2003: 30) states, women become constituted as women “through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks”. This came up also when many activists stressed the significance of acknowledging that the relationship between subaltern women and Western feminists can be problematic. Often, feminism was perceived as an essentially Western conceptualization, one that might compartmentalize issues that are not separate:

First of all, I don't believe in feminism... because the outlook what the feminists preach... they compartmentalize it... they say that this woman movement is... different from the other aspects of the movement... But... this society is very much uneven... in terms of religion, in terms of cast... in terms of gender also... The women agenda also should be seen in this aspect... Whenever you are questioning the society, the structure, then only you can question the problem of a woman. You cannot separate or compartmentalize that... You cannot keep the feudal system and request that the women [would be] liberated... This is absurd. (Interview, Kolkata, 17 March, 2012.)

It was emphasized that although women are exploited across the world, it is difficult to make comparisons between women's issues in



Europe and the global South because their histories as well as current problems are very different. In this context, the hegemonic role of Western feminism was sometimes critiqued quite strongly:

We have a lot of differences with the Western feminist[s]. We find that they don't understand economic issues. Economic issues are very important to our members, and they are only talking [about] violence. Violence and sexuality seem very important [for them] ...while for our members [problems regarding] hunger, wages, work...are important... This conflict is there in any kind of feminist meeting we go...Conflicts are there. Very often we have walked out of them because we have felt that issues we are concerned with cannot be addressed there. (Interview, Kolkata, 26 March, 2012.)

Moreover, it was argued that Western feminists sometimes have a problematic tendency to conceptualize not only oppression but also women's resistance from their own particular, European perspective:

In India women are silently, without being feminist...continuing [a] long struggle...When she was young, society wanted that a woman should not read...not [to] study because it will be harmful... it will be dangerous for her. In spite of that, women... inside their house, they would sit and read books...So, this kind of struggle has been going on for years...Western feminists, don't understand this kind of [a] protest. (Interview, Kolkata, 27 March, 2012.)

These kinds of failures to recognize and conceptualize difference have been critiqued by many black and postcolonial feminists, particularly strongly by Mohanty (2003: 22) who has blamed Western feminists of imperialism and ethnocentric universalism in representing the women of the global South as passive, dependent, and victimized subjects – which, as a notion, is constructed through the implicit “self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities and the freedom to make their own decisions”. Indeed, it was in the context of this particular binary that Mohanty developed her imperative to decolonize feminism, which is also closely related to discussion on the hierarchical relationship between subaltern and



academic subjects (e.g. Spivak 1988). Both of these issues became articulated by women activists in South Asia in straightforward terms: many of them criticized academics, both local and foreign, for maintaining that they “know better than the people”, and for representing their own views as the “voice of the people”. Some argued that instead of trying to educate the poor and the oppressed, both activists and academics should rather learn from the poor as their everyday lives, experiences, and constant encounters with structural violence and injustices make them experts in a broad range of issues. (Interviews, Kolkata, 17 March, 2012; Kathmandu, 30 June, 2012.) Another source of critique was that scholars coming from the global North tend to be more interested in advancing their own academic careers than collaborating or becoming partners with movements or activists. Scholars were considered also hypocritical because, for example, while criticizing neoliberal development, many of them continue to enjoy “all the benefits of modernity”. Academics, and some activists as well, were criticized for supporting the neoliberal system indirectly, for example, by choosing environmentally destructive lifestyles based on consumption. (Interview, Kolkata, 1 March, 2012.)

## Feminism and Anti-Capitalism

Many activists in Kolkata underlined that the agenda of the feminist movement is not only a “question of equality vis-à-vis men” but that women and men need to struggle together against the forces of neoliberalism (Interview, Kolkata, 27 March, 2012). They suggested that only in the context of a more systemic struggle it would become possible to fight against patriarchy:

Obviously, any movement...if it is progressive, its nature should be anti-capitalist in some way or another. I don't think any feminist movement can be a feminist movement if it is not anti-capitalist. (Interview, Kolkata, 1 March, 2012.)

Moreover, it was argued that if the feminist movement does not challenge the basic structure of capitalism, it will end up supporting the social framework of patriarchy. While capitalism was conceived as built on masculine, aggressive qualities without which it would not function, men were considered victims of patriarchy as much as women, and it was



stressed that patriarchy is not gender-specific, but oppressive for both, or rather all genders. (Interviews, Kolkata, 1 and 26 March, 2012.) The activists mainly reflected on the intimate historical connections between colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy and less emphasis was put on the new forms of gendered and racialized discourses and practices through which the contemporary neoliberal state operates (such as citizenship and other individual rights). Yet, it was stressed that many of the existing inequalities and injustices have been aggravated by neoliberal policies.<sup>11</sup> It was also in this particular context of discussing anti-capitalism in which some activists brought up, again, the question of macro-level differences, and pointed out that the interests of Western feminists and those of middle-class or poor women in the global South are far from being identical: “Feminism cannot be same for educated, white women, and black women. Even in America their agenda is different. Have to be different.” (Interview, Kolkata, 1 March, 2012.)

While being critical of the universalistic as well as individualistic human rights discourses that characterize Western liberal feminist frameworks, some of the activists stressed that special initiatives should be made to educate women about their rights and encourage them to become more active in political decision-making. The main perspective was not, nevertheless, that of liberal feminism. Rather, it was stressed that as the problems women are facing are “nothing but a result of the system”, women need to be politicized and become radical in their struggles against structural inequality. In order to accomplish this, women should ally themselves with men; not to think of them as enemies but, as brothers and friends to unite, and fight together with, against patriarchy and neoliberalism. (Interview, Kolkata, 17 March, 2012.) In this context, one of the most radical suggestions was made by a male activist who argued for giving up all privileges, claiming it as an essential strategy in challenging patriarchy:

The important question is how...you avoid this power, how can it be diminished... It is a cultural and social decision. It is a voluntary deci-

<sup>11</sup> For discussion on the cumulative effects of colonial rule and capitalism, see e.g. Mohanty 2003: 62–64.



sion...that you have to deny the privileges that are due to you...certain class, or certain position or some sexuality. Suppose you are homosexual in India or Europe. Just being a heterosexual male in a family...enjoy some privilege or power which he [a homosexual] does not enjoy... Here comes in the role of consciousness whereby you should voluntarily refuse the privileges...which have been historically associated with the position you enjoy. Just because you are white in America you enjoy a position of power there which black or immigrants...or the aboriginals of the country [do not] ... If in any other respect you are same but...you are white...that is not your fault...but you should be conscious [of] that just being white, I enjoy certain privileges that are denied to him. And a conscious activist...it becomes his duty and role, to actually deny the privileges. Only then can you talk about equality. (Interview, Kolkata, 1 March, 2012.)

In the context of political activism and resistance, the idea of refusing privileges seems very well placed. It is so not only when talking about gender, class, and race – as well as their intersections – but also in addressing the power-laden and hierarchical relationship between the researcher and her research “subjects”. As postcolonial scholars have taught us, unlearning academic privileges is a necessary first step in all engaged scholarship (e.g. Spivak 1988; Mohanty 2003; Motta 2011), but we must seriously consider whether it is enough as such, or should we, as researchers working with the poor, impoverished, and marginalized people make more concrete efforts to refuse other privileges we might have. Indeed, living an “activist” life is about being something instead of just knowing something, to frame it in the words of Chitta Ranjan Das (2009: 582) who speaks from the conviction that “all revolution and paradigmatic departures should be accompanied by a personal revolution” as knowledge (jnana) “becomes real and mature only when it is translated to karma, that is, action”.

## Towards Decolonial Feminist Solidarity

Based on my observations and experiences of participating in daily activities, meetings, protests, sit-ins, courses, educational events, and pro-



motional campaigns organized by social movement activists in Kolkata and Kathmandu, it has become clear that women's political activism and resistance – whether explicitly articulated as feminism or not in those contexts – is a remarkably complex, and often a highly dangerous endeavor that requires a high level of commitment, as well as harsh personal sacrifices from the participants. Although a phenomenon that can be called feminization of resistance has taken place in countries such as India and Nepal, not all activists who struggle against the forces of global capitalism, neoliberalism, and state power in these countries are explicitly feminists. In fact, as the analysis above has demonstrated, many activists in Kolkata and Kathmandu are highly critical of many different forms of power/knowledge, as not only do they challenge the premises of current world order, so-called 'development', and neoliberal capitalism that backs its position through state power, but they also constantly challenge the role of NGOs, and Western academics, including Western feminists.

What has also become clear in the course of my research is that the struggles in which women engage have much potential of increasing the power and agency of the women involved. The gendered practices within the movements as well as patriarchal relations between movement activists are also becoming increasingly politicized, and thus, also challenged. In this way, the feminization of resistance can construct a growing challenge to what has been described as masculinist theories of political practice (Motta 2013). Indeed, viewed from a broader perspective, many analyses of contemporary movements, including women's movements and feminist movements in the global South, speak to a different conceptualization of resistance of what is common in the traditional Western political thought, and which concentrates on political agency played out in the public sphere, in the context of political parties, trade unions, the state and its institutions (Motta 2013: 36, see also Collins 2000: 228; Brown 1988; Sargisson 1996). However, as we saw, resistance takes place also in the private sphere, in the everyday of women. In working with their communities in order to become autonomous agents of change, these women politicize issues that are not necessarily considered political in traditional Western political theory. It can be interpreted as the politicization of "the everyday, community, and family" which



means that family, community, womanhood, and motherhood are being turned into “a terrain of resistance, potentially transcending the limitations of patriarchal capitalist gendered relationships and roles, breaking down social isolation and creating solidarities” (Motta 2013: 41, 44). In these kinds of feminized practices of resistance, women are not passive or apolitical subjects in the private sphere but, are active organizers who draw attention to women’s agency, and also to the knowledge that they have and produce (ibid.: 48). Yet, one must bear in mind that “the politicization of their role as ensurers of the reproduction of the family and community” often comes at great personal cost and may also reproduce “more traditional gendered representations of the women as self-sacrificing caregivers” (ibid.: 44).

So far, Western political theorists have been slow to analyze and theorize these issues despite the fact that they have been addressed by feminists of color already for decades, both within and outside the Western academia. As suggested by Motta et al. (2011: 24–25), we need to pay more attention to “the complexity of the feminised political subjectivities being formed” in order to “re-write the dominant patriarchal script of politics in solidarity with women in movement”, and in doing so, we must “stretch our understanding of what politics is and where it occurs, in ways that encompass the everyday, the private and the informalised world of work”. If we fail to recognize these dynamics and understand that everyday feminist practices can be as important as organized movements (Mohanty 2003: 4), there is a risk of reproducing concepts and theories that continue to mask and ignore “women’s role at the heart of revolutionary and popular struggle” (Motta 2013: 36). Hence, for us in the academia, it is important to take seriously the realities of the poor, impoverished, and marginalized women in order to learn and “engage in solidarity with the complexity of feminized political subjectivities being formed and the contradictions and tensions in this process” (ibid.: 49), as well as to learn from the critiques presented by those who do not feel that white, liberal, and bourgeois frameworks of feminism represent their perspectives. They necessarily compel us to reconsider Western epistemologies as well as their premises.

To which extent this will result in “reconfiguring and reimagining the nature, meaning, and subjects of political resistance and social



transformation” and creating “possibilities for the development of new forms of revolutionary subjectivity”, as anticipated by Motta (2013: 26, 36), remains yet to be seen. The aim, however, should be to “develop a feminism that speaks to multiple and diverse needs while recognizing also “the right of other feminists and women to similar freedoms” (Motta et al. 2011: 7). This kind of ethic of recognition, or what I have here referred to as decolonial feminist solidarity, neither denies tensions and contradictions between different forms of feminism nor does it maintain that alliances could be easily made with different frameworks but it rather seeks to demonstrate and address these tensions among feminists. It suggests that we need to give “voice and legitimacy to feminisms that come from working class and black positionalities” (ibid.; also Mohanty 2003; hooks 2000), and instead of theorizing excluded and marginalized women from a distance, we need to build theory together, in dialogue with them (Motta et al. 2011: 16).

As an approach, decolonial feminist solidarity emphasizes the necessity of developing “a praxis that is mindful of others, opens space for a plurality of voices to be heard, and challenges unspoken assumptions about race, class and gender” (ibid.: 7). Its potential is not limited to feminist studies, but, it has much to offer to other fields as well. In the context of social movement research, for example, the development of movement-relevant theories demands epistemological and conceptual rethinking in order to subvert academic subjectivity and privilege as well as to transcend the binary between theoretical and practical knowledge (Motta 2011: 192). To be able to contribute to the struggles of the movements they study, researchers must work closely together with them, building on questions and “knowledge-practices” that the movements themselves consider important (Casas-Cortés et al. 2008; also Tuck and Yang 2012; Juris and Knashabish 2013).

To offer personal reflection on my own experiences of unlearning some of my academic privileges I must say that working with movements in South Asia has been a huge learning process in which the critiques presented by the activists helped me to understand the complexity of power relations as well as many of my privileges in concrete ways. The transforming aspect in this process was that it changed the way in which I considered the aims of my research, especially in the context of



the second part of my research project, which has included fieldwork with the slum dwellers' community in Nepal, and which I have, on the basis of my experiences in India, planned and designed from a quite different perspective than what was the case in the first part of the research project in Kolkata. For example, the collaboration (still ongoing) with women activists engaged in the slum dwellers' movement in Kathmandu has involved much more reflection and discussion on what they expect from me as a "researcher-in-solidarity", a term that we invented for describing my role to the outsiders when I participated in public protests and sit-ins together with the activists. On the basis of our discussions we have, for example, jointly planned my fieldwork in local slum communities, and designed strategies for meetings with local authorities. These and other experiences have convinced me that the practices of sharing with and learning from each other carry with them the potential of transforming the relationship between theory and political practice into something more reflexive and dialogical.

## Conclusions

This article has analyzed feminization of resistance in South Asia, highlighting the importance of decolonial forms of feminist solidarity while also reflecting on its potentials and challenges in the context of engaged social movement research. Drawing on activists' views, critiques, conceptualizations, and suggestions, I have argued that taking them seriously into consideration creates potential for enriching the theoretical discussion on feminization of resistance and may contribute to efforts to decolonize Western political thought and feminism. Moreover, through a reflection of my own experiences I have given some examples on how my own research orientation has been transformed as I have learned in practice how crucial empirical studies are when developing theoretical arguments over concepts and approaches. I also hope to have illustrated that learning from movements is an invaluable, yet, an underestimated method for theorists where the aim is to transform the relationship between theory and political practice into something more reflexive and dialogical. For this to take place, the conception that academia and activism would be somehow dichotomist or antagonistic entities needs to be challenged (e.g. Leavy Solana 2011; Mohanty 2003: 216, 236), which can



be worked toward by building on the ethico-political traditions of critical theory and engaged scholarship in its various forms.

As Mohanty (2003: 125) suggests, we must consider what kinds of conditions, knowledges, and attitudes “make noncolonized dialogue possible”. In the context of women’s movements and women in movements this indicates, at the very least, of thinking of ways in which it would be possible to create “a plurality of forms of knowing”, as well as alliances and solidarities through which we can seek to destabilize “epistemological politics of patriarchal capitalist coloniality”, and to challenge “the dramatic effects of neoliberal capitalism on the lives of women” (Motta 2013: 38), both locally and globally. Along with political science and social movement research, the idea of decolonial feminist solidarity can be considered important in the context of development studies because as a discipline it has taken on an increasingly strong emphasis on gender issues. If the concept is developed further, it can be potentially utilized in producing a counter-discourse for challenging the broader development-power/knowledge nexus, that is, a global system of knowledge production that typically involves fields and disciplines such as development studies, ethnographic research, social movement studies, political science, feminist studies, and anthropology, and is built on Eurocentric development knowledge, favouring Western perspectives and interests either explicitly or implicitly.

To be sure, as a scholar I am not outside, above, or beyond the above mentioned criticisms, problematiques, and power relations, and therefore, I wish to end this article by reminding both myself and others that in a world characterized by extreme inequalities, we need to carefully consider who we wish to serve and benefit with our research, recognizing that when power co-opts knowledge, it becomes “a product, and an articulation and exercise of power” (Miri 2009: 472). Social sciences in the Western academia are increasingly often serving as mechanisms of societal control by the elites and the powerful instead of being sources of creative and progressive thought that would serve human emancipation (Das 2009: 580). This can be regarded as yet another imperative to look outside the academia for new ideas and ways in which global hierarchies of power/knowledge can be contested. Especially, for Western political science it would be beneficial to pay more attention to the ways in which

resistance is conceptualized outside its own realm. Further steps toward a broader conceptualization of feminism within the Western academia need to be taken as well. Both of these combined together could mark, as Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008: 46) puts it, a move towards the direction “that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous”.

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# Constructive Resistance: Conceptualising and Mapping the Terrain<sup>1</sup>

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### *Abstract*

*People living in systems of domination and exploitation resist in many different ways. Some modes of resistance build and experiment with alternatives to the present in various forms, from the small to the large, the hidden to the open. An overall term for these efforts is “constructive resistance,” which covers initiatives in which people start to build the society they desire independently of the dominant structures already in place. Within peace and conflict studies, this has been approached through Gandhi’s concept of the constructive programme. In the anarchist and Marxist traditions, a related notion is prefigurative politics. There are large areas of overlap between these concepts, but they have somewhat different emphases. In spite of frequent references to the need for constructive supplements to protesting and non-cooperation among both practitioners and scholars of resistance, surprisingly little has been written about how to understand and analyse the alternatives. This article suggests a broad definition of constructive resistance, taking the point of departure in an inclusive understanding of resistance. But how much “construction” and how much “resistance” must be included in order to deserve the label of constructive resistance? Through a set of diverse examples, this article explores some possible ways of operationalising both the elements of construction and resistance.*

*Keywords: constructive resistance, theory, definition, constructive programme, prefiguration*

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## Introduction

In Brazil, hundreds of thousands of poor and landless people from *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* (MST), the landless worker's movement, have occupied land for more than 30 years of struggle for land reform and the possibility for a decent life. On occupied land, they have started to grow food and establish communities based on ideas of gender equality, cooperative farming and organic cultivation. The occupations have been met with a number of different reactions from authorities and landowners, and these responses have varied over the years. On many occasions, MST participants have been exposed to violent evictions, and in 1996 21 people were killed in a massacre in Eldorado de Carajás (Branford & Rocha, 2002). However, the occupations have also modelled a successful strategy for gaining legal recognition of occupied land in many places. According to the organisation itself, 370.000 families have had their right to 7,5 hectare of land recognised, while 150.000 families are still waiting in temporary encampments (MST, n.d). This land reform from below is constructive resistance because the occupations challenge the established power structure of land distribution in Brazil, but using a method that constructs the desired future within the shell of the old society. With 1,5 million members, MST provides an example of contemporary constructive resistance on a large scale, but throughout the world, people undertake initiatives to establish autonomous spaces where they escape prosecution or experiment with alternative ways of living. Such constructive resistance is worth exploring because it is so widely practiced, yet hardly any theory exists in this area.

In an article about resistance, Stellan Vinthagen describes “constructive resistance” as resistance that can “transcend the whole phenomenon of being-against-something, turning into the proactive form of constructing “alternative” or “prefigurative” social institutions which facilitate resistance...” (Vinthagen, 2007). The purpose of this article is to explore the phenomenon of constructive resistance and how to operationalise the two components of “construction” and “resistance”. How can these concepts be operationalised into an analytical tool that can be useful for academic investigations as well as practitioners of constructive resistance? How much “construction” and how much “resistance” does





an initiative have to include in order to deserve the label of constructive resistance? By mapping the terrain of constructive resistance, researchers and practitioners can establish a starting point for exploring the phenomenon further.

It is possible to study constructive resistance from many different perspectives, such as the level of organisation behind them or the areas they cover. Constructive resistance can be carried out by many actors, from individuals, small associations and local communities to national organisations or organised global networks. It covers areas regarding the fulfilment of basic needs, communication, economic concerns and decision making structures. Other possible approaches are whether the alternatives are legal or not, or to what degree people themselves frame their alternatives as resistance. However, I have settled on an approach that focuses on the two elements of “construction” and “resistance”.

Below I start with a brief introduction to the two approaches most relevant to a discussion of constructive resistance: Gandhi’s concept of *constructive programme* and anarchist/Marxist ideas about *prefigurative politics*. This is followed by my suggested definition of constructive resistance, a quite wide understanding of the term based on an inclusive understanding of what counts as resistance. Different possibilities for how to operationalise both the concepts of “construction” and “resistance” are introduced, concluding in two possible frameworks. These are introduced through a number of different examples of constructive resistance, ranging from a small Norwegian Montessori school, the file-sharing network *The Pirate Bay* and the organisation *FairTrade*, to Kosovo’s alternative education system during the 1990’s and Gandhi’s campaign for homespinning. These examples are not comparable but illustrate the diversity that can be found within variegated initiatives, all of which can be conceptualised as constructive resistance. Finally, the conclusive reflections include discussions about intentions versus consequences, and what should not count as constructive resistance even with a broad definition of the concept.



## Constructive programme and prefigurative politics

One of Gandhi's most common and widespread constructive campaigns was to promote Khadi, or homespun cloth. This was at once a promotion of non-cooperation with the British by refusing to buy imported textile, but even more important was the way spinning and weaving in the villages strengthened self-sufficiency and contributed to local-level empowerment. For Gandhi, the constructive programme was more important for the liberation of India than the non-cooperation and civil disobedience campaigns. He claimed that India could never be truly free as long as social ills like poverty, untouchability, discrimination against women and violence between Hindus and Muslims persisted, and the purpose of the constructive programme was to work on these issues as a means of achieving liberation (Gandhi, 1945). Authors writing about nonviolent struggle frequently mention Gandhi's concept of constructive programme and how important he considered it to be (Burrowes, 1996; Schell, 2003). The concept has rarely been developed further, although Mark Mattaini and Kristen Atkinson have investigated constructive programme through behavioural systems science and found it to be a useful way to challenge oppression (Mattaini & Atkinson, 2011). Practitioners of nonviolent struggle have also discussed what constructive programme means today in a US context (Chisholm, 2010; Sheehan, 2007).

Gene Sharp's famous categorisation of 198 methods of nonviolent actions also include several which are constructive, for instance establishing alternative communication channels, new social patterns and alternative social institutions. However, Sharp emphasizes how these alternatives can disturb the ordinary functions, not so much on how they themselves contribute to developing a desirable society. The examples he uses are also mainly taken from nonviolent struggles where non-cooperation creates the need for an alternative. Sharp's description of the alternative modes of transportation established by the civil rights movement during the Montgomery bus boycott starting in 1957 is a good example of this approach. African Americans and the white population were not allowed to sit together on public buses, and as part of the struggle to de-segregate public transport in the US South, the civil rights movement



initiated a boycott of the bus company in Montgomery. The boycott itself did not have any element of constructive resistance, but the need for an alternative form of transportation quickly arose. People still needed transport to get to work, for example. The organisers of the boycott soon organised alternative forms of transport, first with taxis and later through a private car pool. Without this constructive element, the boycott would not have been able to continue for more than a year (Sharp, 1973: 222, 414-15). However, the constructive element was developed as a result of the boycott. If constructive resistance had been the main approach to confronting segregation of buses in Montgomery, it would have required something along the lines of establishing an independent, unsegregated bus company.

The concept of *prefigurative politics* or *prefiguration* has much in common with constructive programme, although it derives from anarchist and some Marxist traditions of talking about how to “create the new society within the shell of the old”. The term was first used in reference to left-wing movements in the United States from the 1960’s (Boggs, 1977), but the idea of course dates back many centuries. Prefiguration usually refers to “the attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present, either in parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest” (Yates, 2014: 1). According to Luke Yates, prefiguration has been used with two different meanings: one refers to the alternatives built by movements, and another focuses on the way protest is performed (Yates, 2014: 2). An example of the latter is Barbara Epstein’s study of the way protest camps were organised during large civil disobedience actions in the US in the 1970’s and 80’s against nuclear power plants and nuclear research facilities. In these movements, the community building, affinity groups, tolerance for diversity and decision-making based on consensus could be very empowering for the participants. Since they were distinguishing themselves from the “old left’s” hierarchical organisations and top-down structures in an attempt to create a more desirable world in the present, many participants had a sense of the actions being successful even if the immediate goals were not reached. It was considered more important to spread ideas about non-violent direct action and to have more people learn about and experience well-functioning consensus than to reach a specific goal (Epstein, 1991).



Later movements have used the idea of prefiguration differently. Mirianne Maeckelbergh discusses the concept in relation to the alterglobalization movement, in which the term “process” is used to cover ideas about how protest can be done differently. It is not about a theory for change, but about doing things differently in practice. According to Maeckelbergh, the alterglobalization movement uses prefiguration strategically. Previously, the term “strategy” has been used in a particular way by the “old left”/Marxists who consider it something that the leadership decides upon and the members then carry out. Where others have talked about prefiguration as a supplement to strategy (or even more important than strategy, because they equate strategy with hierarchical, goal-oriented organisations) Maeckelbergh seeks to claim the term strategy for other purposes (Maeckelbergh, 2011). In the alterglobalisation movement, prefiguration is strategic because the goal is to change the way power operates. The goal is not to take over state power or control the revolution, but to make space for people to pursue many goals simultaneously. This is done by constantly decentralising power whenever there are signs of its centralisation, and by creating connectivity between movements that have different goals. With Maeckelbergh’s understanding of the term, the prefigurative embodies two elements that must be pursued simultaneously – challenging established structures and constructing an alternative (Maeckelbergh, 2011: 14). This is what I aim to do with the concept of *constructive resistance*, but in relation to a much wider set of practices than what has been done with prefiguration.

Yates has provided an interesting theoretical approach to the study of prefiguration. Based on his study of autonomous social centres in Barcelona, he concludes that “prefiguration necessarily *combines* the experimental creating of ‘alternatives’ within *either* mobilisation-related or everyday activities, with attempts to ensure their future political relevance” (Yates, 2014: 13). Yates presents five social processes that “allows for a more practical and specific evaluation of the political logic at play in processes of prefiguration” (Yates, 2014: 13-15). First of all, Yates finds that prefiguration involves *experimentation* with everyday practices and projects, as well as with political mobilisation. Secondly, by *perspectives* he refers to how “prefigurative groups host, develop and critique political perspectives, ideas and social movement frames” (Yates, 2014:



14), for instance by organising seminars and debates for self-education. Third, *conduct* is about establishing new collective norms which result in new routines for how things should be done. Fourth, Yates finds that *consolidation* is related to how prefigurative politics is manifested in material environments or social orders. In Yates's study, this ranged from establishing dry toilets to sharing of possessions and division of space. Finally, fifth, *diffusion* allows the alternatives to "to persist beyond the present for groups and collectives" (Yates, 2014: 14).

The philosophy and practice of anarchism has a strong tradition of prefiguration. Richard Day describes and analyses the role of anarchism in what he calls "the newest social movements". Day considers the constructive and prefigurative elements in examples like social centres, food cooperatives and various temporary autonomous zones the "newest" way of organising. Many activists have given up on the idea of *demanding* change, and instead carve out niches of autonomy. The more visible aspects of the movement criticizing globalisation, holding street protests during high-profile meetings of the G8, the EU, the IMF, etc., have received the most attention, but Day claims this eruption of protest originated in autonomous ways of organising in solidarity across many different struggles (Day, 2005). Shantz provides a detailed account of how anarchists in North America have built "infrastructures of resistance" by establishing independent media and free schools, organising together with unions, and taking direct action in solidarity with poor people and migrants (Shantz, 2010). Anarchism and some forms of socialism have a century-old tradition of advocating and practicing autonomy and experimenting with different ways of organising life and work, such as the English diggers who cultivated common land in the 17th century (Winstanley & Hill, 1973), the Spanish anarchists who organised collective ways of working during the Spanish civil war (Leval, 1975), and the so-called utopian socialists (Day, 2005).

To sum up the contributions and limitations of existing literature relevant to the concept of constructive resistance, we see that the literature on prefiguration usually discusses the phenomenon in the context of taking direct action, and not as something that can be done independently of direct action in more discrete and hidden forms. When it



comes to the constructive programme, it is a limitation that constructive resistance has been theorised so little and rarely mentioned outside of a Gandhian context. Thus we know little about what it means for a movement to have a constructive programme, and what constructive programme looks like under other circumstances than the Indian struggle for independence. By exploring the concept of constructive resistance I intend to bring the insights from constructive programme and prefiguration together in the context of the emerging field of resistance studies.

### Defining constructive resistance

Resistance is often defined in relation to some form of power that it aims to undermine, and the explicit or implicit understanding of power shapes the way resistance is conceptualised (Vinthagen, 2007). It is not within the scope of this article to discuss these matters in depth, since other authors have already written on these topics. Suffice it to say that resistance to domination can take many different forms: Some people chose violent resistance to tyranny, occupations and injustice through riots and guerilla war. Others commit to nonviolent struggle with methods such as strikes, boycotts, and civil disobedience. These are the actions and events that the average person will think of if asked to describe resistance. However, authors such as James Scott and Asef Bayat were forerunners in documenting hidden and quiet forms of resistance. Scott showed how poor peasants, serfs and slaves quietly resist when they are out of sight by working slowly, gossiping, and stealing (Scott, 1985; Scott, 1990). Bayat has focused on how the urban poor in the global south create a better life for themselves day by day, by establishing businesses on the pavement, building illegally or tapping into the power grid (Bayat, 2010). Feminist researchers have pointed out that women's resistance might look different than men's and take quieter forms (Marchand, 2003). An inclusive definition of resistance that takes into consideration this wide variety is the beginning of Stellan Vinthagen and Mona Lilja's entry on "resistance" in *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*. They write:

"Resistance is a response to power, it is a practice that challenge and negotiate, and which might undermine power. Depending on the definition of power, different types of activities will count as resistance." (Vinthagen & Lilja, 2007: 1215).



They continue describing how resistance is part of social life and relational, and then explains that

“When power becomes (perceived as) dominance, resistance is likely. If power is understood as the creation of subordination through discourses that structure performance, label and rank identities, create boundaries, reduce complexity, and then promote power-loaded images of identities to be invested in, then resistance might be performed by the usages of identities, images and discourses in order to alter stereotypes and hierarchies.” (Vinthagen & Lilja, 2007: 1216).

Across all the forms of resistance mentioned previously and included in Vinthagen and Lilja’s quote, we find initiatives which not only criticise, protest, object, and undermine what is considered undesirable and wrong, but simultaneously acquire, create, built, cultivate and experiment with what people need in the present moment, or what they would like to see replacing dominant structures or power relations. I suggest a definition which says that *constructive resistance occurs when people start to build the society they desire independently of structures of power. They can act alone, but usually constructive resistance is carried out by groups. In order to be considered “constructive resistance”, they necessarily have to be both constructive and provide a form of resistance, but there is a huge variety within both concepts. Resistance can be either an implicit or explicitly outspoken critique of structures of power upholding the status quo. These structures of power can be the state, corporate power or patriarchy, but is not limited to these. The constructive element can be either concrete or symbolic, and ranges from initiatives that aim to inspire others to actions that partly replace or lead to the collapse of the dominant way of behaving and thinking. Constructive resistance does not exclude conventional forms for protests, boycotts and civil disobedience, but focuses on creating, building, carrying out and experimenting with what is considered desirable.*

In order to be open-minded towards the phenomenon of constructive resistance, this definition is deliberately rather generous towards what can be considered both resistance and construction. For instance, I suggest leaving aside two of the elements that Vinthagen mentioned in his discussion of the term, which also appear in the writings on prefiguration. First of all, I do not include anything about “institutions” in the definition, making it possible to include unorganised and individual acts

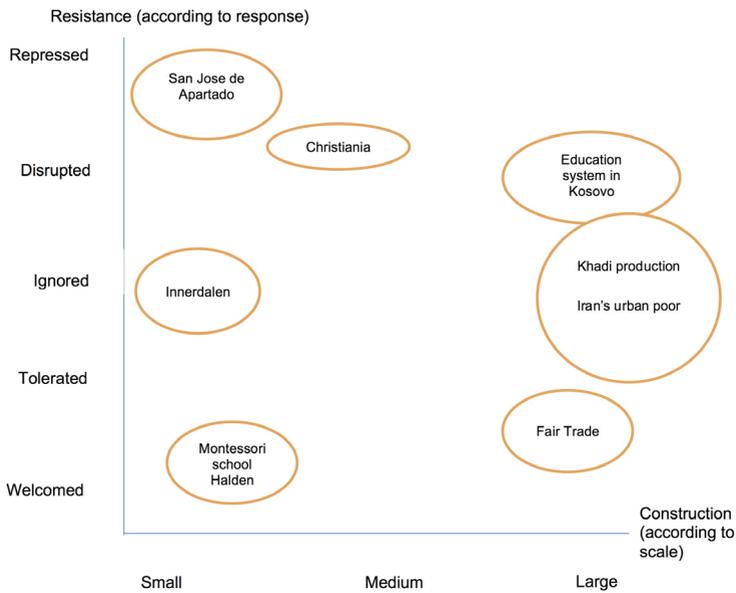


as constructive resistance. Secondly, I think it is an unnecessary limitation to speak about the construction as something that “facilitates” resistance. Creating alternatives can be resistance without having to facilitate anything that looks like more traditional or well known forms of resistance. When MST occupies land, the act of creating the alternative is the resistance. This way, we also count as constructive resistance initiatives that remain small and do not advance beyond exemplifying an alternative or providing inspiration for others. Such a broad definition of constructive resistance is a logical consequence if one subscribes to an inclusive definition of resistance generally. It also means that initiatives can be oriented towards reform rather than revolution. Although activities might currently take place outside of state structures, it does not have to be a goal that they remain independent. There is no normative aspect of this definition; constructive resistance is not necessarily “good”, and what starts out as constructive resistance might itself result in new forms of domination and exploitation when it grows and expands. One can say that early capitalism was constructive resistance to feudalism, but it soon developed into one of the most oppressive economic structures imaginable. And no matter how much we might disapprove of their agenda, right wing extremists and religious fundamentalists are also engaging in constructive resistance. Normative criteria are relevant, for instance, when we decide what types of resistance to support and which topics to spend our time researching, but it should not be applied when establishing an analytical definition of a phenomena. Thus, there is deliberately no normative aspect in the definition. However, the examples I have chosen to focus on are all striving, in one way or another, for a more just, peaceful or free society.

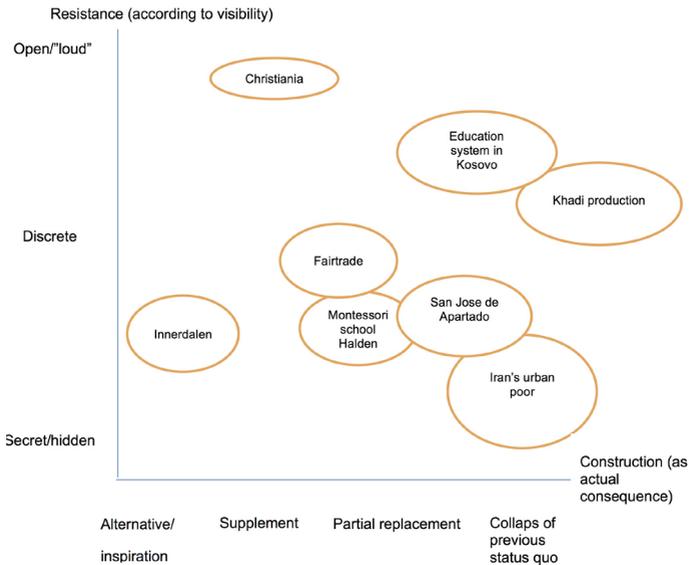
Both “construction” and “resistance” can be operationalised in different ways. “Construction” can be conceptualised as the actual consequences for the system under attack at the time of evaluation. Such consequences can be more or less severe for the system. In cases where the constructive initiative does not go further than providing inspiration for others to follow or functions as a supplement to the dominant way of doing things it might not be perceived as threatening. However, when it comes to initiatives where part of what is undesired has been replaced, the situation is very different. Ultimately the constructive alter-

native might become the norm, thus resulting in a complete collapse of the previous dominant structure. When it comes to judging how much “resistance” there is in an example of constructive resistance, there are several ways of making this assessment. One option is to evaluate resistance in terms of how confrontational it is towards a particular dominant system. This continuum ranges from the hidden and secret, to the discrete, and finally to resistance that is openly declared. Another option is to consider how “forceful” the resistance is, but the challenge then becomes how to decide who is responsible for determining what constitutes force. One possibility is to look at the response from authorities and those who are being “attacked” or undermined in the situation. This creates a continuum ranging from initiatives that might be welcomed, tolerated or ignored, to those which are disrupted and repressed. Both construction and resistance can also be understood in relation to the size and scale of the initiatives, such as how many people are involved and how long it lasts. None of these options are inherently better than the others; it depends on what aspect of the constructive resistance one is

**Figur 1. Resistance/construction in relation to response and scale**



Figur 2: Resistance/construction according to visibility and consequence



interested in examining more closely.

Below I have constructed two diagrams that each use two of the continuums suggested above. The same examples are plotted into both diagrams, to illustrate how the way one decides what to consider as resistance and construction influence how one evaluates the examples.

### The variations within constructive resistance

Figure 1 shows eight examples of constructive resistance where the resistance axis is set in relation to the response from authorities, and the constructive element in relation to the size of the initiative. Figure 2 shows the same examples, but with a different operationalisation of both resistance and construction. Here resistance is shown according to the dimension of confrontation, with the hidden and secret on one end and openly declared resistance on the other. The axis of construction is laid out according to the actual consequences of the initiative at the time of evaluation, ranging from those that “merely” inspire to those that lead to a collapse of the previous dominant way of behaving or thinking. For



both figures, both axes are continuums and not categories. Some of the examples remain in the same area of the figure no matter which axes are used, but others move quite a bit depending on how construction or resistance are operationalised. Together the examples illustrate how diverse constructive resistance can be while still being included in the definition.

### Albanian school system in Kosovo in early 1990's

An example of constructive resistance which belongs in the top right corner of both figure 1 and 2 is the Kosovo Albanian parallel education system during the nonviolent struggle of the early 1990's. After a period of relative autonomy, things turned to the worse for the Albanian population in Kosovo during the 1980's. In 1989, ethnic segregation was introduced in schools, with the Serbian minority receiving far better conditions than the Albanian majority. In 1990, new legislation required that all students in Serbia (which included Kosovo) should use the same curriculum, "with only token concessions to the presence of Albanians in the republic" (Clark, 2000: 96). Albanian pupils should no longer be taught in the Albanian language, and the curriculum was changed in order to better fit the Serbian narrative of the history of the region. As a response, the Albanian pupils, students and teachers did not go on strike, which would have been counterproductive. Instead they established a system of parallel schools and a university. In improvised facilities, the teachers continued to teach the curriculum, which had been decided upon during the time of autonomy. Although the number of pupils fell during the 1990's, by 1997 there were still 330,000 pupils using the parallel system, compared to 376,000 enrolled in school before the changes took place (Clark, 2000: 99). In the beginning the teachers worked for only a symbolic salary, but this increased with time. The parallel education system meant much for keeping up morale and encouraging pride among the Kosovo Albanians. Ninety percent of the taxes collected by the parallel government went to the schools. The parallel schools received some criticism when it came to quality and lost momentum as the years passed and no progress was made with the nonviolent struggle in other domains. Nevertheless, it was an impressive effort which showed that the Kosovo Albanian population was perfectly capable of running their own lives (Clark, 2000: Chapter 5).





In both figures this is an example of constructive resistance that included both considerable resistance to the dominant Serbian education system and a lot of constructive action. It was a comprehensive initiative which involved the majority of the Albanian children and the consequences were quite far reaching. All these teachers, children and their families participated in the building of a parallel government which partly replaced the Serbian-controlled government when it came to schooling. It did not lead to a complete collapse of the Serbian school system, but nevertheless went way beyond the symbolic level of inspiring others. When it comes to the two ways of measuring resistance, the Kosovo Albanian education system ends up in different places in the figure. The schools were discrete in their operations; lessons were quiet, everyday occurrences that tried not to call too much attention to themselves. They took place in hidden and secret locations, but could not be completely clandestine, since the children and parents needed to know where to go (Figure 2). Nevertheless, as shown in figure 1, both teachers and pupils were harassed to such a degree that it disrupted the functions of the schools, which is why the case moves depending on how resistance is operationalised.

This campaign played an important role in upholding morale during these years of struggle, and as a direct consequence a large number of children were not exposed to nationalistic Serbian propaganda while they were in school. The nonviolent struggle in Kosovo collapsed and eventually war broke out, but the story of the education system in Kosovo remains a powerful example of how extensive constructive resistance can develop in spite of limited resources and a hostile environment that aims to crush opposition.

### Gandhi's Khadi campaign

Gandhi's campaign for homespun and home-woven cloth is the most well known example of what he called "constructive programme." The idea was simple: instead of buying imported British textiles, Indians should produce what they needed themselves in a way which provided work to many people and simple industries in the villages. The Khadi production was an important element of both the non-cooperation campaign in 1920 and the nonviolent campaign of 1930-31. Since spinning is a very





simple procedure which only requires one tool, this became a way for millions of people to participate in the independence campaigns without running too much risk, and it could be done by the young and the old, men and women, rich and poor, in the cities and in the countryside. One can, of course, evaluate the khadi campaign in relation to the whole British system of colonialism, but it seems more fair to focus on the impact on Indian textile import. When combined with a boycott of British textiles, the consequences became even more substantial. In figures 1 and 2, this case is an example which goes far on the constructive scales, because so many people participated and it led to a near collapse of the previous status quo regarding the import of British cloth. In connection with the 1920 campaign, the import of British-produced textile dropped by nearly half (Chandra, 1989: 188). When it comes to the aspect of resistance, khadi production was an activity that was difficult for the authorities to clamp down on since spinning and weaving was not forbidden. This meant that while many other aspects of the independence campaigns were repressed, khadi had to be ignored. Likewise, it was a quiet form of participation that did not have to involve taking to the streets. In between the major nonviolent campaigns, khadi production was also a simple way for people to show to themselves and each other that they remained committed to the cause of Indian independence.

## Christiania

Staying in the repressive part of figure 1 but moving towards smaller examples, we find the community Christiania in Copenhagen, Denmark. This self-proclaimed “freetown” was established in the end of the 1960’s as a squat settlement in an abandoned military area. Christiania was organised as a free space outside of government control where people experimented with alternative lifestyles, drugs, music, art, activism, etc. (Rasmussen, 2002), just like so many other squats, communes and community centres that existed during this time. The reactions towards Christiania have changed over the years, and authorities have tried to legalise the area when it comes to building permits, tax paying, and drug control. At times there have been violent clashes with the police, but Christiania has remained a place very different from surrounding Copenhagen. There are approximately 850 permanent inhabitants, but Christi-





ania's influence goes beyond the people who have chosen to live there. Many people visit and take part in the cultural activities, and the cultural life has had an impact far beyond Christiania itself. In figure 2 Christiania is a "loud" and openly confrontational example. Although some inhabitants would have preferred to continue quietly with their alternative lifestyles, as a whole the community has not been quiet and discreet in its resistance to the status quo of Danish society. Although it can be argued that the permanent residents have partly replaced conventional ways of living, most of Christiania's influence when it comes to the constructive elements has been to provide a lively supplement for the many visitors when it comes to music, art, bicycle culture, environmentally friendly energy, etc.

## San Jose de Apartado

Another initiative which is modest when it comes to size but has managed to catch attention worldwide is the peace community San Jose de Apartado in Colombia, where the inhabitants in 1997 declared their village and its surrounding areas a peace community and refused to be part of the ongoing civil war. The area was a contested territory where the guerrillas had had the upper hand for some years, but where the paramilitary groups supporting the government was gaining control and actively displaced the population. When the inhabitants of San Jose de Apartado returned in spite of the continued warfare and high risks, they decided that they would not in any way assist any of the armed sides - be it guerrillas, para-militaries or the armed forces. Weapons are not allowed in the village and the members of the peace community also started with more collective ways of farming and organising community life (European Centre for Conflict Prevention, 1999; Jiménez, 2015; Westerbaan, 1999).

In Figure 1, the peace community is placed as a rather small-scale initiative; it involves only an estimated 1500 members. However, they have been constantly disrupted and approximately 200 members have been killed or disappeared, especially those who are most outspoken. The Colombian President Uribe in 2005 publicly declared that it was not possible to be neutral in the civil war, and that everyone who was not siding with the government was siding with the guerrillas (Jiménez, 2015: 56). However, using the scale of construction in figure 2, we see what a





difference it makes how you decide to define “construction”. In spite of its modest scale, the establishment of the peace community led to a collapse of the previous status quo with forced displacements around San Jose de Apartado. Although it only concerned a limited geographic area, the military did not get its way in this case. Support from Colombian and international human rights workers, which has accompanied the community since its establishment, has provided significant unarmed protection and support. Figure 2 also shows how the conceptualisation of resistance matters. Living an ordinary peasant life growing food and taking care of your family is in itself quiet, and it is only when the response it provokes is taken into consideration that it becomes obvious how much resistance there can be in such stubborn persistence.

### Housing for Iran’s urban poor

Bayat has coined the term “the quiet encroachment of the ordinary” to capture how the urban poor of the global south in many places manage to carve out space for themselves to make it possible for them to build better lives without any overt protest. This can be the establishment of shantytowns where people illegally tap into the power grid, small stalls on the pavement for selling merchandise, and so on. One of his studies focuses on the urban poor of Iran. During the 18 months preceding the Iranian revolution in 1979, the urban poor was largely ignored both by the regime and opposition forces. Instead of participating in the political revolution, the poor were involved in a parallel revolution of securing better living conditions (Bayat, 1997). Already before 1979 migration from rural areas increased the number of inhabitants in Tehran, which could not be accommodated in the legal housing market. Instead they resorted to building houses in slums and squatter communities, mainly at the outskirts of the city. By 1980 an estimated 1,4 million people or 35% of the population of Tehran lived in slums and squatter communities (Bayat, 1997: 29). When people had established their houses, they started to demand services such as water, electricity and garbage collection. When these demands were not heard, the squatters resorted to quiet direct action, illegally tapping into the water pipes and power grid. In most people’s own perception, these actions were not political, but simply a way of surviving (Bayat, 1997: 45). In 1977, the authorities tried





to demolish many of the illegal settlements. Twelve people died during struggles where the squatters defended their homes in the autumn of 1977. However, as soon as houses were demolished, the squatters started to rebuild them from the rubble, and eventually the regime had to give in. In 1978, the squats were recognised by the government for the first time, and home construction outside of the city limit was accepted. From 1979 to 1981, the struggles for urban housing took more overt and organised forms, including occupations of hotels and homes, but once stability was restored this opportunity vanished and the poor once again resorted to the tactics from the pre-revolution years, with gains won quietly, followed by concessions from the authorities (Bayat, 1997).

In figure 1 (below), the Iranian urban poor's struggle for housing is placed at the "large" end because it involved such a vast number of people. Authorities ignored this struggle for the most part, although the clashes in 1977 of course moved it temporarily towards the repressive corner. When it comes to figure 2, if we take 1979 as the time for measuring, this example had led to a collapse of the previous status quo. According to Bayat, the gains for the poor was made due to the quiet nature of the way they built houses and acquired services like water and electricity. As long as they did not make too much fuss, they were to a large degree ignored and could continue establishing a better life day by day. This is an example of activities which are not explicitly framed as resistance, but nevertheless has had a huge impact on the living conditions of the urban poor in Iran.

## Halden Montessori School

Schools which base their teaching on Maria Montessori's approach to children's learning and development exist worldwide, including in the Norwegian town of Halden. Montessori started to develop her pedagogical ideas in Italy before WWI, but the school in Halden was opened in 2015. The first year it has been attended by less than 20 children, so it is a small initiative in a town that has 30.000 inhabitants.

This small school is just one out of countless schools which base their teaching on some form of alternative pedagogy and which can also be considered constructive resistance. I have included this particular ex-





ample primarily for one reason: Halden Montessori school itself explicitly says that it does not compete with the pedagogy in the public schools (Halden Montessoriskole, n.d.). This raises the question if it is reasonable to label initiatives “constructive resistance” if the organisers themselves state that they are not resisting. Although I respect the school’s intentions of being non-confrontational, I will nevertheless argue that this is indeed an example of constructive resistance, although a modest one. In figure 1, the school is placed in the lower left corner because of the present size and the fact that the local authorities have welcomed it. However, in figure 2 it is an example of a discrete form of resistance, indeed because it so clearly frames itself as non-confrontational. However, when it comes to measuring the consequences of the constructive aspect, it falls in the middle as “partial replacement”. This is because a child that attends the Montessori school cannot simultaneously attend the schools run by Halden municipality. The Montessori school is not just an inspiration for others or a supplement the children can choose after the ordinary school day is over, it is an alternative school which implicitly confronts the dominant way of educating children in Norway.

## Fairtrade

Fairtrade describes itself as an organisation which “...is an alternative approach to conventional trade and is based on a partnership between producers and consumers (...) Fairtrade offers consumers a powerful way to reduce poverty through their every day shopping.” (Fairtrade, 2016b). The organisation started out as a small initiative selling products in the Netherlands in 1988, but the idea soon spread to many other countries (Fairtrade, 2016a). Fairtrade is based on the idea of informed consumer choices and the assumption that individuals will be willing to pay more for products that they trust to have been produced under just working conditions. Rather than simply criticising everyone upholding an unjust trade system, Fairtrade uses its label to provide an alternative to the present system of exploitation. Although easily dismissed by radicals because the organisation does not distance itself from economic growth as a way to prosperity and continued trade between rich and poor countries, it has grown to gain a considerable proportion of the market. On its webpage, Fairtrade presently talks very little about what it is opposed



to, and this discreet way of creating an alternative might be a reason for its success. In figure 1, Fairtrade is currently an example of a large constructive initiative that ends up in the area between being tolerated or welcomed by authorities. This is the perspective from the consumers who buy the products, where for instance some cities have taken the step of becoming fair-trade cities. That they are welcomed by authorities in the global North does not mean they are welcomed by their competitors, but it makes it much harder to disrupt and repress them. However, the situation might be very different for farmers in the global South when their new practices challenge conventional power relations. Fairtrade is also an example that moves quite a bit from figure 1 to figure 2. With time it has moved from mainly being an inspiration and an alternative to replacing a large part of the market when it comes to products like coffee, bananas and chocolate. Nevertheless there is still a long way to go before it will lead to a collapse of the trade in conventional, unfair goods.

## Innerdalen

The last example in figures 1 and 2 is the Norwegian struggle to save the valley “Innerdalen”. In the end of the 1970’s, the plans for establishing a number of power stations in the Orkla-Grana river system was far advanced. As a consequence, several valleys would be flooded, including Innerdalen where valuable land well-suited for food production would be lost. Local opinions about the issue were spilt, but in 1978 a number of environmental organisations together formed the action group “Grønn Aksjon Innerdalen” (Green Action Innerdalen) in order to draw attention to the issue. During the summers of 1978, -79 and -80, the group organised a number of camps, including a “people’s university”. The camps were places for socialising and learning more about environmental issues, practical skills, as well as discussing the actions against the planned power stations. Also other locations in Norway became centres of struggles against similar plans, with Alta being famous for the civil disobedience actions. An activity which made Innerdalen considerably different from Alta was the focus on constructive work. The land in Innerdalen had turned out to be of very high quality, a reason why this particular valley was chosen to be the centre of the struggle. In Norway, fertile, cultivatable land is scarce, and it frequently engenders strong



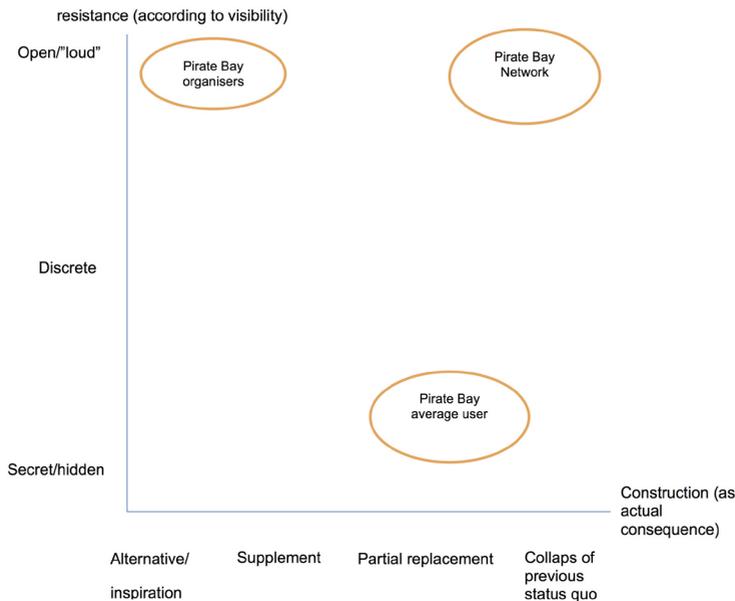
emotions when there is talk about projects that will destroy soil. With direct inspiration from Gandhi's constructive programme, it was decided to start to cultivate more of this land. One person also settled in the valley together with his 40 sheep (Grønn Aksjon Innerdalen, 1981: 25).

In figure 1, the settlements in Innerdalen are a small scale example that was easily ignored by authorities. In figure 2, it did not get further than providing an example, and it was quite discrete as long as the settlements did not obstruct the building plans. In order to have become more confrontational, the activists would have had to be working the land in the valley when the water started flooding it, something which did not happen.

### Managing large networks in the model

In figure 1 and 2, the examples of Christiania, Innerdalen, the Montessori school and the peace community in Colombia all take place in a specific and limited geographical location. In contrast, the examples of Kosovo's education system, the Khadi production and Iran's urban

Figur 3: Pirate Bay



poor are dispersed over larger areas and without a centre. Nevertheless the constructive element still requires a physical location to meet for the schools or a place to build the illegal houses or produce the cloth. The final example, the organisation Fairtrade is also dispersed, but since it is one organisation in the figures it is treated as one “unit”. When it comes to global networks, this becomes more challenging because different parts of the network have to be placed on different parts of the figure.

The Pirate Bay is a peer-to-peer file-sharing network where people can share large files such as films, music or videogames through BitTorrent technology. It was started in 2003 by the Swedish organisation “Piratbyrå” (The Pirate Bureau), which together with groups such as Anonymous and Wikileaks is part of a “hactivist” culture and a growing movement for an open internet (McKelvey, 2015). At first the file sharing was just a small part of what Piratbyrå did, but it soon started to grow and at the end of 2005, The Pirate Bay website had 2,5 million users (Looper, 2014). The growing popularity of the site prompted companies with copyrights to the shared material to accuse The Pirate Bay of copyright infringement. In 2006 the Swedish police raided Pirate Bay for the first time, but the file sharing was only down for three days. In spite of all attempts to close it down, file sharing continue via The Pirate Bay. Decreases in the number of users has only been temporary, and a Dutch study has shown that six months after a Dutch court demanded that internet providers block access to Pirate Bay, downloads via the network had increased instead (Essers, 2013).

The initiators of The Pirate Bay have become public spokespersons against control of information. In 2009 all four were convicted to one year in prison for assisting in copyright infringement and fined. The verdict was appealed, and in 2010 the prison time was reduced, but the fines increased to 6.5 million US dollars. Thus, in figure 3 the organisers of Pirate Bay are placed in the top left corner. They are few, but the repression they have experienced has been relatively severe. Alone they could not have posed much of a challenge to the film and music industry, and it is unlikely that anyone would have bothered to press charges against them if they had not grown to include so many users. However, the situation for the average user is very different. Most of them do their downloads discretely and anonymously, and although some share the hactivist phi-



losophy, they are not prepared to be public spokespersons. In addition, we must also suspect that a large proportion of the users do not perceive their acts as political, but simply want free music and films. These average users are placed in the lower middle part of figure 3, because their actions have become a widely used supplement to the usual way of accessing films and music, but did not replace more conventional forms. Thus, when we look at the Pirate Bay network as a whole, including both organisers and average users, it ends close to the top right corner of figure 3. Although the film and music industries have since adapted to demand for files that could be easily downloaded and developed legal services where people can download and stream films and music, for a while the ordinary way of doing business looked as if it would collapse.

### Concluding reflections

The intention with including these nine examples of constructive resistance is to illustrate how highly diverse this phenomenon can be when it comes to the context, how many people are involved and how long they last. In spite of the diversity, the cases do have a common characteristic: a constructive aspect of their resistance to the dominant systems of trade, education, housing, music purchasing etc. that they confront. The people performing these activities are not (just) criticising, demanding change or tearing down established structures. While they might be involved in such types of resistance as well, what is highlighted here is the way they create, build or simply acquire something they consider better than the status quo. They imagine that things can be different, they experiment through trial and error, they change practices and norms, and they share their experiences with others. The motivation for creating an alternative varies considerably. Some people engage in constructive resistance out of an immediate necessity. They start to grow food on occupied land because they don't have enough to eat or see no other option of earning an income. Some are responses to changing circumstances, such as the civil war in Colombia. Out of these new situations grew a need for creating alternatives. The inhabitants of San Jose de Apartado developed a way of living that made it possible to stay close to their land rather than be displaced. Some forms of constructive resistance combine the alternative they create with critique of conventional society, such as places like





Christiania or the parallel education system in Kosovo. Other examples, like the Montessori school and Fairtrade are obviously not as necessary for immediate survival or explicitly critical, but arrive at constructive resistance out of a desire to create a better alternative rather than criticising or obstructing what one considers problematic.

I constructed two different scales for measuring both the constructive and resistance elements of the examples of constructive resistance. Instead of settling on one and arguing in favour of that choice, the purpose is to highlight the consequences of the decisions. With some of the examples, it did not make much difference which figure was used; if one were only to investigate Innerdalen and the khadi campaign, it might have led to the conclusion that it does not make much difference which scale to use. However, looking at San Jose de Apartado and Fairtrade show that the way one talks about both resistance and construction makes a considerable difference when deciding how “much” constructive resistance these cases demonstrate.

It is perfectly possible to make a convincing argument that it would be better to label the lower left corner of the figures something like constructive work or constructive action. However, I have chosen this approach because I embrace an inclusive definition of resistance and want to emphasise that constructive resistance happens along a continuum and can change significantly over time, making it difficult to judge when something has become “enough resistance” to be included. If one generally has a broad concept of resistance, then it also follows logically that the concept of constructive resistance should be broad. This said, not everything that can be included in the definition of constructive resistance is equally interesting for academics and practitioners focused on radical social change. Initiatives like Innerdalen, Fairtrade, Iran’s urban poor and Halden Montessori school might not be considered to have goals that reach far enough or managed to reach a size where they can pose a threat to the status quo. Thus, when selecting what one considers interesting to study it might be necessary to set additional criteria about the potential of the constructive resistance or decide to focus on those who’s aims include non-state structures. This would exclude things like Montessori schools that apply for permission from national authorities. Likewise, what starts out radical can very well stiffen with time. When





Gandhi conceived of the khadi campaign, it was part of larger struggle for Indian independence and liberation that went much further than getting rid of the British colonizers. Gandhi was critical of a centralised state, but today khadi is sold in government shops. It also seems quite ironic that the Indian national flag, one of the most powerful symbols of the state, is by law required to be made from khadi (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2002).

However, I want to emphasise that not everything that can be considered constructive is resistance. My definition requires that it takes place outside of state structures and challenges a dominant system. Thus, conventional development aid given through state agencies is not constructive resistance, but a way of “patching up” problems created by the current world order without challenging the structures that created the problems in the first place. When companies or industries start their own labelling as a way to appear “green” and compete with independent labels, they are not engaged in constructive resistance, since they are not challenging their own domination. Instead, this is “greenwashing”: an attempt to appear green with as little effort as possible. Charity to the poor and homeless in the form of soup kitchens, shelters and donations might well be good deeds, but as long as they do not include an attempt to subvert a particular system that has created inequality, they do not qualify as constructive resistance. However, when the poor engage in social empowerment and themselves organise development or soup kitchens that is a completely different matter.

Another issue for discussion is the question of intentions vs. consequences. In my definition, considering an activity to be constructive resistance can both depend on the intentions and the result of what is done. If the intent is to do constructive resistance and can be reasonably argued to fit within the definition, then I consider it constructive resistance even when the results are limited. Likewise, if the result of activities is the construction of alternative practices, I consider it constructive resistance no matter what the intentions were. Not everyone is likely to agree with this definition, and it does pose some challenges. For instance, it might not seem reasonable to call something like Halden Montessori School in its present form resistance when it has been welcomed by the local authorities and the school explicitly says it is not a competition to





the ordinary schools. Nevertheless, even if such a small school seems insignificant now, there is a potential for growth with far reaching consequences. If a large number of parents in Halden decide to send their kids to the Montessori School, this would either force the municipality to find excuses to close the school, or close some of the public schools because of lack of pupils, or force the municipality's schools to adopt some form of Montessori pedagogic. Resistance always has to start small. The possible benefit of all the examples that are ignored, tolerated and welcomed is that because they are not involved in a constant battle, this gives possibilities to evolve gradually. On the other hand, many of the people who participate in these initiatives might not consider them resistance to anything at all. When people are not forced to defend their alternatives, they can continue to live comfortably without ever being considered a threat.

The example of file sharing illustrates the problem of only focusing on intentions and leaving out the consequences. Because so many people changed their behaviour, although they had no intentions of undermining the film and music industries, the result was nevertheless that the copyright holders felt threatened. Including only intentions or results would mean that examples such as file sharing or the Montessori school could not be considered constructive resistance.

The definition used here is much wider than what has previously been included in the discussions about prefigurative politics and constructive programme. In Maeckelbergh's use of prefigurative in relation to the alterglobalisation movement, only those who simultaneously confront established structures and engage in creating alternatives are involved in prefigurative politics. I think it is important to also include all those who are not interested in criticising or confronting (whether because of fear, ignorance or because they don't think it will make a difference), when we talk about constructive resistance. If we accept Maeckelbergh's own understanding of strategy, engaging in any kind of activity that creates alternatives can be strategic. No matter if they think it or not, people are still contributing to resistance as long as they are performing activities that create alternatives to or implicitly undermine established structures of power. Constructive resistance might become more effective if it is designed to confront the status quo and not just bypass it. On the other hand, it is easier to continue working undisturbed when you are involved in a small-scale non-confrontational supplement





rather than openly confronting and explicitly aiming for total collapse of the status quo.

The definition of constructive resistance suggested here, and the presentations of the different examples, provide starting points for mapping the terrain of a phenomenon with little theoretical exploration. Hopefully this aspect of resistance studies will be developed further with investigations of even more interesting questions than how to define them. Such studies can investigate some of the aspects I have pointed towards in the concluding reflections, like the question of consequences vs. intentions. Likewise, it will be interesting to know what differences exist between using methods of dispersion and methods of concentration when it comes to constructive resistance. A particularly important aspect will be to look at the relationship between constructive and non-constructive forms of resistance, and how these can work together to undermine systems of domination.

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# ‘Little feminism, but lots of feminists’: Feminist resistance and the Scottish independence movement

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## *Abstract*

*The Scottish independence campaign became a mass social movement against austerity in the lead up to the independence referendum of 18 September 2014. The participation of the radical left in the campaign built up a form of resistance to the British neoliberal status quo. However, little attention has been paid to the role of feminist radicals in the movement. Drawing on feminist theory, this article presents data from interviews with 37 pro-independence activists illuminating feminist strategies of resistance. Feminist participation and practices of resistance in two main forums are examined: firstly, in the cross-class women’s group Women for Independence (WFI), and secondly in the principal left wing organisation, the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC). The possibilities of the alliance with WFI are considered, alongside the constraints of a cross-class group for feminist radicals in resisting multiple interacting power relations. Conversely, in RIC resistance to the marginalisation of women and feminism is examined. This article critically examines contemporary feminist radical resistance to unravel the limitations imposed by a discourse of individualism. As shown in the analysis, while structural understandings of concepts such as capitalism or patriarchy are rhetorically invoked, resistance is primarily focused on self-transformation or persuading others to change their personal behaviour. This emphasis impedes the development of a collective feminist praxis to resist the structures behind individual behaviour.*

*Keywords: Resistance, feminism, independence, Scotland*

## Introduction

The Scottish Independence Campaign, advocating a “yes” vote for the independence of Scotland from the rest of Britain in the referendum of 18 September 2014, was one of the largest political movements in



recent Scottish history. While the official pro-independence campaign “Yes Scotland” promoted a vision of Scotland very similar to the British neoliberal status quo, an alternative grassroots movement fuelled by popular resistance to austerity blossomed. The grassroots movement was comprised of many individuals and organisations, but the most prominent among them were the left wing coalition, the Radical Independence Campaign (RIC), and the women’s group Women for Independence (WFI). Despite this there was a lack of feminist politics across the referendum debate (Kenny, 2014; Morrison, 2015). A frequent comment from feminists about RIC was “there’s little feminism, but lots of feminists.” While there was no organised feminist group and little collective effort to advance feminist demands, a high number of self-identified feminist radicals participated in the campaign. This article analyses feminist strategies and practices of resistance in the grassroots of the independence campaign. Focusing on self-defined feminist radicals who aim to resist multiple power relations across class, race, and gender, it explores feminist resistance in broad social movements. This article argues that a discourse of individualism dominates feminist radicalism where structural concepts are rhetorically invoked, but, resistance emphasises the altering of individual behaviour, impeding the development of a collective feminist praxis.

The first section discusses feminist theories of resistance, emphasising the interconnections of multiple sites and levels of feminist activity. The concept of everyday resistance is introduced alongside its interconnection with the constraints of hegemonic power relations. The openings and constraints of feminist radical participation in the cross-class women’s group Women for Independence (WFI) is examined in the second section. WFI is an autonomous grassroots group which is open to and aimed to appeal to all self-identified women<sup>1</sup>. Historical continuity is demonstrated in a feminist radical critique of the limits of the appeal to all women. Lastly, the final section considers resistance practices focused in and beyond RIC. It highlights efforts to challenge the internal marginalisation of feminism in the radical wing of the independence

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<sup>1</sup> As with many organisations established to campaign for independence, WFI and RIC have continued even after the defeat of the September 2014 referendum.



movement as well as within broader society. However, while feminist radicals undertook individual and everyday acts of resistance, their practices were shaped by hegemonic neoliberal discourses.

As with all social movements the independence campaign is a heterogeneous one with different but sometimes conflicting ideologies and practices, nonetheless a movement that coheres around a common issue (Flesher Fominaya, 2010). Evidently, feminist participants are equally heterogeneous even within the circle of feminist radicals. Discussing feminist resistance in the independence movement is not meant to imply that feminists spoke with a single voice, rather this form of resistance traces broad dominant discourses. Throughout this article the term feminist radical is used to refer to the thirty (30) self-identified left wing feminists who were interviewed to form the data used in this research (see methodology below). Simultaneously, feminists also identified with various ideological positions including those such as socialist, anarchist, and queer. Radical is used in this article, as it is generally used among activists in RIC, as an umbrella term to include differing left wing positions, moreover, it also includes those who do not identify with the traditional left, but, understand themselves to have radical politics opposed to parliamentary liberal democracy. Feminist radicals are those who self-identify specifically as both feminist and radical. Feminist radical is also used to distinguish from the theoretical position of radical feminism – which understands patriarchy as the root of societal inequality – with which none of the interviewees identified.

## Feminist Resistance in Social Movements

Alongside the wave of protest movements which have arisen since the 2008 economic crisis, a resurgence of feminist activism has been noted in the Global North (Dean, 2012; Winch, 2015). Much of this renewed feminism has been closely connected to forms of resistance against austerity such as the Occupy movement in the United States (Reger, 2015), the *indignados* in Spain (Gámez Fuentes, 2015), or the 2010-11 UK student movement (Cochrane, 2013). The Radical Independence Campaign (RIC) has been placed alongside these movements, and subsequent political parties such as Podemos in Spain, as new political configurations capable of challenging the neoliberal political consensus (Ali, 2015).



However, feminism has faced marginalisation across these movements, including in RIC (Morrison, 2015; Ng and Toupin, 2013). Feminist activists and scholars have long sought to expose and resist how gendered power relations structure social movements (López and García, 2015; Rowbotham, Segal and Wainwright, 2013). Radical movements are shaped by their social origins, tending to be dominated by white, middle class men, and prioritising analysis of class above other forms of oppression such as gender (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2007). As a result, feminists struggle to render visible and resist power relations both in society as a whole and within mixed gender movements. This dual focus was continued by feminist radicals in the independence campaign, who resisted domination in their own movement as well as in broader Scottish society.

To no one's surprise, feminist practices of resistance have often been overlooked in resistance literature, reflecting the marginalisation of feminism in the movements. But, acknowledgement and acceptance of feminist resistance is significant, as it allows us to rethink the concept of resistance in general by highlighting that the private sphere and interpersonal relations are sites of resistance. Feminists have long challenged the traditional understanding of resistance as limited to large-scale, public, overt acts of contestation. Feminist research has drawn attention to women's resistance in the private sphere, for example in the sharing of childcare in communities (Glenn, 1985; Brand, 1987). Such insights into resistance are also brought into feminist resistance within public events such as social movements. Feminists have maintained that resistance, even internal to a movement, must be understood as the range of acts from the daily practices of supporting one another or building solidarity among women and public through confrontational actions such as strikes or rallies (Maiguashca, 2011). As Motta (2011) argues, feminism helps us to re-conceptualise resistance by considering how power works through our subjectivities and relationships and how everyday emotions and acts of support or solidarity can begin to disrupt such power relations. Therefore, the lack of high profile resistance practices such as rallies cannot be taken to indicate the absence of feminist resistance in the Scottish independence campaign.

The concept of the micro-political or everyday politics has been engaged by many resistance scholars. First coined by Scott (1985), the idea



of “everyday resistance” refers to the mundane acts people undertake in their everyday life that oppose power. Scott (1990) outlines how covert or everyday resistance is low-profile, quiet, disguised or invisible. Thus, everyday behaviours of subaltern groups, such as foot-dragging, laziness or avoidance, can actually be acts that aim to undermine domination. The concept of everyday resistance has been further developed within feminist research as it provides a theoretical framework for women’s and feminist’s resistance in daily life. This way feminist critique has expanded the concept of resistance by demonstrating that gendered subjectivities shape the way resistance occurs (Agarwal, 1994). Kandiyoti (1998) further expands the critique of Scott by highlighting how resistance to power relations is also found in interpersonal and intimate relations. These scholars have expanded the site of resistance by including the family, personal, and community, and acts of resistance by including interconnections within those sites.

The concept of everyday resistance is important as it reframes resistance as something which is a part of everyday existence rather than something that exists outside of normal life. Instead of resistance as external to the routine of life, resistance is an integral part of daily activity. Further, Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) note a criticism of Scott creates a dichotomy between everyday resistance and public resistance. Such a dichotomised understanding of resistance overlooks the ways in which everyday and public resistance can become one another, but also how everyday existence exists even within public events such as social movements (Simi and Futrell, 2009). Examining feminist resistance provides productive insights into the range of resistance practices undertaken by women. Feminists have stressed that women’s resistance occurs simultaneously across multiple levels from the everyday to the overt-collective. (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2010). Thus, the everyday should be considered as part of a complex, and overlapping spectrum of resistance ranging from covert acts – even invisible acts – to open rebellion. During the Scottish independence campaign, feminists were not only public activists for the cause, but, they also performed acts of everyday resistance to undermine power relations found within the movement. But, while understanding everyday resistance is an essential aspect of conceptualising resistance as a spectrum of activity, there is a risk in situating everyday



resistance as the (only) form of resistance undertaken by subalterns or marginalised groups such as women (Gutmann, 1993).

Agarwal (1994) reminds us that women's resistance has always included the entire spectrum from covert-individual to overt-collective acts. Moreover, she cautions against romanticisation of everyday acts and questions whether they can have any significant political impact. Similarly, Mittelman (1998: 851) asks this of everyday resistance: "if the consequences are fully felt only in the *longue durée*, how long will that be?" Mittleman makes case that trying to construct collective forms of resistance can be more effective in changing peoples' lives. These researchers highlight the danger of fetishizing everyday resistance, or the failure to consider the spectrum of resistance from the micro to the macro level. It is also important to note that feminists such as Motta (2011) advocate engagement with the everyday as a way to rebuild group solidarity and community, and not just to focus on individual everyday acts.

It is important, therefore, to consider how resistance is interconnected with power, particularly as power works not merely through externally imposed top-down structures such as the state, but, through everyday social relations. Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony is useful in considering how resistance faces the constraints of power. Hegemony refers to the process through which social identities, relations and structures are constituted by the dominant classes. Feminist scholars have emphasised the gendered and multiple nature of these processes which maintain men's dominance in society (Ledwith, 2009). Hegemony operates not through external force, but, by the institutions of civil society such as the family, media or school, yet, as a continually changing process hegemony changes through each historical context. As hegemonic processes are never complete, they always exist in tension with alternative understandings of social life. This understanding of hegemony as always in tension with resistance is important in differentiating the concept from the idea of false consciousness which has been criticised as deterministic and unable to account for change (Abrams, 1989).

Such an understanding of hegemony as distinct from false consciousness is important in integrating the concepts of everyday resistance and hegemony. Scott (1990) argued that subalterns are politically conscious and demonstrate autonomous agency in undertaking acts of



everyday resistance, and only maintain a public image of consent to systems of domination. Moreover, Scott explicitly critiques the concept of hegemony, which he frames as determinist or as requiring the absolute internalisation of the ideology of the dominant class by subaltern subjects, therefore, not permitting space for conflict or change. However, Haynes and Prakash (1992) argue that Scott misunderstands the concept of hegemony, emphasising that conflict is an intrinsic aspect of hegemonic processes. Hegemonic ideas, or the common sense of a society, are an effect of a subject’s multiple social positions, but are not absolute, rather allow room for agency and resistance. Everyday resistance, therefore, exists not in contradiction with hegemony, rather can be conditioned by it (Mitchell, 1990). Additionally, the complex tension between hegemony and resistance can result in contradictory consciousness where a subject resists some forms of power relations, but, internalises and reinforces others (Chin and Mittelman, 1997). In light of this, everyday resistance and hegemony are not contradictory concepts, but can be reformulated as complementary. Under correct conditions, various everyday acts can come together in collective open rebellion resulting in structural change. Such resistance emerges in the everyday and can be built to form a collective, counter-hegemonic common sense.

In Britain the resurgence of feminist activity after the 2008 economic crisis that formed the antecedents to feminism in the Scottish independence campaign, took place alongside the emergence of new protest movements and an intensification of neoliberal reforms across Britain. Study of the resurgence is in its early stages, but, there appears to be a prominent strand with a clearer left-wing orientation and increased emphasis on global structural concepts such as patriarchy, capitalism or white supremacy with the acknowledgment of difference within such categories (Mitchell, 2013). Resistance practices have tended to focus on the individual, particularly with the emphasis on the tactic of ‘calling out’ (Munro, 2013). Call outs are when individuals publicly challenge the oppressive speech or behaviour of other individuals. Moreover, individuals are encouraged to examine and change their own behaviour and speech to avoid reinforcing privilege. Such practices can be seen as everyday resistance as they are at individual level, usually relatively covert acts that undermine power. However, neoliberalism is also a hegemonic project





which seeks to reconstitute subjectivities (Hall, 1988). Feminist research suggests that women, including feminists, are reshaped as neoliberal, self-responsible, self-managing subjects (Gill, 2008; Gill and Scharff, 2011). It is a combination of the invocation of radical understanding of concept such as patriarchy, but a neoliberal focus on resistance as self-responsibility and individual growth dominated feminist radicalism in the independence campaign. Therefore, while acts aiming to resist gendered power relations existed throughout the campaign, feminist subjectivities remained shaped by hegemonic neoliberal understanding of individualism and self-transformation, despite the explicit opposition of feminists to neoliberalism. In addition, neoliberal subjectivities were also resisted, as some interviewees argued for a collective feminist resistance.

## Research and Methodology

This study emerged from my own experience as a feminist activist in Scotland over the past ten years, as well as my own involvement in the independence movement. Currently based between Barcelona and Glasgow, I am a member of and participated in the Radical Independence Campaign. The data presented in this article is taken from thirty-seven qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with pro-independence activists which is part of a larger study examining feminist organising during the Scottish independence campaign. Thirty of the interviews were with self-identified feminist radicals and four were with pro-independence members of the feminist Third Sector who were also active with Women for Independence. The remaining three interviews were with key male RIC organisers and spokespersons. This article may, therefore, be considered as a piece of insider researcher as I am a member of the group I am researching (Aguilar, 1981). Insider research is particularly open to a charge of bias, as the researcher may experience conflicted loyalties, hesitancy in being negative about their own community or unable to question practices which appear commonplace (Walsh, 2004). However, it must be noted that feminists question the very claim of researcher's objectivity by arguing that all research is inherently biased (Haraway, 1988). As a result, feminist research necessitates the continual reflection on the researchers' own biases and social location.





Also, the insider/outsider binary has been questioned, as community status is always fluid and changing (Naples, 1996). As RIC is a broad coalition I have closer political and personal connections with some groups, and group-members than others. Therefore, I had an ambiguous insider/outsider position that shifted depending on who I was interviewing. My (shifting) insider status may have brought some advantage in overcoming the hesitancy some activists have about having their words misused in an academic context (Eschle and Maignascha, 2010). My identity as a feminist, radical and an independence supporter was cited by several interviewees as a way of making activist feel more comfortable. Of course, participants could have also been nervous about criticising a group of which I am a member, and this may have affected their presentation of ideas. However, during my research I found participants to be more willing to discuss negative aspects of the groups I was a member of – RIC in particular.

It is recognised that the interviews inevitably reflect power hierarchies, and my position as a white, middle class researcher created a particular imbalance between interviewee and interviewer. Nevertheless, power never goes entirely in one direction and in order to limit power hierarchies I ensured all participants had an information sheet, that they were aware of what the research entailed, and that they gave informed consent to participation. Additionally, I sent a copy of the completed transcript to the interviewee to edit as they saw fit, allowing them a degree of control over what information ended up in the public realm. Most interviewees made no changes to their transcripts while others made changes based on ensuring anonymity rather than to the content of the interview. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman, 1997).

Interviews lasted between twenty minutes and two hours, with participants aged between twenty and seventy-two. All interviews took place during the referendum campaign, between May and September of 2014. I initially recruited participants by approaching my own contacts within the pro-independence radical left in Glasgow and asked them to facilitate further contacts-known as snowballing (Browne, 2005). I also identified key activists and organisations and contacted them via email as well as by asking them to facilitate contacts. Interviews were focused on women’s



participation, feminism in the independence campaign as well as contemporary feminist organising in Scotland more generally. Of the thirty interviews with feminist radicals, twenty were members of RIC at the time of their interview. A further seven had been members of RIC, but, had either dropped out or only peripherally involved due to the marginalisation of feminism or misogynistic behaviour of men in RIC. Three interviewees chose not to join RIC, citing the presence of abusive men and the failure to integrate feminist politics. Of the thirty interviewees, twenty-two participated in WFI, some peripherally, but, others had positions as organisers or more prominent activists. A pseudonym has been assigned to all interviewees in order to preserve anonymity.

## **Alliances and Constraints:**

### **Women for Independence**

During the independence referendum debate many feminist radicals joined the primary Scottish pro-independence women's group Women for Independence (WFI). As indicated by its full name, Women for Independence/Independence for Women, WFI was founded to challenge the male dominance and lack of gendered analysis in the independence movement. A broad coalition open to all self-identified women, WFI provides a women-only space and advocates for more women in Scottish public and political life. RIC organisers and spokespeople have supported and celebrated WFI with their leading organiser, Robert, stating "we have a very close relationship with Women for Independence... [WFI] should obviously be encouraged within the independence debate and in terms of the arguments around it" (interview, June 25, 2014). Additionally, some interviewees praised the role played by WFI in bringing a gendered perspective to the independence campaign. WFI successfully mobilised a high number of women behind a demand for equality of gender participation and representation. Yet, the emphasis on the importance of appealing to all women to win a "Yes vote" for independence was also perceived by some feminist radicals to constrain the development of feminist resistance within boundaries tolerated by the mainstream campaign. The desire to appeal to all women resulted in the marginalisation of working class and women of colour. Alternative forms of feminism



could be framed as antagonistic as they challenged the unity of women and were, therefore, considered negative for the campaign.

Women for Independence state on their website that their aim is to “promote the causes of Scottish independence and other constitutional changes likely to contribute to greater democracy and home-rule for Scotland, gender equality and social justice,” which will be achieved “by working to increase women’s political engagement, nationally and in communities” (Women for Independence, 2015). The organisation was officially launched in September 2012 because the founders felt the “Yes campaign” was not adequately taking a gendered perspective or including women’s voices in the campaign. As a result, WFI was set up as an autonomous movement that is separate from “Yes Scotland,” and with the aim of developing an independent agenda, comprising members with different political outlooks.

WFI focused resistance practices on providing women a voice in the independence campaign. WFI provided speakers for formal political meetings, but, also organised informal events such as coffee mornings to attract women marginalised by male dominance in traditional political settings. Moreover, their online forums and blog provided a further space for women to enter political discussion. The importance WFI as a woman only space was noted by several interviewees. One of the self-identified working class feminist Kerry stated, “you can converse in a different way” (interview, 10 June, 2014) in the absence of men, particularly in a less confrontational manner. Additionally, women did not need to spend as much of their time and energy justifying and explaining feminism as they did in mixed gender groups. Such women-only spaces allowed women the space to discuss and develop certain feminist ideas, and build confidence in women to articulate such ideas in the public sphere.

WFI encouraged women to self-organise events, providing space for women to develop alternative modes of political participation. RIC activist Kerry noted the value of the space provided by WFI stating:

I want to have one [a women’s meeting] that isn’t specifically about independence, just women I know and just interesting motivated women, that’s so broad, basically every women I have ever met, basically I want





to start that where everyone brings something to eat, we all sit down together, break bread and talk about the state of the world and what is important to us rather than the specific constitutional question (interview, 10 June, 2014)

The open structure of WFI permitted Kerry the space to go beyond the political confines of the independence campaign and permit women to define what they considered political. Yet, other activists expressed frustration at a sense that feminism was placed outside of the political realm by WFI:

it turns into we don't want politics, we want community ventures with discussion groups, where women feel included, it doesn't really tackle the real issues it just sort of invokes this wonderful world of women having chats. (Alison, interview, 06 May, 2014)

In this view WFI meetings did not always advance a feminist understanding of gender equality. However, Kaplan (1982) developed the idea of a "female consciousness" where women may reject politics, yet, be drawn into activism around conventional understandings of women's roles as they demand the rights that go with that role. Such activity can result in further politicisation with the awakening of a gender consciousness. Thus, drawing women into self-organisation can allow the space for the development of a feminist consciousness.

Nonetheless, the relatively narrow political standpoint of the national WFI campaign was experienced as a constraint on the development of a feminist radical resistance by some interviewees. In particular, a central point of tension emerged as to whether WFI only aimed to encourage women to vote "yes" in the referendum or if it was also using the independence debate to promote gender equality. Alison attended early WFI meetings, but, later dropped out because she felt it had a very narrow political focus, and had this to say:

I was at the meeting where we were setting that up [WFI], and there were problems because people had different types of feminism but also because some people called themselves feminists and other people from the SNP just thought they needed a women's group and I feel like





Women for Independence developed along very shaky lines because of that disagreement, so one of the first things they decided, or really the only thing that anyone could agree on was a listening exercise which was about listening to women and what they wanted, which I felt was a bit conservative and didn't really work because no one really did it and I think after that Women for Independence, it became more and more just a group of women, sort of older women, who used to be involved in politics and wanted to be involved in politics and maybe is now seen a bit, like a group of careerists or people who just want their voices to be heard but isn't necessarily very open. (Interview, May 6, 2014)

While WFI officially aims to enhance gender equality, that aim frequently became subsumed in merely persuading women to vote “yes”. While listening to women is an intrinsic aspect of feminist organising, if it is detached from feminist ideology it can have a conservative pull because it will arch towards reinforcing rather than challenging the status quo of women's opinions. Due to differing political views it was difficult to gain general agreement on political aims resulting in the decision to focus primarily on equality of gender representation and participation. Sophie, in response to being asked for her opinion on WFI, commented,

The difficulty is, pretty much the only things we do agree on are the total basics like women should be represented more, a bit on anti-austerity with the more left-liberal ones, so what do you do? You go to the lowest common denominator 'cause that's what you can agree on and we all end up talking incessantly about representation even though we all know it's kinda bullshit. Meanwhile we have this mass of politicised young women wanting something much more. (Interview, 11 June, 2014)

Rather than representing the unity of women and feminists to promote a certain demand, the focus on representation is framed as shutting down a broader conversation about gender. O'Keefe (2013) discusses the concept of “lowest common denominator” politics where in order to build unity and facilitate dialogue, feminists appeal to the lowest common uniting factor among women and their gender. Yet, this appeal sidelines contentious topics, complex identities, and differing priorities for



differing groups of women. The written material of WFI was relatively sparse, coming largely in the form of leaflets and blog. The leaflets and blog, alongside endorsing the anti-austerity and anti-nuclear position of “Yes Scotland,” promoted the importance of gender equality in representation (McAngus and Rummery, 2015).<sup>2</sup> Moreover, speeches from key WFI representatives largely focused on encouraging gender equality in representation, and the enshrining of gender equality in a proposed Scottish constitution (McAngus and Rummery, 2015). While these positions are important aspects of feminism, the relatively narrow focus supports the view of some interviewees that there was a limited space for alternative feminism that prioritised different issues.

The inclusiveness of WFI was called into question by some interviewees who argued that efforts to include everybody resulted in the exclusion of many. In this view, including all women resulted in a tendency to overlook the real existing power relations which divide women. Some activists protested that the class-neutral approach of WFI in fact privileged middle class women’s voices. RIC activist, and self-identified working class feminist, Teresa, mentioned that she didn’t go to a local WFI event “because of the venue and the types of women it attracted, certainly she [the speaker] was speaking to those women but she wasn’t talking to me” (interview, June 16, 2014). The respondent noted that sometimes left wing speakers were promoted by WFI, but, the overall politics made her unlikely to attend events. Working class, black, and socialist feminists have criticised women’s and feminist movements for being dominated by middle class, white women that side-lines working class or black issues (hooks, 2000; Brenner, 2000). White, middle class women are more likely to have their voices heard, are more likely to take leadership positions, and their issues are seen as universal, whereas others are considered sectional. Several women of colour discussed a similar dynamic of marginalisation with Faiza citing a “tokenistic” attitude in

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<sup>2</sup> In the aftermath of the independence referendum WFI has expanded its political focus to some extent. A new website and blog launched in early 2015 discuss support for Syrian refugees and anti-fracking campaigns. Moreover, WFI as an organisation agreed to formally support the reform of abortion laws and an end to women’s imprisonment. <http://www.womenforindependence.org/blog>



WFI and across the independence campaign (interview, 13 May, 2014). Teresa described in detail the problem with building an organisation simply around those who identify as women:

In general it's no enough to just be a woman, it's no enough to identify as a woman, it's not enough and that's what I meant by women who become like men who don't do anything to further women, it's no enough to have the workings of a woman and to identify yourself as a woman, you have to be about women, and I've done stuff about people experiencing domestic abuse, working with children actually experiencing domestic abuse, or their mothers have experienced it and they've grown up in that household you know, ...but you know what, I want to work with women and where are women just now? Women are in poverty and I'm in welfare rights, so I'm working with women day in, day out... it's about, I hate empowerment, I hate that word but you know what I mean, furthering women, that's what it's about, I'm actually working with women every single day (interview, 16 June, 2014)

Women are never constructed solely as women, but their identity is always classed and racialized (Skeggs, 1997). However, WFI was perceived to marginalise the viewpoints and politics of left wing, working class, and women of colour. As a result, it controlled the political space for feminism, which minimised the ability of feminist resistance to challenge dominant power structures in and beyond the independence campaign.

Additionally, WFI has been unable to launch a substantial challenge to the political outlook of the “Yes campaign” due to a narrative of unity in order to gain a “yes” vote. WFI has repeatedly emphasised their autonomous status and especially from the SNP driven “Yes Scotland,” and WFI members has criticised the SNP on policies related to gender. Thus, WFI activist Eilidh, referring to an SNP proposal to introduce 30 hours of free childcare per week for one to five year olds, said women were “understandably resentful that women and the women’s vote was being summarised by a move on childcare” (interview, 12 September, 2014). Moreover, WFI launched a campaign after the referendum against SNP plans for a new women’s super-prison. However, there was little



overt criticism of the overall politics of the SNP, and by extension the mainstream “Yes campaign.” This ambiguity in critique of the SNP is partially due to WFI containing SNP members. However, it is also due to the attempt to appeal to all women, with WFI activist Hannah stating “you could have a Tory [conservative] women and she is voting no but she is still a woman ...it doesn’t mean you can’t talk them round [to a yes vote]” (interview 22 May, 2014). This appeal to unity means while some individuals in WFI have, or rhetorically invoke, radical politics, but, these are not promoted at the collective level by the group. The separation from the SNP has been further called into question in the aftermath of the referendum. After the defeat of the campaign many Yes campaigners joined the SNP quadrupling its membership in six months (The Scotsman, 2015), and this number included many WFI campaigners. In the British General Elections of May 2015 the SNP won an unprecedented 56 out of 59 seats. As 11 of the 21 women SNP MPs elected were connected to WFI, including a co-founder and prominent organiser. But, questions have been raised about the maintenance of critical distance from the governing party.

The appeal to unity within the independence campaign in order to win the Yes vote” also operated to frame WFI as the ‘acceptable’ face of women’s organising which in turn marginalised other feminisms. Sophie discussed how “They’re [WFI] a little bit wet, but [that is] also needed” (interview, 11 June, 2014) in order to win a “Yes vote” precisely because they do not promote an antagonistic or challenging vision of feminism. Many RIC feminists expressed a desire for a feminism which would challenge dominant structures of capitalism or misogyny. Yet there was a strong sense of worry from about being considered sectarian or harming the unity of women’s voice by organising separately. For instance,

I don’t know if there would need to be a separate, maybe an internal feminist thing but I think there is a problem if it is an external visible thing and you have Women for Independence, it’s seen as duplicating the same areas. (Siobhan, interview, 27 May, 2014)



I know one of the reasons they [RIC] don't talk about women's issues that much is because there's Women for Independence and you don't want to step on people's toes, you know they have their niche and RIC's got theirs. (Hannah, interview, 22 May, 2014)

WFI is framed as sufficiently representing 'women's issues' and women's voices in the campaign. The idea that women may have different, sometimes competing, political visions is lost and alternative feminist organisations are framed as having a negative impact on the movement. While this was effective in building WFI as a strong organisation which involved a high number of women, the politics of WFI were also seen as the only possible form of women's resistance.

Participation in Women for Independence allowed feminist radicals to build connections with a wide group of women across Scotland. The creation of a self-identified women only space allowed for women to organise and raise different political issues which were marginalised in the rest of the movement. Moreover, the openness of WFI resulted in a mass mobilisation of women who became involved in political discussion in the public sphere often for the first time. The increase in women in the public sphere disrupted the dominance of male voices and bodies, which demonstrated a form of feminist resistance with their presence. This way, WFI also illustrates how resistance is always intersectional as they resist gendered power relations while accommodating others of different class or race. As with previous debates between various radical and liberal feminisms, the success of WFI in promoting a limited resistance to gendered power relations existed in tension with its marginalisation of a radical conception of feminism. The appeal to unity resulted in the promotion of a class and race neutral understanding of feminism, which formed other feminisms as contentious and negative for the "Yes movement." WFI therefore functioned well for both "Yes Scotland," and RIC as they allowed both aspects of the campaign to present themselves as taking women seriously and incorporating demands for equal gender representation without having their central politics challenged. Women's dissent was managed, as expression was given to certain demands while closing down space for a broader political discussion.



## Building a Feminist Radical Resistance?

The limits of WFI meant many feminist radicals sought other forums to advance alternative forms of resistance. Activity was predominantly, but, not exclusively focused around the Radical Independence Campaign, which made a class-centred discussion rather than a nationalist one for independence. However, feminism was marginalised within RIC (Morrison, 2015). Thus, feminist radicals sought to challenge the lack of a gendered, race and LGBTQ+ analysis in RIC, but also in Scottish society more broadly. There was no explicitly pro-independence feminist radical organised group, yet, many feminists participated in various forms of feminist collectives alongside the independence movement. Resistance focused on two main interconnected areas: first by ensuring women's equal representation and participation, and second by challenging misogynist behaviour within and beyond RIC. But, this section argues that the dominance of a discourse of individualism limited feminist political praxis. While there was rhetorical invocation of systemic structures of oppression, such as capitalism or patriarchy, undue focus was placed on persuading individuals to change their personal speech and acts. Contesting individual behaviour or speech is an example of everyday resistance as it is an individual, covert act aiming to undermine gendered power relations. However, the focus on individual self-responsibility, rather than collective action to challenge power in interpersonal or intimate relations, also reflects neoliberal personhood illustrating how such individual acts remain shaped by hegemonic neoliberal patriarchy.

The Radical Independence Campaign was originally launched as a one-day conference in Glasgow in November 2012. As a loose and broad coalition of the Scottish left, RIC comprised socialists, anarchists, Greens, and independent activists from varying social movements and organisations. The success of the conference led to the development of autonomously operating local groups across Scotland. A national forum made up of representatives from local groups was established in early 2014 that met every 4 to 6 weeks, and directed national activity. RIC held traditional political meetings with formal speakers alongside alternative events with comedians, singers, and theatre performers. Significantly, RIC organised a series of mass canvasses in the most deprived areas of Scotland. Polling data suggested that citizens of poorer areas were more



likely to vote yes to independence, but they also had with a very low voter registration and turn out in elections. RIC sought to mobilise those communities behind their vision of decisive political and social change (Sangha and Jamieson, 2014; Lynch, 2015).

In the early stages of the campaign a 50:50 policy was adopted and implemented by RIC organisers. This meant that at least 50% of people on any RIC platform had to be women. However, the integration of 50:50 illustrates the limits of focusing on technocratic strategies of resistance. Levy has called approaches to gender relations technocratic when solutions are “disconnected from the critical process surrounding gender relations” (1998: 254). Clearly, feminists in RIC had a critical understanding of gender relations. Yet this perspective tended to be side-lined as 50:50 was used to promote the image of a gender equal movement without examining how inequality in the campaign was reproduced. The integration of 50:50 has not, therefore, been used to increase the feminist politics of the campaign, instead they have been used to marginalise them (Morrison, 2015). The quick, top-down implementation also resulted in the initial feminist-led surge fading from view. Alison commented that in the early stages,

There was quite a lot of voices within things like RIC that were wanting there to be more women but I feel *quite* strongly that now that has died down a lot ...and there is a sort of, there is a feeling that that is done or that the message has got across and there's not an awful lot of criticism (emphasis in original interview, 6 May, 2014)

As the central focus had been on 50:50, its quick integration caused some difficulty in expanding past the single issue into a broader feminist movement. While the implementation of 50:50 has resulted in RIC having a high proportion of high profile women organisers and speakers that challenge male domination of the left, it has not increased the power of feminism within the movement.

A key focus of feminist resistance in RIC was the creation of a “safer spaces” policy. RIC is not free from power relations, and gendered behaviours continue to structure the campaign just like in other mixed gender social movements (Eschle and Maiguashca, 2010). A safer spaces policy is an agreed code of behaviour adopted by a group which typically





includes a statement against oppressive language or behaviour and action to be taken if the code is violated, thus, aiming to create a safer more inclusive environment for those from oppressed groups. A safer spaces policy was adopted by RIC, although not without opposition from some men, as described by Samantha who was a representative at the national forum,

[W]e had national forum of RIC when all the national groups come together, someone had put forward a safer spaces policy which was really just a policy that branches could and should adopt to say 'eh we won't tolerate people being bad to each other within this campaign and here are some procedures if that does happen' and we had a discussion at that national forum where exclusively men said 'I don't understand why we need this, it's a silly idea' and literally shouted across the whole room at each other about how safer spaces was a ridiculous idea, meanwhile the women in the room sat back for a little while, rolling our eyes and crossing our arms and thinking it was ridiculous and after they had all done their shouting bit we stepped in and said this is why, and it passed, it is policy. (Interview, 10 June, 2014)

The prevalence of everyday patriarchal behaviour from RIC men in shouting over women is evident, as is the everyday resistance to such behaviour through acts such as eye rolling. Moreover, the policy provided an opportunity to discuss the behaviour of activists and raise awareness of how women and other oppressed groups may be marginalised. The educative value of safer spaces was emphasised by other activists in creating a space to discuss everyday behaviour, which is otherwise difficult to raise in political meetings.

However, initial resistance from some men towards safer spaces policies does not mean that the policy cannot be used by men instrumentally. Organisations could implement a safer spaces policy to provide the superficial appearance of adherence to feminist politics but fail to change the underlying structures which sustain gendered inequality. A clear example of the potential for safer spaces to be used to project the image of a feminist conscious organisation while not tackling the underlying issues can be found in the attitude towards safer spaces by key





organisers who are men in RIC. Iain emphasised that he was committed to the agenda of safer spaces which was necessary for the safe and successful running of an organisation. However, while discussing safer spaces and misogyny internal to the left he stated,

All of this [safer spaces and misogyny on the left] is part of a big learning curve not just for individuals but for the entire left, not just for the left in Britain, but actually for the left internationally, and I think generally we've done quite well, and I think the reason we've done quite well, the way I would evidence that is that we've not had incidents piling up, so despite the breadth of it, the nature of it, the numbers of people involved and so on, we've not had issues piling up, we've really had one issue and as I say I think there are mental health issues attached to that [the man in question], so that, do you know what I mean, I'd say that the days of saying to women, oh just get on with it, that's over. (Interview, 23 June, 2014)

However, stress was placed on the fact that only one person was reported as a problem to the safer spaces committee as evidence that there was not a significant problem with misogynist or patriarchal behaviour in the movement. Yet, many interviewees talked at length about problems they faced with men, for example, repeatedly interrupting and ignoring women in meetings or demanding they be given the right to make a speech rather than allow more people to participate in a discussion. Iain therefore overlooks the power relations which may make it difficult to report behaviour. Instead, RIC is promoted as having a strong feminist consciousness with few problems with internal misogyny without having a serious commitment to tackling the dominant behaviour of men in the movement.

Safer spaces when detached from a wider critical feminist movement can have an individualising impact on feminist resistance. Some feminist activists mentioned reservations to the entire process as they felt that a disproportionate level of feminist energy was diverted into writing a document that basically asked members not be sexist. The focus that was given to safer spaces is representative of the emphasis on reforming individual behaviour in men (and women) disassociated from critique of the structures that reproduce such behaviour.). Baden and Goetz (1997)





highlight the potential for the deployment of gender in policy formation to have a depoliticising impact when gender-disaggregated data is used but without consideration of power, ideology, and how subordination is reproduced. A similar pattern can be traced in the adoption of safer spaces by social movements. While the different experiences of genders are taken into account, it overlooks, and even obscures questions of why and how oppression is reproduced.

Aside from 50:50 and safer spaces there were many other small instances of resistance from feminist radicals in and beyond RIC during the referendum campaign. These acts were varied but included raising comments and issues in branch meetings, running branch or public talks on feminism, writing and circulating blogs and online activity such as Twitter debates. However, such acts were undertaken at the individual level, so they depended on a small number of confident feminists advocating a feminist message. Women were often isolated and without a substantial feminist support network behind them. Interviewees such as Aileen mentioned a pressure to “be the voice” (interview, 5 July, 2014) of feminism and ensure she raised a feminist point or analysis of a topic under discussion. In another case Melissa stated she felt she was “speaking for feminism a lot” (interview, 9 June, 2014). These two quotes illustrate how feminist women are often labelled the ‘feminist’ separate from the rest of the group and their voice is considered to be the voice of feminism. While feminists undoubtedly helped prevent the complete marginalisation of feminism in RIC and the broader campaign, they were also side-lined into being representative of women and delegitimised as full members of the movement.

The development of a collective feminist resistance was impeded by a dominant focus on the reform of individual behaviour as the primary resistance strategy. Many feminists advanced the idea that to stop the oppression of women, men must change their own personal behaviour. For example, Alexandra stated,

I can say that the only way that this feminism can become understood is if men listen and then realise their privilege and realise that their performance of gender in everything, if its kicking about the office, jumping about the roof of the Scottish parliament, getting eccied [tak-





ing drugs] at parties, everything, the way they perform their gender impacts on women and LGBT, trans people, whoever, and understand that is a social construct and it's not a given, and they need to realise how, how they act might disempower women (interview, 27 June, 2014)

While understanding gender as a social construct is shared by many feminists, challenging patriarchy by asking others to recognise their privilege and change their behaviour was the primary form of activism for many feminists. Similarly, Zainab when asked about feminist activism discussed how she had asked men to “listen to women” (interview, 21 June, 2014), and learn how to change their speech and acts. Challenging individual manifestations of misogyny has long been an important aspect of feminist activism as they reproduce gendered power relations. However, an often reductive focus on personal behaviour was found in many feminist radicals where other forms of activism were indefinitely side-lined due to the belief that men in the movement had to change first. Bergfield (2013) has called this “the negation of politics” as it ignores the societal level to challenge individuals. Reed (2010) identified a similar pattern in anti-racist activism and argued calls for recognition and reformation of individual behaviour is a form of non-political politics which is satisfied with the naming of inequality rather than specifying the mechanisms which produce them. As a result, challenging inequality is reduced to individuals signalling their own goodness – a public recognition of how privilege works in their own life or the lives of those around them.

At its extreme the focus on self-transformation can be debilitating to building a wider feminist movement as it marginalises projects of movement-building. Smith (2013) discussed how the confession of privilege in anti-racism and feminist organising comes to substitute for political action to dismantle structures of domination. Confessions of privilege comes from awareness of power structures, but, collective action is displaced by the emphasis on individual transformation, even reinforcing privileged subjects as the subjects capable of self-reflection. When asked about her involvement in feminist activism, non-RIC aligned feminist radical, Lorna, stated “I have checked my privilege” (interview, 15 May, 2014). She explained she was aware of and read up on how her whiteness gained her advantage within the feminist and other movements. Her



activism focused on challenging others, particularly in activist groups but also in other spheres, online and offline, to see their privilege and change their behaviour. Such emphasis also frames activism in terms of the self-responsibility and self-transformation that are emblematic of neoliberal subjectivity (Gill and Scharff, 2011). Mhairi's feminist group was not collectively affiliated to the independence campaign, but when asked about their activity she commented:

We're trans inclusive, an intersectional feminist group, and online on the Facebook group there's an account that's been set up to ban anyone who is transphobic or homophobic or anything if they cause problems in the group (interview, 4 July, 2014)

Resistance to manifestations of privilege again focuses on calling participant's behaviour to account. Written material from feminist radicals during the independence campaign was limited, reflecting the marginalisation of feminism in RIC, but, also possibly the lack of formal feminist organisation. Nonetheless, the literature which emerged, primarily in the form of blogs, displayed a tendency towards centring individual behaviour. Thus, in the only blog post by an RIC group directly addressing feminism, McFarlane (2015) discussed "making space feminist" (p. 3). While mentioning that independence participants could attend feminist events or provide childcare, the post gave substantial space to how individuals may change their behaviour in order to make campaign space more inclusive of women. Outside of RIC, a pro-independence feminist radical voices were the non-RIC aligned blog "A Thousand Flowers" (ATF) founded on 8<sup>th</sup> of March 2013, international women's day. ATF is described as a personal blog rather than part of a movement, but, was one of few explicitly pro-independence feminist radical voices in the independence movement. During the independence campaign ATF wrote several critiques of misogyny in the left, yet the solutions tended to focus on the personal level. For example, men were encouraged to "drop the macho crap" (ATF, 2013a), people to educate themselves on privilege (ATF, 2013b) and safer spaces policies encouraged (ATF, 2014). It is not to suggest that groups should not strive to be inclusive or challenge oppressive speech or acts. However, the response to structural domination has been individualised and does not consider how to challenge the



systems which reproduce oppression. Interviewees agreed when asked that patriarchy (or capitalism or white supremacy) is structural and needs to be challenged collectively. Yet, aside from rhetorical invocation, there was very limited focus on systems of oppression or how they might be challenged. Any transformational politics will involve changing the way individuals behave, yet this must be part of a broader movement that seeks to challenge structures underpinning such behaviour.

Feminism is not a homogenous group, and some interviewees – including both members and non-members of RIC – critiqued what they perceived as individualism in practices of feminist resistance. For example, Sophie commented how she believed a focus purely on individuals had been debilitating for the feminist movement in general and around independence:

[Women] go to these meetings because they see something wrong in the world and they want to do something about it, and they don't want to spend the whole time poring through everybody's sexual history to see if they might be a predator, but nothing about structure or how to change it, and that's why I found it difficult to engage in the end because there's no way you're going to get any working class women turning up to those meetings and staying very long, and by working class I mean essentially most people who work, because they just couldn't be bothered with it, it's so time consuming and it's minutia that goes nowhere, like I couldn't deal with it because coming back from work after a day and listening to someone...[sentence unfinished on recording, interview, 11 June, 2014].

The claim of feminist radicals to be inclusive is called into question as a class divide is identified in feminist meetings. The centring of individual privilege contradictorily works to marginalise those women with less privilege. The minutia in focusing on small acts of privilege or oppression is experienced as exclusionary rather than inclusionary, and does not reflect the priorities of working class women. Similarly, Manjit pointed out there were ‘really only a few’ (interview, 28 May, 2014) women of colour involved in RIC, and also in various feminist groups. She questioned the very outcome of their emphasis on inclusion.



The latter stages of the referendum debate saw a few tentative attempts to self-organise feminist radicals with an orientation towards challenging structures of oppression. There were some attempts to organise autonomous women's space, online and offline. Aileen, for example, set up a women-only Facebook group for pro-independence feminists to provide a "place for women to discuss issues connected with feminism and independence" (interview, 5 July, 2014). Stephanie discussed attempts to develop a radical form of the WFI meetings,

there are a bunch of women in the RIC group who are a bit mental, and we are trying to sort out our own women for independence thing where we can enjoy ourselves a bit (interview, 9 June, 2014)

Stephanie emphasised that the event would allow them the space to establish the crucial issues for themselves as women and local community organisers. However, she also indicated connections to systemic issues mentioning the need for action against rent prices. Additionally, Boyd and May (2014) published a short manifesto called the "Scottish Independence: a feminist response" aiming to resist both the marginalisation of gender in RIC, and the dominance of individualism in feminism. Moreover, the book sparked a review post on a local RIC group blog arguing for the campaign to integrate feminist politics (Radical Independence Dumfries and Galloway, 2014). Other interviewees spoke of a desire to have an organised 'left wing women's group' (Teresa, interview, 16 July 2014). In the aftermath of the referendum the Scottish Left Project was started by some RIC activists as a forum to discuss advancing a socialist challenge in Scotland. An autonomous women's group was also established indicating some potential for the development of a collective feminist praxis. It remains to be seen whether this will develop an alternative understanding of feminist resistance in the pro-independence left.

Feminist politics are not fixed but exist in a constant state of flux inside and outside of RIC, and feminist radicals do not speak with one voice. RIC feminists had significant success in promoting 50:50 and safer spaces policies. These policies have drawn some attention to issues of representation of women, and highlighted how radical spaces continue to be structured by gendered power hierarchies. Yet, the individualist focus of feminism resulted in undue stress on the public recognition



of privilege. The dominant understanding of resistance as self-transformation divorced from transformation of social, political, and economic structures impeded feminist praxis. Much feminist resistance was thus reduced to discussing individual privilege in themselves and others; such discussions only reflected the imprint of neoliberal subjectivity. While a structural understanding of oppression continued to underpin understandings of privilege, political projects to develop resistance at the systemic level were indefinitely displaced. Nonetheless, alternative conceptions of resistance continued to exist, with many interviewees declaring a desire to go beyond the focus on the self. Albeit in a very late stage of the campaign, the formation of autonomous space began to provide a voice and build the knowledge of individual privilege into a collective project to transform the structures that reproduce power relations.

## Conclusions

As a mass populist movement against austerity, Scottish independence provided an unexpected arena in which radical activists could publically challenge the dominant economic, social, and political consensus. Despite feminist politics not featuring prominently in any aspect of the independence campaign, feminist radicals were active across multiple forums during the referendum debate. Feminists in contemporary Scotland still struggle on multiple fronts, facing marginalisation of feminism within the RIC and the marginalisation of class within WFI. How to enact intersectionality remains a key point of tension in developing strategies of resistance as feminists in and beyond WFI and RIC struggled to foreground working class and women of colour. As argued by Chin and Mittelman (1997) social identities are always multiple and cannot be understood as additive but they are combinations of identities that express different resistances. What constitutes resistance can depend on the complex intersection at which any given subject is located, as her position is always a combination of different relations of subordination and domination. Feminist resistance undermined certain power relations, particularly the gendered power relations, but reinforced others such as class, and race. Yet, as Coleman and Tucker (2012) maintain, what is understood as resistance depends on the specific context in which a particular act emerges. Thus, the multiple, overlapping and sometimes





contradictory perception of resistance reflects the complexity of the particular social location in which individual feminists find themselves. The analysis, therefore, supports the view that resistance is always inter-sectional and context specific.

As the independence movement continues to unfold post-referendum, alternative feminisms remain overlapping and in tension with one another. Nevertheless, the dominance of certain conceptions of resistance, and the focus on representation and individuals, have thus far limited the advancement of feminist radicalism as a collective project. Feminist radicals undermined gendered power relations at the individual level by challenging themselves and others to consider the power relations in gendered behaviour and speech. As discussed at the start of this article, individual and everyday acts of resistance such as the challenging of patriarchy by feminists illustrate how resistance existed not only in the large public events but in the day to day activities of the campaign. While everyday resistance has traditionally been understood more or less as an internal process and to exist at a smaller scale, examining feminist resistance reveals a more complex image of everyday and public resistance as intricately intertwined. Moreover, the emphasis on interpersonal relations in feminist resistance exclude the range of sites and practices of resistance. There is also an ambiguity in the categorisation of the calling out of behaviour as an act of everyday resistance given that such acts can sometimes occur in the public sphere. Scott (1985) gives the covert or disguised nature of acts as one of the defining features of everyday resistance. Yet, this ambiguity reinforces the idea that resistance exists on a spectrum and can move between levels, or even occupy several levels at the same time.

It is maintained that an analysis of the individual and collective levels is necessary to fully conceptualise resistance. A focus only on the everyday, individual practices of resistance can obscure how such acts are constrained by hegemonic processes. Conceptualising hegemony as an open and fluid process means everyday-covert and collective-overt resistance can be understood as interrelated. Considering the collective level permits an understanding of feminist individualism also as a reflection of neoliberal subjectivities. Feminist radicals tended to reproduce discourses of self-responsibility, self-transformation and self-dependence





in their calling out of patriarchal or other oppressive behaviour. The presence of these discourses again illustrates the intersectional nature of resistance, which existed even when feminist radicals challenged patriarchy. The idea that power relations are structural is left aside or reduced merely to the rhetorical. Such discourses reconstitute and reinforce neoliberal power relations, which are recognised to also reconstitute patriarchal relations (Elson, 1992; Gill, 2008). Transformative resistance must, therefore, attempt to reconstitute collective practices that can effectively undermine neoliberal individualism. As argued by Motta (2011), those aiming for collective practices must remain aware of the individual everyday level and how acts such as sharing or emotional support can provide space for redeveloping collectivity through community. Nonetheless, if these spaces are to grow into a counter-hegemonic movement they must also build beyond the level of individuals to become a collective project.

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## DEBATE - REFLECTIONS

## Ayotzinapa and Resistance

Breaking history with narrative.<sup>1</sup>

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*Abstract*

*The essay examines the murder of three students and the disappearance of another forty-three, who all attended the teacher training college “Escuela Normal Rural of Ayotzinapa”, in Guerrero, Mexico. The crimes took place in September 2014, and the only people accused were the local authorities and police force, supported by organized crime groups. According to the rhetoric of the Mexican state, this tragedy is a natural and normal incident (two words that spell out oblivion). I argue that memory and hope are pillars for the construction of different narratives, with theirs own words and concepts. There exists an urgent need for the creation of a different knowledge which will allow for the breaking with capital and the state in any part of the world. The experience of the relatives of the murdered and missing students can provide a guideline for such a proposal.*

*Keywords: memory, subject, history as narrative, resistance*

The assassination of three persons and the forced disappearance of another forty-three in the town of Iguala in the state of Guerrero, Mexico, shook public opinion in Mexico and abroad. According to a variety of testimonies, news and journalistic reports, the perpetrators can only be understood as inhuman; the impacts of their deeds have been absolutely devastating. Without flinching, various government agents denied any involvement of high-ranking officials and laid the blame on Councillor

<sup>1</sup> This article has been translated from Spanish to English by Anna Holloway. I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers, the editors of JRS, and my colleagues and friends Julia Cottle and John Holloway. Their comments and critique helped me improve this essay. However, all mistakes are only my responsibility.

Jose Luis Abarca and his wife. They also pointed to the involvement of members of the municipal police and of the band of drug dealers known as “Guerreros Unidos” in the executions and disappearances.<sup>2</sup>

The investigations were slow and clumsy. In the end, a high-ranking Mexican official declared that the missing boys had been taken to a landfill, set on fire and their ashes placed in bags that were then thrown into a nearby river. This has never been supported by scientific evidence and recent research indicates that the bag of remains was planted there by a senior government official. This official declaration represents an attempt to ignore the tragedy and mourning and declare an end to the story of these crimes.<sup>3</sup> The message was meant to convey that there was no alternative but to move on. This matter is now in the past, to be forgotten just as any trauma. What lies behind this rhetoric? What about it is intended to undermine and minimize a pain that, without a doubt, cannot be merely forgotten?<sup>4</sup>

Almost thirty years have passed since the announcement of full freedom guaranteed by the neoliberal economy. Yet, the promises of well-being and happiness based on individual achievement and the implementation of democratic systems have not been fulfilled. On the contrary, its results have proven devastating for large sectors of the world’s population. Despite the false promises, a sense of naturalness and normality guides our lives, embedded in what R. Williams (1977) would have called an order of unstable or not total power. Drawing from this order, states have had the nerve to create false expectations of employment, enjoyment and harmony through judicial reforms, based on an illusion of democracy as well as on the construction of a citizenship that exercises its rights and obligations thoroughly and honestly in the permanent constitution of a political community.

In this essay I suggest that we name what obtains, as a result of these illusions, monstrous dimensions that provoke violence, pain,

<sup>2</sup> See *Proceso* (2014)

<sup>3</sup> See the latest report of the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts, which contradicts the findings of said official investigations and directly involves the state in the Ayotzinapa crime. <https://kehuelga.net/diario>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Epo7Hfs8xCK>.



frustration, and rage. They are different sides of individual and collective experiences that result in what Theodor Adorno referred to as “damaged lives” (2005 [1977]). They can provide us with a stark image of the most terrible impacts of the logic of present-day capital which renders everything uniform, wrests us of our humanity, and turns people into things that can be simply added or subtracted, just as the living are counted or the dead forgotten.

This work is a story of our time. It is about the case of the youth who were murdered, the youth who disappeared, who were studying to become teachers at “Isidro Burgos” College in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, Mexico. It is about something that should not have happened, but did; of what happened but must be ignored. Paradoxically, it is the story of an ongoing effort to make us accept that everything must go back to normal; an effort to erase resistance or turn it upside down so that our lives are composed of a multitude of fragments that together create routines that permit us to be prosperous, successful and happy. The fortunate history of the individual that dwells in the routine, standardization and evaluation of productivity is sustained by a system that lacks sensitivity regarding the fabrication of monstrosities.

This essay consists of three parts. The first provides a context for these events through an overview of the Mexican Revolution, one of the most important social revolutions in the twentieth century (Wolf, 1969). The role that public education came to play in the formation of a national community and disciplined citizens proves intimately linked to unfolding of events during that period. Despite concerted attempts at hegemony, there were local places and regions in Mexico that have continued to confront how the forging of a nation resulted in a loss of autonomy. Education, religion, culture and daily life represented arenas of conflict and resistance; a case in point being Guerrero, where Ayotzinapa is located. (see Rubin 1996).

The second focuses on the tragic case of Ayotzinapa. A reconstruction of events as well as their outcomes are presented. The forced disappearance and murder of the youths and others (acts which unfortunately are common in many parts of Mexico) are attributed to organized crime and capitalist interests intent upon exploiting the natural wealth of the region. Finally, the third part explores the connections between these





events and Mexico's "dirty war" in the 1960s and '70s; a period characterized not only by a dirty war, but also a crisis for the populist Mexican state.

As a corollary, the intimate connections between the meaning of regional history and the dominant narrative of the state are explored. Emphasis is placed on the forms of globalizing accumulation, which become solidified in places like Guerrero in a multitude of ways, and the Dantean dimensions of state violence are highlighted. It proves crucial to propose concepts that capture the nature of struggle and hope of the people in order to promote change in our societies.

We argue that faced with pain, death and forced disappearances, in the context of capitalist expansion and its relationship to organized crime in Mexico, there exists an unprecedented violence against opponents of those who profit. Nevertheless, these violent and painful acts do not result in immobilization, but rather exactly the opposite. Tragedy is processed as an experience that constructs histories that create relationships between the past and the present. Through the expression of pain and giving it a name, by exchanging words with others who also resist the transformation into mere objects of a globalizing rationality, knowledge is generated. This knowledge is needed to break from a false objectivism and political posturing that hide behind a mask of liberalism generalized throughout academic practice, as in Mexico.

## **Teachers to make a people; a people to make teachers**

Following the end of the armed conflict of the Mexican revolution in 1920, the elites that were created around the state sought to shape a culturally uniform image of a national political community. Before the revolt, the idea of a strong and centralized state was sustained by the existence of sovereign powers that were based on regional oligarchies, *caudillos* and *caciques* (Alonso 2005: 41). The liberal reforms introduced in the country during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were based on the looting and fragmentation of the indigenous community, which had been recognized as a political category since the colonial state. In the asymmetric relations that characterized the simultaneous existence of





indigenous communities and large *haciendas* during the colony and the first decades of Mexico's independence, members of the regional oligarchies acted as strongmen in order to give protection to the communities against the interests of other powerful oligarchies, obtaining in exchange a loyal popular foundation to be frequently used for their own armies and labour force (Florescano 1997: 371-375; Tutino 1986).

In the context of these unequal relationships, for a long period of time the communities were able to have relative control over their natural resources as well as political autonomy. The basis for their subsistence largely depended on the deployment of a community ethics of sharing “poverty”, sustained by the creation of funds to ensure food, seeds and the tools for new harvests, the support of religious rituals and the payment of taxes or rents to the state or owners of the *haciendas* (see Wolf 2001).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this form of sovereignty was torn apart by the Porfirio Díaz regime's modernizing policies. Interestingly, Díaz, a former caudillo, had come to power with the support of regional forces and alliances. The original communities had largely lost control over the territory and its politics (Katz 1988). As a result, one September afternoon in 1909, during a reunion of peasants in Anenecuilco, Morelos (Womack 1970: 6-7) who were concerned about the loss of their lands and autonomy, the old men that occupied the high ranks of the socio-religious system declared that all their efforts to recover what had been lost within the legal framework of the state had been in vain. Amidst their despair, they agreed to name someone from a younger generation to recover what had been taken from them—in the name of the people and by any means necessary. This decision, that led to the choice of Emiliano Zapata as representative, was a response to a series of past and present injuries that endangered the existence of the rural community (Gilly 2002: 88-92).

However, the armed revolution broke out with a strong popular content, driven by stories of plunder, injustice and hope (see Knight 1996; Joseph and Nugent ed. 1994). When the armed movement came to an end and a dominant elite emerged, the flows of resistance that were contained in these stories were institutionalized in the post-revolutionary state administration that denied specificities, demands and particular eth-



ics, replacing them with policies of uniformity and centralization and expressed in the creation of a supposed national culture (Alonso 2005:40; Gómez 2013a: 104).

The Ayotzinapa Teachers College forms part of the public education system that emerged with the post-revolutionary state during the 1920s. Its political project, sustained by several intellectuals like José Vasconcelos and Moisés Saénz (Vaughan 1997: 28), has sought to integrate elements that seemed contrary to the meaning of national culture into ideas about citizenship. A desired homogeneity was achieved to some extent through the use of categorizations that supported individualities linked to formal and informal state institutions.

The agrarian reform and the public education system represented good examples of this. The agrarian reform channelled the flows of discontent over hundreds of years of lost lands and resources with the creation of communal land organizations that were constituted through calculations, mappings and censuses that were conducted by government-led technicians and engineers, frequently with the support of local authorities. This is how the “ejidatarios” were created; they represented a construct that allowed the vertical and direct control by the state through farmer syndicates and coordinated entities, as well as through the official party (Gómez 2013: 134-135).

The education system underwent radical changes designed to recreate a sense of national community desired by the elites (see Vaughan 1997: 44-46, Rockwell 2007: 115). In particular, the model of positivist education, put to practice at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and based on faith in progress, science and modernization, continued along the same lines, and added to these universal premises the reinforcement of national sovereignty. This model encouraged the integration of the indigenous population into the national society. It emphasized rural education, because people living “in the countryside” exceeded—in absolute as well as relative terms—those living in the urban areas (Palacios 1999 40-41). This overall proposal found its highest expression in the so-called socialist school of President Lázaro Cardenas who governed from 1934 to 1940 (Gilly 1997: 420). Its fundamental goal was to create a curriculum and an education that would promote an objectivist approach to the contradictions of class struggle in the ru-



ral areas; this type of education would offer notions of modernity to communities “more integrated with the market and the state” (Vaughan 1997:104).

Along with the creation of the curricula and of the buildings that would house the schools in the rural areas, different institutions were created to quickly train rural teachers in those same social landscapes. They played a key role in post-revolutionary society for the transmission of state policies to the regions and local communities. For some authors, the role of the teachers was important in the creation of a hegemonic language that was understood as the deployment of a set of symbols, practices and organizations for the construction of the state order (Vaughan 1997: 21-22; Rockwell 2007: 167).

Despite this hegemonic rule, the old regional powers received much more support at that time. And the relation and overlapping of these powers gave the impression of an authoritarian architecture that prevailed in all of Mexico. In these scenarios, the control of public space remained mainly in the hands of the *caciques*; their will was always imposed, often through intimidation, the use of force and the support of the local authorities and the different expressions of the state (see De la Peña 1986: 30; Schryer 1980), in order to control formal and informal politics (These *caciques in turn* became governors, e.g. Maximino Ávila Camacho in Puebla, or the Figueroas in Guerrero). However, this image of stability and naturalization never worked in practice. In the villages and regions, what was concealed through the formal or informal institutions of the state—such as the desire for land, justice and autonomy—always emerged as fissures of that dominant order (see Rubin 1996; Friedrich 1986).

The long-lasting popular resistance of the mountainous areas of Guerrero is inscribed in rifts like these. In the face of the permanent farce of fraudulent elections and the stronghold of regional *caciques* who became rich through processes of production of commodities that followed the end of the revolution—including illegal drugs that were always supported by state power (see Astorga 2000: 175) -- a civic movement emerged in the 60s that sought to control the town halls, Coaliciones de Organizaciones del Pueblo (COP-Coalition of Organizations of the People). However, its career in formal politics ended with the system-



atic repression and assassination of its members who were people from more humble sectors. The repression in turn provoked the creation of a *guerrilla* movement led at different moments by the rural teachers Genaro Vázquez and Lucio Cabañas, who were also murdered (Bartra 2000; Montemayor 1997). A political scientist from that period in Guerrero, proposed that “the teacher college and university students (from Ayotzinapa and Iguala) as agitators were central to the growth of the popular movement in opposition to the governor [Raul Caballero Aburto] to such an extent that it nearly resulted in a genuine civil war” (Román 2010: 253).

Despite the scenario of pain and tragedy that was perpetuated in the rural communities of Guerrero with the crushing of any sign of rebellion and the stigmatization of its communities as violent, the element of struggle lived on (Bartra 2000: 15-17). Rather than simple political “agitators”, the professors and students of rural teacher colleges have mostly struggled to prevent the implementation of a rationality that sought to create --through a variety of curricula-- a type of human being more fitting to the needs of a cheap labour force that has been trained for the processes of capitalist accumulation. They pursue this by putting into practice horizontal rather than hierarchical forms of doing politics (Gliber 2015).

## **A piece of news that turns into History and a painful story that becomes hope**

From the moment the news of the death and disappearance of the forty-three students in Guerrero broke out and until the completion of this work, there were many protests in Mexico and abroad in response to this tragedy. In the specific case of Mexico, the protests were fuelled by the participation of a large number of young people who do not want to see this crime go unpunished (See Appendix 1 for a chronology with more details about events in Ayotzinapa). Their force has been strengthened by the voice and presence of the relatives, friends and classmates of the missing students who very movingly have expressed their pain and warned against the dangers faced at any given moment. Why are we in danger, we and others close to us, our sons and daughters, mothers and



fathers, brothers, sisters, friends and neighbours? A youth from the Ayotzinapa teacher's college provides a response to this question:

We would like to note that this scenario is not unique to Guerrero... They are killing young people just for being young. They criminalize us for the way we dress, the way we think, because we are the majority of the population, because they are afraid of us. That's why weapons run through our streets, why they point them at us on a daily basis, why here it's the police who are kidnapping kids, our daughters, to work as prostitutes, to cut them up and sell human organs, for the hit men. Let's not be stupid. You are the Zetas (the armed militia), referring to the State government [of Guerrero] and the government of Mexico. We are beyond fed up. The Ayotzinapa crime is the greater massacre since the 1968 student massacre. In the country there are more than 100,000 dead in eight years; it's human genocide. Those students are not just young people. They are the most combative rural student teachers in the country... There are things going on here. They are killing us... We want the students back alive. At the very least bring us the dead so that we can hold a wake. Give us peace for the mothers. Give us the dead. Give us truth. We feel so strongly the pain of the disappeared. Many of us here have had friends and loved ones taken from us. Here, they have killed journalists, activists, defenders of human rights, defenders of territorial rights. They have killed students, teachers, and whoever else. We are so fed up we are ready to explode. We are not going to shut up.<sup>5</sup>

The question posed and its response are alarming. They articulate a message that is entirely different from the conclusion reached by the state agents regarding the crimes. The question expresses alarm over what violently targets those who do not fit into established patterns, those who surpass the boundaries' institutionality, who question the ruling ideologies and practices of command.

When the fathers, friends and fellow students of the murdered and missing boys point out the underlying threats, their own experience

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<sup>5</sup> Video recording of speech in Iguala, Guerrero, by Alf Gz and published on Facebook, November, 5, 2014.





constitutes a rejection of the ruling order, with its own rationalities, institutions and political practices, knowledge and archetypes of what a society must be, and its expression of harmonic conjunction of global, national and local power orders; nothing proves more false than this harmony.

The story of the students, as that of most of the young men and women who study in the rural teacher colleges of Mexico, is completely different from that of the Mexican state in origins as well as consequences, including the insensitive response of current servants regarding the disappearance of the young students. We find ourselves enveloped within all these stories. Ayotzinapa represents a story not yet concluded. It is something that transcends the local and settles in any part of the world where there is violence. Therefore, it is a story that must not be forgotten, that plays a decisive role in the breaking of the course of normalization and routine in which we all—wherever we may live—dwell (see Selbin 2010).<sup>6</sup>

However, in a context of reinforced violence such as the one we are currently experiencing, dignity is difficult to shake off. That is why it should unsettle us that people are encouraged to merely forget and move on with their lives. Between the event of the death and disappearance of these people and the present day, a cycle that generates a notion of democracy persists. And in this cycle it is not only the continuity of its institutions and practices—including the elections—that flows. Within this same flow, our concepts of the subject seem to follow the continuity demanded by the dominant social analyses in order to render comprehensible and quantifiable what must be studied and governed.

The story of the murdered and missing boys can help break this association between knowledge and control as a form of domination over life and death; it is a knowledge that objectifies, that turns people into things of abstraction, accounting and administration. This intent departs from the recognition of a subjectivity that is constituted through

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<sup>6</sup> The Spanish word “historia” can refer both to history as “a chronological record of significant events”, as well as to a narration, a story told by someone. In this article I use “story” in English to refer to an event that is repeatedly transmitted orally so that it will not be forgotten.





the contradictory and antagonistic stories of people such as the people of Ayotzinapa –ultimately people so similar to ourselves-- in their constitution as subjects that can be expelled from capitalist rationality. The matter of these boys is a horrifying example of what it means to go against all that, which presents itself as homogenizing and centralizing (the antagonistic).

My approach to the meaning of expulsion is not sociological, but rather ethical. It derives from the simple idea of the existence and deployment of capital's World War Four against the people, articulated by the Zapatistas of Chiapas as an alert to create awareness about the danger we all face, a danger that comes from a capitalism that goes beyond freebooting (Subcomandante Marcos, 1997). I do not believe it is convenient at this point to recreate a debate on new forms of accumulation through dispossession, new fences and their mobilizing or de-mobilizing effects. I simply believe we are faced with the most brutal deployment of the logic of global expansion of capital that produces a long list of expulsions; not only of those who have been driven off their land and have been deprived of other natural resources, but also of those who have been stripped of their rights, livelihoods, dreams and hopes.

The starting point for analysis engaged with a commitment to further an ethical perspective is to criticize the relation between knowledge that renders entire communities the object of expulsion and the creation of a logic that evinces a consciousness of the particular specificities that reinforce, justify and very often achieve the appropriation of large areas, resources and knowledge. These are dismantled so that the individual interests of transnational companies can obtain greater profits. In this perverse communion of knowledge and power, the struggle and resistance of those who have been or are about to be expelled is the clear expression that, despite the brutality experienced, there still exists the ability to stop and overcome these devastating forces against life.

I argue for the importance of the Ayotzinapa youth's resistance. This importance resides in developing no-state subjectivities by generating knowledge contrary to conceptions that standardize, deny, and erase people's experiences. The rural teacher college students' struggle to believe in another type of knowledge, to transmit it and change the world proves crucial. Those studying to become rural teachers and the rural



teachers themselves are amongst those expelled by the totalizing rationality. Their teachings make no sense to the docile subjectivities that the needs of the market require. They do not operate according to that logic; the type of knowledge they promote does not serve it. Therefore, they become targets for expulsion. They are an obstacle to the enrichment of a minute fraction of the rich, the “1%” (Maclay 2012: 311-316).

What follows is a sketch of the history of the place that the students of the rural teacher college do not have in today’s Mexican society. I link their story not only to the construction of a state power but also to these incidents of plunder witnessed in Mexico and many other places on the planet. To expel them from the system of education, even to gruesomely end their lives, is not just an option; it is something that can happen specifically in Mexico so that the state can ruthlessly and cynically enact the most shameless levels of present-day capitalist brutality.

Furthermore, this section outlines a different meaning of knowledge. It is knowledge as another history. It creates an alternative narrative that transcends the canons of official historiography. Therefore, its “data” cannot be verified through different sources; they are, rather, in the words of Adorno (1973: 17-18), marked by what possesses the most objective burden than anything else: the subjectivity of suffering. This knowledge opposes the reified subject that is simplified in attributes or numbers and is named in the long Histories that are written in capital letters, the ones that speak of the creation of state orders that always assign to it a subordinate, abject or subaltern condition. That is why, when I think of another narrative, I think of a political component that disassociates the existence of an illuminating consciousness from the idea of subjects in need of a guide that will illuminate them. That does not only amount to an idea of a subject with raised awareness, it also overflows the identifying concepts to administrate matters of life and death. I do not think of a subject without history, but rather of a subject that goes against history, against the history of domination, terror and despair.

### **Breaking the siege, creating a different narrative**

The disappearance of the forty-three students and the murder of yet another three people occurred when they were asking passer-byes and car drivers for a few coins, and handing out propaganda against the au-



thorities that denied them the support for their school's operations. Why were they asking for money? Were they blocking the traffic in order to raise their voices against corrupt rulers? Why did their practices unleash the inconceivable violence to which they were subjected? There may be many answers. One that contradicts the official version seems most plausible; one that refuses to forget or to trivialize death.

Generally speaking, the curricula of the different levels of education have cancelled or undermined courses devoted to humanistic or ethical concerns. Local histories do not seem to matter and history as a whole is a subject that is partial and ideological, containing silences and celebrations that serve the ideas of prosperity, individualism, and the global market that the state promotes. This history reclaims characters that, in their time, were a motor of modernization while never hiding their authoritarian disposition. Furthermore, they sit on the same pedestals opposite visions of Zapata and Villa, Francisco I. Madero, Venustiano Carranza and Obregon--all of them revolutionary heroes.

The youth of Ayotzinapa, like so many students, the men and women from Mexico's teacher colleges, they all come from working-class communities. The missing boys, specifically, come from villages near the college campus. Their parents work in a variety of jobs. They live hand to mouth. And in places like theirs, to become a teacher contains an element of redemption. For the young students, there is a moral principle to help the other. And this principle depends on schooling: to teach how to read and write, as well as conduct basic arithmetic operations. Indeed, that implies a learning that has limits on what the students will achieve. In recent years, the activities of the professors and students of the teacher colleges have been characterized by their tenacious opposition to the implementation of new systems including curricular and extracurricular activities along the line of the goals set by neoliberal education in its effort to create operational workers for the cultural reproduction of the dominant order. For example, in 2009, when the *Alianza por la Calidad de la Educación* (Alliance for Quality Education-ACE) emerged, many groups of teachers from throughout the country (and especially teachers and students from rural schools) opposed the reforms that emphasized the strengthening of programs designed to cultivate individuals who would better meet the needs of a neoliberal market. Similarly, that oppo-





sition from teachers and professors is directed against a complex system of evaluation that determines salaries based on points, and interferes in the relationship between present-day teachers and their immediate social environment (see Méndez 2014).

Instead of strict programs leading to a limited and uniform knowledge, the young people learn to encourage the recording of oral histories of those who opposed the *caciques*, the army and the exploitation by agro-and extraction industries. They learn how to cultivate vegetable gardens so that the boys and girls can grow their own healthy and inexpensive food at home (see Univision 2015). They promote the projection and solution of local problems through dialogue, and their mode of administration does not give more power to certain individuals over others. They are committed to re-examining what nature provides and what that means for the endurance of the circle of life. They learn how to be sensitive and capture the condensed knowledge of many generations regarding the past, life, death and all that is linked to the long and short history of the people and gives them dignity. It is this dignity together with hope that constitute the main forces of the struggle of people under constant expulsion and expropriation.

That is why to create a vegetable garden or compost, to walk in the woods and mountains, to know and name the varieties of plants and animals, to symbolically map the meaning of a territory, represent elements that students like those from Ayotzinapa integrate into their teaching. Needless to say, such elements do not closely coincide with the state's official educational plans. Beyond the Cárdenas period and his support to a rural education that sought to create a political community, the idea of progress in the visions of the Mexican elites corresponds to a model of education that promotes only modernization. Therefore, for many decades the rural teacher colleges have enjoyed very little official support. An old teacher tells us that in the 1960s, it was said with cruel irony that the Mexican government gave more money to feed the army's horses than it did to all the schools of that type (Trujillo Baez 2014).

Precisely in the 1960s, the pressures of authoritarianism and exploitation were so high that the civic movement mentioned above emerged. Many professors that had graduated from the Ayotzinapa teacher col-





lege, such as Genaro Vázquez and Lucio Cabañas, saw no other way to face this violence but with the violence of the poor, a resource that has been mentioned by theorists and historians of the struggles and consciousness of the oppressed (Hobsbawm 1973; Scott 1985; Wolf 1969).

At the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, the fantasy of the state order became more fragile. That is when the manifestations of discontent and rupture with the forms of domination appeared in different regions. The repression and violence became obvious. Sometimes the state did not manage to conceal it, as occurred with the murders at Tlatelolco Square in Mexico City (Poniatowska 1971; 2003). In other cases, its military apparatus prepared for anti-guerrilla warfare and completely eliminated groups and cells in the countryside and the cities. Yet, tragic events remained mere rumours. For example, one rumour was that indigenous communities in Guerrero or in some part of the northern highlands of Puebla were attacked with napalm bombs, just as the populations of Vietnam had been attacked by the U.S. Air force (see Trial 2016). Similarly, many regional oppositions to authoritarianism were equally repressed or their main leaders co-opted. But the suffering remained. It remained engraved in many places as a memory that should not be forgotten but rather fuelled. An example is the testimony of an anonymous man, whose extended family participated in peasant organization against the state:

When I was a child, my uncle, a rural teacher and peasant leader in the 1970s, told me that it was a well-known secret in Atoyac de Álvarez (Guerrero) that napalm bombs had been used in the mountains. Atoyac lies on the mountain slope. The highest parts of the mountains were inhabited by the “chiveros” (“goat people”), that is where the bombs were released. The “chiveros” --who were called like that because “only goats lived” in that arid and cold area-- were young people who lived off robbing, mainly livestock. Lucio Cabañas had tried to convince them to join the movement, but they had refused. They even worked as the “ears” (informers) of the government because they were so poor, they would accept what the government gave them and they would pass on information. They were young people who knew the area very well. However, when the repression of the peasants of Atoyac began,





the “chiveros” decided to join the struggle. As they knew these paths that were off the beaten track very well, they played a strategically important role within the guerrilla movement. When government officials found out about their participation, they realized the only way to tackle the guerrilla was by eliminating the “chiveros”. They used the napalm bombs to wipe out their small communities and burn their houses. That was common knowledge in Atoyac, but the government always denied the information. There had been efforts to look into the use of these bombs in the mountains, but the required permits were never granted and the events were never verified. It is also said that author Carlos Montemayor [now deceased] had to withdraw all reference to the use of napalm bombs from his book, as this information had not been confirmed.

This period of repression in Mexico was called the dirty war and was accompanied by a discourse that was very effective in constructing enemies to the stability of the system. Peasants, urban workers, migrants moving to the cities in search of work and housing, students, militants, were all simply called criminals. They were accused of invading land, participating in informal economies, they were dismissed as subversive individuals who turned their back on their obligation to study, guerrilla fighters who created a climate of violence and instability.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> A Puebla newspaper offered a brief report on the peasant mobilizations in Puebla and Veracruz, the agrarian conflict and state violence. See *La Opinión* Puebla, 18<sup>th</sup> January 1975, p. 2, “Peasants evicted by the army in El Palmarillo, Veracruz, the army acted arbitrarily”. 11<sup>th</sup> February, 1975, p. 2, “Peasants of Monte de Chila (Puebla) invaded 150 hectares of a large estate yesterday”.

We also come across this “rumor” on the 11<sup>th</sup> of February, 1975: “Calling of the Mexican Communist Party to the workers of the state of Puebla. To the peasants and students, to the people in general. “[...] through fascist tactics, first came the blatant violations of the Constitution, then the murder of our comrade Hilario Moreno, followed by the rumors of ‘sterilization’. And now the bombings, the terrorism”. Puebla, Thursday the 18<sup>th</sup> of September, 1975. *La Opinión*, front page: “Repression continues in the Sierra Norte. Only a month ago the stockbreeders and their gunmen destroyed the village of Cañada de Colotla, in the municipality of Pantepec, and on the 9<sup>th</sup> of September the *caciques* shot and seriously injured peasant leader Eleazar Pérez Manzano, secretary of



The same discourse seems to be emerging today, once again directed against similar subjects. It has become quite commonplace to assert that social protest in recent years has become criminalized, as if in other moments in time the classifications used against those who share a different vision of the world, those who break with the logic of capital, go against homogenization and defy authoritarianism had never existed. And, therefore, it is as if classifications based on identity had not been used to justify violence and death.

This provides the main foundation for the narrative that emerged following the disappearance and assassinations of the young students; life must continue as if the pain of others were not our own. The formula for achieving this is simple:

1) Trivialize the event: what happened to the boys was bad luck and the blame placed on local authorities, their hunger for power, their connections to organized crime, and corrupt municipalities. Therefore, the persecution and arrest of the guilty make up for the pain inflicted. The trivialization is also accompanied by the unfolding of this event as a spectacle; the more striking and morbid aspects of the story are emphasized— such as the actions, persecutions and assassinations of guerrilla fighters that during the dirty war occupied the pages of the bloodier sections of the yellow press and gave special prominence to a rag such as *Alarma!*<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, representatives from the intellectual and academic sphere are deployed to supposedly give legitimacy to the trials. All these interpretations are published in newspapers that support the official policies and are transmitted through major radio and television channels that monopolize the media.

2) Do not render the drama visible in academic politics. Beyond the individual or collective display of support from sectors of the academia who participated in different mobilizations and signed letters of repudiation in relation to the criminal actions, and the manifestations of rage

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rural affairs of the Independent Central Campesina peasant union of Puebla.

<sup>8</sup> *Alarma!* was a weekly journal that specialized in crimes and death. It was very popular and sold up to two millions copies in one week. It was part of Llergo Press and an archetype of snuff journalism in the entire world, with bizarre phrases and morbid pictures.

and dismay from scholars and intellectuals, the event did not constitute a breaking point. For some years now, during a period characterized by the war declared by the Mexican government on criminal bands, the deaths and disappearances have been constant. Only the finding of clandestine mass graves in San Fernando, Tamaulipas, shocked. But it should have shocked even more. For many, the straw that broke the camel's back – a back that was breaking upon learning of the numerous women murdered in Ciudad Juarez-- was Ayotzinapa.<sup>9</sup> And, as in all the other cases mentioned, the Mexican academic community generally did not go beyond a sense of commotion.

The disappearance and assassination of the young men occurred in September 2014. Concurrently, novel bureaucratic procedures were instituted in Mexican public universities. For professors and/or researchers this entailed the filing of numerous reports, processing applications for bursaries and presenting projects. These additional tasks continued into early 2015 compounded by yet more required reports, work plans, test results, even more applications for similar yet different issues, all amounting to an evaluation of individual work, its quality and the wage that can be earned according to these measurements. The result was a rationalization of individual or group work corresponding to the Toyotaist model of labour organization which has been integrated into the so- Academic Bodies (Cuerpos Académicos – CA), implemented since 1997 by decision of the Secretary of Public Education in most Mexican universities. The main objective of the Academic Bodies was to outline academic trajectories, elaborate subject matters and an increased specialization of academic tasks. In this context, teaching and research continued at its usual pace, driven by the dignified objects of the academe, with its significant empirical content and its link to significant national

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<sup>9</sup> From 1993 until today, hundreds of corpses of women, mostly between the ages of twelve and eighteen, have been found in the border town of Ciudad Juarez, in the north of Mexico. Their bodies present violations, strangulations, multiple wounds, dismembering. The viciousness of the murders is scandalous. The clues obtained by independent investigators, mainly journalists, tend to relate these crimes to drug cartels linked to high-ranking individuals of the political and economic elites. On this, see the article by Diana Washington (2003), part of a broader investigation.



problems, as demanded by the agenda of the CONACYT, the country's highest institution for the administration of scientific research in Mexico (see Programa Especial de Ciencia, Tecnología e Innovación 2014-2018).

There was a shift from genuine indignation to inevitable passive contemplation, at least for a great number of the members of the academic and intellectual world who have always existed as a relatively autonomous sphere of society. However, fortunately not everything devolved into this apathetic attitude. As noted previously, there had been warnings since 2011 that everyone was exposed to death and violence, articulated through the ethical arguments that flourished during the epistolary conversations between the Zapatistas and the philosopher Luis Villoro (see Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos 2011). What the mothers, fathers, and classmates of the dead and missing students have been doing refuels this need to not forget, to not renounce the pursuit of justice, to not surrender, so that these events are not repeated. Therefore, the content for a different narrative that opposes this hypocrisy, naturalness, normality and immobility is concrete and full of hope. This narrative amounts to the realization through words of that which we must call painful and what we must brandish as an argument for changing life itself.

The relatives of the Ayotzinapa students have verbalized the consequences of pain caused by undergoing such a moment. They are the extreme manifestations of a cruel administration of our life and death, the appearance of a state that represents social relations of value whose worst dimensions are lived not only through high levels of exploitation, the expropriation of land and destruction of nature and the ousting of entire populations. They are also experienced through the disappointment of realizing the promise of a better life is a fantasy, through the apathy that makes the immorality of formal politics bearable. The people of Ayotzinapa tell us to break with all of that. For example, the moving words of a father who lost his son on that fateful day of September 2014 have been very present on social media. He noted that even the freedom of his everyday pleasures, such as enjoying his favourite meal or sitting on his terrace during sunset, had been torn away from him when his son was torn away from his life.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "Ayotzinapa: los padres", video de Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3iR8tP2n0t8>



His words contain the terrible metaphor of how our highest hopes can be destroyed in an instant. In the words of this man, as in the words of all the mothers and fathers of the boys the Mexican state killed and forcibly disappeared, lies the aesthetic of what must be a narrative of resistance and change.

What is the meaning of this specific set of words and its articulation by those specific individuals? It means many things, the most important being that this story of barbarity will not be told in the language of social sciences or under procedures of analytical rigour. It is/will be a narrative we will all create, those who now suffer, whose pain is deeply engraved on their skin, in the anguish caused by uncertainty, in the remembrance of what has been lost, and in plain and simple hope.

An English-speaking reader may be surprised by the lines written here about the Mexican academy and Ayotzinapa. The reason is that in academic circles outside Mexico there exists a general perception that their studies contain a highly-charged critique against dominant powers. The argument here challenges that general perception. It is true that Mexico has generated important concepts, methodologies and debates about social continuity and transformation. For example, one needs look no further than the theories about cultural change, indigenism, internal colonialism, development and dependence, political ecology, or even the recreation of the famous debate about the agrarian question in the 1960s and 1970s that posed the end of the peasant as it became the proletariat or its persistence and forms of social life, all of which proved consequent in the construction of political consciousness (see Hewitt 1984).

However, from the 1990s until the present, precisely with the regional economic integration solidified with the North American Free Trade Agreement among Mexico, the United States and Canada, the social sciences have lost much of the critical character they possessed in previous decades. Faced with the numerous “post” currents (postmodernism, poststructuralism, postmarxism, etc.), agendas for study that revitalize two specific questions have been prioritized. The first is an essentialism based on identity, which permits the designation of populations as an “object of study” (Indians, women, youth, migrants, etc.) reinforcing the empiricism of the “thing observed”. Second, and in part as a critique of that empiricism, there are “realist” studies that treat people



like facts. They place themselves next to concepts like objective tools of their research and, consequently, eliminate any possibility that the subjects might possess to counter history and generate their own knowledge.

Therefore, academic circles, particularly in Mexico, should seek to recover the force of the word. In the face of cynicism, indignation. In the face of the “all is well”, commotion. In the face of the end of phases –the end of indignations-- perseverance to bring back the missing ones alive. In the face of the fury of the state and quasi-state forces, reflection. In the face of the opening of a democratic cycle that closes another one, in order to renovate it with the same political class a few years later, rupture; rupture, therefore, permanent rupture with the false illusion of democratic participation and full citizenship.

In May 2015, in the presence of renowned activists, academics and intellectuals from all over the world, with the participation of delegates of the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), supporters of the Sixth Declaration (derived of 2006 “The Other Campaign Zapatista”) and many more, including the mother of one of the assassinated students, many words appeared once again to write a story against the official story. It was an interesting occasion because the voices of prominent thinkers intertwined with those emerging from the experiences of struggle, the rage and pain of diverse and different speakers. The result was a successful attempt to curb this renovated narrative of promised prosperity at the cost of destroying life.

The seminar against the “capitalist hydra” called by the Zapatistas is part of the narrative of change that we have been creating for some time. For example, in the public squares of New York in 2011, in the face of the expressions of reciprocity, joy and hope, the word became a concept. If those people suffered from unemployment, lack of housing or broken illusions of any kind, they believed it was due to the economic interests of a few. Therefore, the way in which the expression “they” are the 1% emerged in order to refer to magnates and transnational companies that accumulate the wealth of the world is compelling. And the expression that the rest of us are the 99% is quite hazy. We are those who barely have anything, who have nothing, who have today what will be torn away from us tomorrow, who have hopes that turned into false expectations. We are the ones who get up every morning and see the majesty of these





mountains, rivers for which some poet --no matter where—states that he would give his life. We are those who used to proudly look at our rice fields and cornfields, and now feel the anguish of the presence of wastelands, of sons and daughters who are absent, who have gone away in search of jobs, away from home, far away.

This expression is profound (Byrne 2012). It encompasses all the others. It does not refer to a “multitude” linked together by networks and nodes. We simply seem to be entrapped by this disappointment. Berlant (2011) referred to what has been happening to us during these decades of economic, emotional, professional and other failures as “cruel optimism”. We are made to believe that we will have better jobs, quality education, a future that is ensured through pension funds gambled in the stock markets. But this never happens. All that which surrounds us, rather than organizing our lives, disorganizes them, launching us into an enormous and depressing, personal and collective chaos. That is what capitalism is about: it organizes us, it reorganizes us and then disorganizes us again. It is a permanent cycle, the cycle of domination which, in the process, destroys our life and nature itself.

Berlant is right. When hundreds of thousands of people around the world have to leave their homes, flee from war and pile up in refugee camps; boys and girls climb up on a train or a shaky boat and set out on a voyage towards the inferno of the North with the hope of a better life; when job opportunities for all are scarce; when success is a myth that the middle classes ruminate, there is no room for optimism.

The territory of Guerrero is being fought over by large capital devoted to mining because it is located at what is referred to as the “gold belt”, where mines are built and exploited more than anywhere in Mexico (Dornbierer 2016). Those capitalists hope that they will be the most significant mines in all of Latin America. They calculate that they will be able to extract sixty million tons of gold from that region over the next twenty years. In addition to gold, that place is key for the transportation of drugs. Control over the region assures multimillion dollar profits. Mexico is currently the second largest producer of marijuana world-wide—after Morocco—and also of poppy—after Afghanistan. There are approximately 12,000 hectares devoted to each in this country and both are cultivated in Guerrero. Gold, marijuana, poppy, a route





for cocaine, natural resources, all of this lends meaning to the “wealth” of the state of Guerrero (see Animal político 2013; BBC Mundo 2013; Expansión-Alianza CNN 2011). Ayotzinapa is precisely in the middle of these big businesses. In order to control them, control of the territory must be taken over, with violence; displacing, assassinating, causing to disappear (Eraña and Rojas 2015).

Every time we hear the fathers, mothers, schoolmates and friends of the missing students of Ayotzinapa say that their resistance and struggle will not be over until they find out what happened to their youth; when we see the Zapatista communities express their problems, engage daily in self-critique and articulate their desire to create a free and autonomous world without a state and without capital, we are forced to transform what experience says into concepts that must eschew what we supposedly must be: submissive, humiliated and exploited (EZLN 2005). Then hope is alive; it is alive in the word and in theory and in a subject that criticizes itself and the world. It is this theory that unveils what is immoral and what is unfair, what must never exist. Could we call this a theory of a revolution forever in process? We believe we can. We always want to radically change the unfairness and the immorality, here, in China, Chiapas, Kurdistan, Argentina, South Africa, Norway, New York, Chicago, Mexico, anywhere, everywhere. It is therefore the theory with which we look at the world today and, along with it, a better future.



**APPENDIX 1**

**CHRONOLOGY OF THE DISAPPEARANCE AND THE SEARCH FOR THE STUDENTS OF AYOTZINAPA, GUERRERO.**

Date/Time	Events
Friday 26th of September 2014	Approximately 80 students who have recently entered the “Isidro Burgos” teacher college of Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, are asking for money in the street, raising funds so as to travel to Mexico City on the 2nd of October and participate in a march commemorating the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre.
21.00	The students leave Chilpancingo, Guerrero, on two buses. On their arrival to Iguala they continue to collect money from passers-byes and drivers. They reach an agreement with a bus driver, who will also join the caravan heading towards Mexico City.
23.00	On their leaving Iguala, the students are ambushed by the municipal police, who fire against the buses with high-caliber weapons. Blocked by a police car, the students exit the bus under gunfire. Some are intercepted, arrested and put into official vehicles. Apparently, others are rounded up in the patio of the headquarters of the Municipal Preventive Police Force.
23.00	The attack on the students attracts the attention of the local media. A press conference is improvised, but the students are once again attacked, this time by people covering their faces.
23.00	Another bus that was transporting a youth soccer football team was also attacked. As a result the bus falls off a cliff leading to the death of the driver, a 14 year-old boy, and a woman who was travelling on a passing-by taxi, whose driver was also injured.
	During the three hours following the attack, two students are murdered –Daniel Solis Gallardo and Jhovani Guerrero—another one is sent to hospital, brain dead after being shot in the head –Aldo Gutiérrez—and yet another one appears abandoned in the street, his face skinned and bearing other signs of torture –Julio César Mondragón. There were also 25 people injured, amongst them a student who was pulled out of a private clinic by the police along with his fellow students before receiving medical attention. Another 43 students have gone missing.

Saturday 27th of September	The government of the state of Guerrero, led by Ángel Aguirre Rivero, a member of the Democratic Revolution Party (Partido de la Revolución Democrática, PRD) but a former member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), orders the arrest of 22 police officers involved in the attack, remanded for first degree murder.
First days of October	More graves of non-identified bodies are discovered, mainly as a result of the actions and mobilization of 550 community guards of the Union of Peoples and Organizations of the State of Guerrero (Unión de Pueblos y Organizaciones del Estado de Guerrero, UPOEG) who combed the region of Iguala in search of the students. The bodies that were discovered did not correspond to the missing students. Their identity remains unknown.
Mid-October	Mexico's Attorney General presents a first assessment of his intervention in the case of the missing students: 300 federal agents took part in the search. 46 police officers were arrested, amongst them 22 officers from Iguala, 10 from Cocula, and 10 civilians pertaining to criminal organization "Guerreros Unidos". José Luis Abarca and the chief of the municipal police forces are to be arrested on charges of organized crime.
October Protests	Local protests taking place in Guerrero are joined by the first nation-wide mobilizations on the 8th and 22th of October in over 20 entities of the country. Approximately 20,000 members of the zapatista civilian support groups arrive to San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, demanding justice for the 43 missing students.
24th and 29th of October	The fathers, mothers and students of Ayotzinapa interrupt all cooperation with the Attorney General due to lack of results. They demand a direct interview with the President, which took place on the 29th. Enrique Peña Nieto commits to respecting the reputation of the missing students. During the meeting, an agreement is reached to guarantee non-impunity, attention to victims, reparation of damages and support to the system of Rural Normal Schools. At the same time, a technical assistance agreement is made with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights at the request of the parents. .

<p>Protests taking place at the end of October and in November</p>	<p>On Wednesday the 29th of October approximately 90,000 people gather up in Mexico City. The same occurs on the 5th of November, with the presence of approximately 120,000 protesters at the city's central square (Zócalo). The days of protest organized on the occasion of the so-called Global Action for Ayotzinapa united people from all around the world who demanded the 43 be presented alive.</p>
<p>November</p>	<p>The demand is now made for the discovery of the students alive, not dead. The search plan is reformulated and a mixed commission of the attorney general and the ministry of internal affairs is created to follow up and coordinate the information. Argentine forensic experts are provided with all the necessary information and means in order to search and identify the recovered remains.</p>
<p>5th and 7th of November</p>	<p>The 5th of November is the day of the biggest national and international protests, with over 80 educational institutions in Mexico on strike. On the same day, José Luis Abarca and his wife María de los Ángeles Pineda are arrested in Mexico City. On Friday the 7th of November then-Attorney General José Murillo Karam gives a press conference that is broadcast live, in which he informs the 43 missing students had been executed, their bodies set on fire until reduced to ashes at a landfill in Cocula, and their remains dumped into a nearby river. The Attorney General presents this as a "historic truth".</p>
<p>8th of November</p>	<p>The fathers, mothers and fellow students of the missing students not only reject and condemn this conclusion the government tries to impose, but also reassert their demand and their struggle for the missing students to be presented alive.</p>

14th and 20th of November	Three caravans of parents depart on the 14th of November, heading towards the north and south of the country, travelling through different states as well as the rest of the state of Guerrero. The caravans arrive to Mexico City on the 20th of November, where the “Great March” takes place. It is the axis of the “Fourth Global Day for Ayotzinapa” which was supported by the strike of 79 schools and 114 universities and higher education institutions around the country, as well as the solidarity of people from all wakes of life and social sectors who took to the streets to demand the 43 students be presented alive. On that same day protests took place in 120 Mexican cities and at least 30 cities around the world. .
December 2014	The fathers and mothers of Ayotzinapa meet with the civilian support groups of the Zapatistas in Chiapas
January 2015	In January 2015, at the “World Festival of Rebellions and Resistances Against Capitalism” that took part in many locations and culminated at the Indigenous Center for Comprehensive Training (CIDECI) in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, the Zapatistas made a formal petition before the National Indigenous Congress so that the relatives of the 43 missing students be received in their villages. The latter also attended the festival as special guests
5th and 6th of February 2015	The Committee of Relatives of the 43 missing students of Ayotzinapa and the Student Committee of the “Isidro Burgos” College make a joint calling to a National Popular Convention on the 5th and 6th of February 2015, to take place in the school’s facilities in order to discuss and draw out a plan of struggle evolving around the demand for justice for crimes against humanity, such as the Ayotzinapa case.

<p>April and May 2015</p>	<p>A committee from Ayotzinapa travels around 12 European countries for over a month, invited by participants of the Sezta Internacional, taking their demand that the missing students be presented alive to other countries. 17th of April: Oslo, Norway; 19th of April: Goteborg, Sweden; 21st of April: Helsinki, Finland; 23th of April: Berlin, Germany; 25th of April: Vienna, Austria; 26th of April: Innsbruck, Austria; 28th of April: Milan, Italy; 29th of April: Rome, Italy; 1st of May: Zurich, Switzerland; 3th and 4th of May: Paris, France; 6th of May: Zaragoza, Spain; 7th of May: Madrid, Spain; 9th of May: Barcelona, Spain; 11th of May: Marseille, France; 13th of May: Liege, Belgium; 15th of May: Munster, Germany; 17th of May: Amsterdam, Leiden, Holland; 19th of May: London, England. .</p>
<p>June and July 2015</p>	<p>A Committee from Ayotzinapa travels for two months around different Mexican states and communities, peoples and nations of the Indigenous National Congress.</p>
<p>7th of Sep- tember 2015</p>	<p>The report of the alternative research conducted by the Interdisciplinary Group of Independent Experts (GIEI) on the Ayotzinapa case dismisses what then-Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam had claimed to be a “historic truth”. According to the findings, the students had not been burnt at the Cocula landfill.</p>
<p>27th of Sep- tember 2015</p>	<p>One year has gone by since the disappearance of the 43 students and none of the 111 people arrested for this case have been sentenced. Many complaints have been made by the relatives of the victims and the experts on how the authorities have conducted the criminal processes related to this crime. Protests take place demanding the missing students be presented alive in Mexico City, Chilpancingo, Morelia, Guadalajara, Jalapa, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Culiacán, Pachuca and San Miguel de Allende. Zapatista civilian support groups protest at the Oventic Caracol. Acts of protest also take place in Toronto, London, New York and Madrid, amongst other cities.</p>

9th of February 2016	Forensic experts from Argentina dismiss the Attorney General's "historic truth" on the Ayotzinapa case. They claim many different fires had been conducted in the Cocula landfill since 2010 and it is highly unlikely that all the remains found there belong to the missing students. .
2nd-5th of March 2016	The fathers, mothers and fellow students of the Ayotzinapa students organize a search day in Iguala. At the end of their itinerary, the movement once again demands the 43 be presented alive. The pain and the search have already turned into national and international clamor.

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## CLASSIC BOOK REVIEW:

**Jaques Semelin;  
Unarmed Against Hitler**

Growing up in Denmark I remember soaking up the impression purported by books, movies and school, the dominant narrative that it was a national embarrassment that the country did not militarily resist the Nazi Germany's invasion, which led to an occupation of Denmark by Germany from 1940 to 1945. Also, we were informed that it was only because of the armed underground resistance that Denmark was not considered an ally of Nazi Germany when the war ended.

As an adult I became interested in nonviolent struggles, reading about what was going on in other parts of the world. To my great surprise I also discovered that Denmark's path through WWII was sometimes used as an example of how a small country could nonviolently stand up to a large and aggressive neighboring state. According to the official German memorandum which were presented to the Danish government, early in the morning on April 9, 1940, German troops were in the country as friends to prevent neutral Denmark from being invaded by Britain. Although no one believed this, the Danish government decided to exploit this official statement as best as it could and remained in place pursuing a "policy of cooperation" until August 1943.

One of the books that was important in opening my eyes on how different history could be told was Jaques Semelin's "Unarmed Against Hitler". Semelin does not dispute the facts about what I had previously learned, but focuses on a part of the story and presents it in a perspective which is completely new to me. Denmark is only one among many occupied countries that is treated in the book, but because of my background this part fascinated me the most. The cooperation policy, which I had understood to be a great shame, in this context turned out to be considered a reasonable choice given the circumstances. Even if it had been armed to the teeth, small Denmark would have had no military chance against the invading German troops. Armed struggle would only



have resulted in many dead soldiers and civilians, and a much harsher occupation time.

“Unarmed Against Hitler” might not have the status as a “real” classic, but it deserves to be read. Everyone interested in civilian resistance and nonviolent struggles have probably been met with the question “but what would you have done about Hitler?”. Just the fact that Semelin deals with this difficult question makes the book worth reading. Semelin is a historian, who uses comparative history to discuss factors that facilitate or hinder non-cooperation, protests, strikes, civil disobedience, and rescue operations.

Semelin finds that in the documentation of WWII, civilian resistance is often considered a supplement to the armed guerrilla war, where the focus is the military goals and how civilians play assisting roles. The consequence is that the type of goals that is not important from a military point of view, but where the goal is to maintain the integrity of civil society, has been neglected. Semelin fully acknowledges that civilian resistance often assists in pursuing military goals, but has chosen to focus only on the autonomous resistance which were completely civilian and not overlapping with armed struggle. These forms of resistances aimed at preserving institutions outside of the occupiers control and protecting people who were prosecuted. A consequence of this choice is that Semelin has investigated the years between 1939 and 1943, since armed and unarmed resistance was more closely interlinked during the last two years of the war. The majority of Semelin’s examples took place before the Nazis were defeated at Stalingrad in February of 1943. Before then, the German army appeared to be invincible, and as Semelin says: “Before 1943, realism was not on the side of those who opposed Hitler. Europe seemed to have become German for a long time to come. The future seemed Nazi” (p. 33).

The forms of civilian resistance which was possible to undertake in the occupied countries depended on the purposes of the occupations. In the East, Hitler wanted *lebensraum* for people of German origin. These areas were destined to be “emptied” of the people who lived there, to provide space for the “master race”. In western Europe and Scandinavia, the occupation had a different orientation. The people were not considered subhuman and only had to be reeducated, a task which was gener-



ally perceived to have to wait until after the war was won, thus, not an immediate priority. Meanwhile, these societies were to be exploited for their skilled labors, manufactured goods, natural resources, food production, and strategic positions. Such a situation provided very different opportunities for civilian resistance than what was possible in the East. An aspect that Semelin emphasizes is that the majority of occupied Europe had no recent experiences with foreign invasions and resistance to occupations, no “resistance knowledge”. No one had made plans about what should happen in case of an occupation. Thus, all forms of resistance had to be improvised and strategies on how to respond developed along the way.

It is not unusual to be met with the perception that when military defeat is a fact, there is really not much that can be done. However, the experiences from occupied Europe during WWII shows that there were a range of different options for governments. As Semelin says, “After the battle of the armed forces comes the battle to control civil society” (p. 49), the question of how to obtain and maintain legitimacy. As mentioned above, the Danish government remained in place and cooperated for the first three years, something that Germany exploited by setting Denmark as its model protectorate. Other governments and royal families fled abroad, like in Norway and the Netherlands. In France, the north of the country was under German administration, while the south was under the control of General Petain who was willing to cooperate with Germany. Yet, another option, chosen by for instance Romania and Bulgaria, was to become a German ally, which made it possible to maintain a fragile political autonomy for some time.

Semelin finds that usually national collaboration leads to legitimization of the occupier (he is very critical of his native France), although he considers Denmark as an exception. However, resistance was likely to start earlier in countries where there were no legitimate government in place, as his comparison between Denmark and Norway shows. Semelin also uses a Norwegian example to discuss the role of social cohesion when it comes to resistance. Societies and groups with more cohesion might be more likely to resist. Norway was a society with strong internal cohesion, and the most famous case of Norwegian civilian resistance was when the bishops, priests, and teachers early in 1942 strongly resisted the attempts to Nazify churches and schools. A Dutch case of how the



doctors resisted nazification in a similar way is also discussed. In addition to the societies generally being socially coherent, professions such as clergy, doctors, and teachers are also often characterised by strong ethical values. In contrast, in places with weaker social cohesion like France and Belgium, civilian resistance was more limited. Nevertheless, these countries did experience some short term strikes and public demonstrations early in the war as expressions of national sentiments and resistance.

In addition to the internal factors, Semelin also investigates how “external factors” influenced resistance. These factors were the German repression and introduction of unpopular decisions such as forced labour. This discussion is spread across chapters 5 and 7, and early in the section about this topic, Semelin says that “We are accustomed to thinking of repression as the supreme means that a tyrant uses to spread terror (...) [b]ut we have not adequately noted the other side of the phenomenon – namely that beyond a certain threshold, repression becomes counter-productive with respects to its own objectives.” (p. 77). It would have been an interesting improvement if Semelin had discussed Gene Sharp’s book “The Politics of Nonviolent Action” (1973) in this context, since Sharp has a much more developed theory of how this counter-productivity can be brought about through what he calls “political jiu-jitsu”. Semelin only has a paragraph about Sharp in chapter 7, but it would have been nice to see him engaging in a conversation with Sharp’s work. Instead, Semelin proceeds by discussing how the severe repression of Polish culture and language also created a counter-reaction in the form of a more united population and civilian resistance. Underground high schools and universities became widespread forms of resistance, and Semelin asserts that people were willing to take the risk of participating as teachers and students because the Nazi terror was so indiscriminate. There were no rewards for those who tried to cooperate. This led many to resist, because it was only slightly riskier to participate in schools and universities than to try to live a quiet life out of the way of the occupier. Thus, one could just as well join in the attempt to preserve Polish culture and language since there was much to gain and no more to lose than if not taking part. Semelin also emphasises another element of civilian resistance that Sharp had already written extensively about 20 years earlier – that for the opponent, it is much harder to find an adequate response



to civilian resistance than to violent resistance. This is supported by Basil Liddell Hart's interviews with German officers right after the war where they stated that violent resistance they were trained to deal with, but that other forms of resistance "baffled" them. (p. 120)

Chapter 6 deals with the role of "public" opinion and how it might change considerably over time. The word "public" is in quotation marks because Semelin emphasises that many opinions could *not* be expressed publicly during the Nazi occupations. The opinion among the general population was important for the development of resistances, although disapproval of the occupier did not result in participation in organised resistance activities for most people. However, the general mood was important when it came to how risky it was to resist. For this argument, Semelin uses the resistance to the compulsory labour in Germany introduced in France as an example. Early during the occupation, the Germans and the French collaborationists tried to persuade and blackmail people to go to work in Germany, but when this did not work, the *Service du Travail Obligatoire* (STO) was introduced. In the beginning, the resistance was limited, and by the end of 1942, 250,000 people had been sent to work in Germany. At this time the conscription was mainly affecting working class people, and someone considering to refuse would not have found any sympathy expressed in public. On the contrary, institutions like the Catholic church and the boy scouts were demanding obedience to the state. However, already in the spring of 1943 the opinion was changing. Semelin thinks that it both played a role that people now believed that Germany would lose the war, and that the revised STO law now required *all* young people to work in Germany for two years. Young refusers could now find support within the French administration to get false papers and places to hide in the countryside. Although the majority of these refusers did not become part of the organised resistance movement, they were an important expression of French dissatisfaction with the occupation. Likewise, Semelin also shows how the termination of the programme to kill the mentally ill within Germany itself (known as T4) was a direct result of some clergy publicly expressing their condemnation.

Semelin has also dedicated a chapter to civilian resistance to the genocide of the Jews, and identifies three potential layers of protection –

the state, the opinion, and social networks. Here Semelin returns to a story I know well from my childhood – how more than 95 % of the Danish Jews were rescued from the Nazi extermination camps because of the massive support from the general population which helped them escape to neutral Sweden. Many factors have been suggested as important when considering the fate of the Jews in the different European countries, such as proximity to a safe place, the level of anti-semitism, the size of the Jewish community, and the level of Jewish integration in that society. Semelin does not buy into these usual explanations when it comes to the Danish success story for civilian resistance. As a comparison he argues that the Norwegian Jewish community was even smaller than the Danish one (Norway had 2000 and Denmark 7500 Jews). Norway also had an even closer geographical proximity to Sweden, nevertheless, half of the Jews were captured in October of 1942 without the Norwegian resistance being able to prevent it. Instead, Semelin argues that the Danish Jews were saved because all three potential protective screens were in place at the same time. Until August 1943, the Jews were protected by the Danish government's policy of cooperation. Danish authorities categorically refused to introduce any form of discrimination that would violate the constitution. In addition, public opinion was against persecution and social networks were in place to assist the Jews when the round up started a month after the resignation of the the government in late August 1943. Indeed, helping the Jews was the entry point into organised resistance for many people. Although, I don't want to downplay the achievements of this rescue operation in any way, it was also a considerable help that the German occupation administration and army in Denmark were internally divided regarding whether it was a smart move to capture the Danish Jews. An attaché at the German embassy, George-Ferdinand Duckwitz had warned the leaders of the Danish resistance movement several days in advance about what was being planned.

Other countries did not have all these three protective screens in place at the same time, but each of them could play a considerable role in protecting the Jews. Many were saved in Belgium, thanks to social networks. In Romania, the state played an important role in saving almost everyone because it became a way for the government to show its independence vis a vis Germany when the dynamics of the war was changing

in 1943. This was not an outcome one would have expected when taking into consideration that anti-Semitism was strong in Romania; a fascist government came to power in 1937, and massacres and pogroms occurred early in the war. In Bulgaria, there were also an anti-Jewish policy, but here the orthodox church publicly expressed its disapproval, and the King was determined to prevent the deportations after the Nazi's loss at Stalingrad.

When evaluating the impact of civilian resistance in occupied Europe, Semelin distinguishes between the direct and the indirect, the immediate and the long term results. When thousands of people refused the forced labour, it had a direct an immediate impact on Germany's access to manpower. The protection of the Jews also directly prevented the Nazi extermination machine from running smoothly. Strikes and demonstrations seldom resulted in changed policies directly, but had a longer term and more indirect effect when they showed that the populations were not submissive. In this context Semelin reminds us that "domination" might be "a fact", but that "submission" is "a state of mind" (p. 172). As the case with the Norwegian teachers showed, military conquest does not automatically mean political conquest. Semelin suggests that where violent resistance tended to unite the Nazis, civilian resistance had a greater possibility to create splits. One has to remember that the local German officials and their collaborators feared the anger and dissatisfaction of their superiors. They had a personal interest in keeping the societies they were administrating calm, something that often made them argue in favour of a softer line than the "hawks" within their own ranks.

One of the things I really like about the book is the "sober" tone. There are no unnecessary glorifications, no exaggerations in order to make civilian resistance larger or more widespread or more successful than what it is. Simply by focusing on this aspect of European history, Semelin has made an invaluable contribution to our understanding of civilian resistance. One of the most important questions generated by the book is that if this could be achieved without any prior planning and training, how much more effective could it not have been if civilian resistance had been a strategy planned in advance. However, towards the end of the book, Semelin reminds us that civilian resistance during WWII was about protecting what was possible to protect, and not about



liberating the countries from occupation, as the latter is a completely different matter.

In the final chapter, Semelin positions his book within the debate and research about civilian based defence as it was in the early 1990's. This part is a bit outdated now, but many of the reflections regarding what is possible and what is not with this form of defence are still relevant. Civilian based defence cannot prevent an aggressor from military invasion, but it has the potential for making the people within the conquered territory very difficult and expensive to govern. Depending on the purpose of the occupation, well developed civilian based defence might mean that the gains will not stand in reasonable relation to the cost and effort of occupation. One of the findings from Semelin's work is how important social cohesion is for developing resistance capacities. Thus, struggles for social justice and inclusion of minorities are not just about internal politics, they might also be important in the perspective of how to develop a civilian based defence.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Jason MacLeod:

**Merdeka and the Morning Star:****Civil Resistance in West Papua***St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2015, pp. 304.*

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There are still a lot of people around the world that live under colonization and struggle for their self-determination. Major historical anticolonial process started after the Second World War and its ghosts are situated in a distant memory. The more familiar people among the ones living under such constraints are the Tibetans, Palestinians, and the Kurdish people; but, there are many others, less well known ones, for example: the Saharawis in Western Sahara, colonized by Morocco; or the Papuans in West Papua, colonized by Indonesia. In *Merdeka and the Morning Star: Civil Resistance in West Papua* (2015, by University of Queensland Press), Dr. Jason MacLeod gives us an account that is simultaneously a case study of the particular circumstances of the Papuan struggle, and a general outline on how nonviolent self-determination struggles can be conducted effectively.

MacLeod is an activist-scholar that for over two decades has devoted himself to explore the options of a self-determination struggle in West Papua against the occupying Indonesian regime. He shares with us his experiences of working together with Papuans over the years in numerous workshops and meetings. From his readings of a vast range of research literature in different fields (self-determination, West Papua/Indonesia, civil resistance, revolution, regime change, culture, etc.) MacLeod creatively develops different models of possible unarmed methods and strategies, and makes summaries of strengths and weaknesses of the current Papuan struggle.

West Papua is situated on the western part of a large island, north-east of Australia, where mountains divide two nations. Papua New Guinea constitutes the eastern part. In West Papua 1.5 million people from



several different indigenous groups live in highlands and lowland areas, as well as on surrounding small islands. Papuans were colonized by the Dutch in 1848 and became part of Indonesia in 1963 when Indonesia liberated itself. West Papua was formally recognized 1969 as a part of Indonesia by the international community after a rigged “Act of Free Choice” (named “Act of No Choice” by Papuans), where representatives of the Papuans were violently intimidated to make a public vote to belong to Indonesia, a process that was shamefully supervised by a passive and ignorant United Nations (p. 52-4).

### **Merdeka is possible through popular civil resistance**

MacLeod argues that self-determination à la ‘Merdeka’ (the Papuan version of freedom) is possible, but he recognizes all the obstacles, including those that arise from weaknesses of the Papuan struggle. MacLeod argues that diplomacy and negotiations in themselves, without a powerful position is meaningless, as they have not and thus will not lead to any meaningful change. However, if combined with an effective resistance that forces the Jakarta government to negotiations, it would make sense. Thus, the key questions are how such a Papuan resistance could be mustered and what characteristics it needs in order to constitute enough pressure. So far, the armed struggle has proven less than effective, and MacLeod don’t see any prospects for it to become more decisive. That path has been tried and failed since 1960. The answer needs to be found somewhere else. MacLeod sees an alternative path through a skilled strategy of unarmed resistance. A key reason for long-term hope is that it is increasingly clear for the younger generation that a struggle that involves broader sectors and higher participation of the Papuans as well as Indonesians in general, is needed. Only nonviolent means of struggle is able to achieve that, claims MacLeod. So, basically the whole book discusses the history of and prospects for civil resistance in West Papua.

### **An overview of the book**

*Merdeka and the Morning Star* expresses MacLeod’s engaged academic approach. It summarizes the theories and methodological perspectives





informing the study, outlines the history of West Papua and the evolution of the root causes that drives the conflict, the existing visions of freedom ('Merdeka') among Papuans, the history of the Papuan liberation struggle (including a historical chronology of resistance acts), the transformation of armed struggle into unarmed resistance, and a detailed framework of how a nonviolent liberation would be possible. A summary of this version of engaged academia (p. 38, 42) shows how MacLeod approaches his study through a combination of research, pedagogy of solidarity and praxis. I appreciate the details given in the first chapter outlining the radical academic approach based on solidarity with the Papuan liberation dreams informing MacLeod, but 40 pages of methodological reflections would not engage everyone.

Chapter 2 gives the history of colonial rule of the indigenous people in West Papua, how it went from Dutch rule to Indonesian "liberation" in the anticolonial process, and how the UN was deeply complicit through its incompetence in creating the dilemma Papuans now face. MacLeod describes how the *root causes* of the problem of today (p. 56) – systemic injustices and violent repression, resource exploitation, racism, migration and changing demographics, and the historical denial of self-determination – combine with *proximate causes* (p. 69) – such as "corruption and competition between Papuan elites", "deep suspicion between Papuan moderates and politicians", "low-level horizontal conflict between Papuans and non-Papuans, between Papuans and Papuans, and between Papuan elites and grassroots" – and amounts to a "slow-motion (cultural) genocide". As a basis for later discussions of potentials for resistance we also get a comprehensive analysis of the sources of Indonesian domination (based on the power theory of Gene Sharp), which is today maintained through a combination of in-migration from the rest of Indonesia, modernization development that serves migrants and the state, and militarized repression of Papuans. Thus, the dominance of Indonesia is built on external sources that exclude Papuans, something that makes it more difficult for them to make effective resistance. Indonesia is dependent on the territory of West Papua, but not Papuans.

Since every liberation struggle is guided by a vision of how something else is possible, chapter 3 outlines in detail the manifold visions and cultural traditions that underpins the understanding of "merdeka" (free-





dom): self-realization and welfare for all, peace and justice, and cultural resurrection. In chapter 4 MacLeod narrates the history of resistance, with a focus on the period from 1998, the “Papuan Spring” (1998-2001) that started with a brave flag raising of the Papuan independence flag – the Morning Star – that lead to a brutal reaction in the form of the “Biak massacre”, and, eventually to a partial success in the form of the “Special Autonomy” that was granted to West Papua within Indonesia. This was a success since the Indonesian regime felt pressured to give more to the Papuans than what they were originally willing. However, like in so many other similar cases, it looked good on paper but was betrayed in reality. Therefore, the liberation struggle continues. Throughout this chapter it becomes clear that Papuans built their resistance by basing it on a long history of 42 rebellions during the first hundred years from 1850. The more immediate basis of the contemporary wave of resistance is the instructive recreation of a culture of resistance by the performance group Mambosak in the 1970s, which collected and performed traditional songs and dances throughout the region, and inspired a wave of performance groups in the 1980s (p. 122-3). To me it seems this was a key process that facilitated the Papuan identity and self-awareness as a nation. In his more detailed treatment of the current wave of resistance, MacLeod analyses a number of campaigns (several of which he closely investigated over his more than 20 years of focus on West Papua), such as the church-based Land of Peace campaign (that succeeded in undermining sectarian violence mobilizations between groups), and the strong strike waves by the exploited workers at the Freeport gold mine (the biggest tax payer in Indonesia) that lead to substantial improvements, and the vital and powerful mobilization of unity articulated in the Papuan People’s Congress (that eventually in its turn lead to the hopeful broad alliance of different groupings in the unity umbrella of ULMWP formed just recently). MacLeod also engages in a detailed analysis of the fascinating process in which the armed resistance (that has proliferated into several groups, although still small and poorly equipped) transformed into a liberation movement focusing on unarmed resistance. A range of factors explains this complex, multilevel and non-linear transformation in which the focus has changed without that the armed resistance is halted and still receive popular support. In the new Papuan liberation movement



it is a new generation of younger and more urban based activists that has taken the lead and employ a range of civil resistance techniques, but becomes clear from the discussion as it proceeds: is lacking discipline, informed knowledge of civil resistance, a clear strategy and unity that would make it effective. Therefore, MacLeod spends the last chapter outlining in details his proposed framework for a nonviolent liberation of West Papua. MacLeod's hope is then that the newly created unity among different Papuan groups would adopt this strategic framework in their future liberation struggle.

### **How is self-determination through civil resistance possible?**

MacLeod suggests already in the introduction a unique model for self-determination that he advocates, a model he develops throughout the book. It is summarized in a formula: “[(mass + momentum) x unity in three domains] + diplomacy + political opportunities = merdeka (‘freedom’)”. “Mass” stands for high levels of participation and broad involvement from social groups, while “momentum” is a matter of skillful application of strategies (grand strategy, goals and objectives, leadership, etc.). This is suggested to be used in order to resist key power sources within three domains that uphold the Indonesian control of West Papua: West Papua, Indonesia, and the international domain. This basis of liberation struggle should then be assisted by active diplomacy (within the different domains) at times of raising political opportunities (as e.g. waves of political opposition and reforms within Indonesia, Indonesian economic crises, changed regional power dynamics, policy changes within superpowers, etc.).

The challenge for West Papuan self-determination is immense, and there is nothing MacLeod shies away from. The fact that Indonesia is seen as a democratic success arising from a regime change in 1998 (due to a basically unarmed uprising of Indonesians), together with the ban on media reporting from the occupied territories, obscure the authoritarian role of its army in West Papua. The weakness of Papuan mobilization is a key problem MacLeod tries to address. This weakness is made visible in the form of low levels of participation (less than 3 % of the Papuan

population even during mass campaigns), as well as cautious Papuan political representatives, and a lack of consensus, understanding, and commitment for a clear civil resistance strategy and unity. Furthermore, and perhaps most decisive in the long run, is the high number and speed of migration of non-Papuan groups in to West Papua. The estimations point to Papuans being only about 15 % of the total population already 2030 (p. 228). And lastly, a point that is connected to the previous mentioned obstacles is we have an international community with very little interest that lacks commitment and awareness of the colonial situation of West Papua. UN took West Papua off the list of colonial territories after it gained Special Autonomy status, and there is only one country – Vanuatu – that recognizes West Papua as an independent territory.

The conclusion is therefore that the Papuans have a long way to go before their liberation might be possible. They were not able to utilize the opportunities that arose with the Indonesian democratization in the wake of the popular unarmed revolution of 1998, as East Timor did. But today a new unity seems to develop within the Papuan society, and the armed resistance seems to loose its momentum with a new generation of unarmed liberation warriors. To me, MacLeod's emphasis on the three domains seems to be a key insight, that it is simply not enough to wage a liberation struggle within West Papua. The struggle needs to get force from a strong mobilization within Indonesia and the international community. It is however here I do not feel convinced. I cannot see what it could be that would make Indonesians and the wider international community – both populations and governments – to care enough about Papuans to actually take on a long-term struggle with the Indonesian government and pressure them to concessions. This is perhaps the only section where I think MacLeod should have developed his thoughts a bit more.

### **A major contribution – but aiming for too much**

*Merdeka and the Morning Star* is a comprehensive historical and theoretical analysis of and developed proposal for the liberation struggle of Papuans in West Papua, which is written in an engaged and a personal reflective style. In my view the book provides an account of and serves as a model for us all; a deeply personal-political struggle by an academic to



find options for a colonized people, a model that shows how it is possible with an interdisciplinary engagement with the question of freedom struggles to apply general theories and models on a particular context, and to do that through dialogue and solidarity with the people that are oppressed. The book is a testament of hope and solidarity, and a cry for help to stop the ongoing slow-motion “cultural genocide” of the indigenous people of West Papua that risks virtually slaughtering their culture in a similar way the colonizers of Australia and the US did to the culture of the colonized. The book is rich and engaging, a kind of handbook for both students of West Papua and civil resistance. It gives a contextualized adoption of general theories, and shows a way of how to fruitfully and with sensitivity apply our models of resistance, power, and social change on a specific case.

However, the book has a weakness, but I would refrain from calling it significant. MacLeod tries to do too much at the same time. This is a book that is a report of 20+ years of work for Papuan liberation, a theoretical overview of civil resistance research, a cultural description of the worldview of these indigenous groups, an overview of the history of anticolonial resistance, an analysis of Indonesian exploitation and exercise in domination, as well as a separate study of how armed resistance transforms into civil resistance out of frustration with the huge costs and poor results of war, and a novel suggestion of how self-determination of colonized peoples could be done despite tremendous high odds, and still more. With such varied aims and broad scope it is not surprising that sometimes clarity is lacking. Sometimes it becomes a problem when the text suffers from an unclear structure in which the chronological and analytical approach is mixed (e.g. in the history of civil resistance in chapter 4), and we are quite often burdened with too much details of some events and processes, while sometimes the underlying context is not explained (or comes later), as e.g. when suddenly a ‘Freedom Flo-tilla’ is mentioned, but not explained, or when events are not dated. Still, there is a clear central thread throughout, and MacLeod moves forward in the discussion, focused on the problems and possibilities of liberation through civil resistance, and both the outline of the arguments and perspectives in the introduction and conclusions in each chapter make it easy to follow the main discussion. Thus, the unclear aspects of the text are not a major problem.





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If we had these kinds of case studies of all other self-determination cases in the world, we would have a possibility to make systematic comparisons and develop answers to why this kind of struggle is so much more difficult, both for armed and unarmed struggles. As Jason MacLeod says, we still do not know enough of why self-determination is more difficult than regime change, and there is also clearly not enough research distinguishing between different types of contexts, strategies and outcomes in self-determination struggles. With *Merdeka and the Morning Star* MacLeod has brought us one big step closer towards understanding, while also providing guidance for, liberation movements.

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## Kurt Schock (ed.), *Civil Resistance: Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle*

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The efficacy of nonviolence as a political tool has been pondered over for centuries. The long history of writings on nonviolence and nonviolent struggle/civil resistance took a quantum leap with the campaigns of Mahatma Gandhi and the investigation of those who not only described campaigns but also attempted to analyse them in order to distil lessons that explained why at times mass political movements succeeded and at other times they failed. The noteworthy authors, such as Richard B. Gregg (*The Power of Nonviolence*), Krishnalal Shridharani (*War Without Violence*), Joan Bondurant (*Conquest of Violence*) and, most significantly, Gene Sharp (*The Politics of Nonviolent Action* and *Waging Nonviolent*



*Struggle*), penned ground-breaking works, but, the concept of nonviolent struggle remained marginalised and did not make it into the mainstream of political science. Then, in the last few decades, the world witnessed “People Power”, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the various Colour Revolutions and, most recently, the Arab Spring. Nonviolent struggle could no longer be ignored, and a new spate of important and scholarly writings on the topic appeared.

In fact, in the last twenty or so years it has been difficult to keep up with all the new offerings. Some of them gave accounts of various struggles (for example Peter Ackerman and Jack Duval’s *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*), others attempted to draw out the lessons from the examples generally written about in order to provide strategic principles for enhancing the likelihood of success in nonviolent campaigns (for example Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler’s *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century*). More recently the literature on nonviolent struggle/civil resistance has provided a more in-depth analysis of nonviolent political movements. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (*Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*) demonstrated that nonviolent mass political movements succeed more often than violent ones, and Kurt Schock (*Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*) examined the factors that increased the resilience of protesters and assisted them in challenging the state’s power base. He also made an attempt to tease out the factors that promoted regime change in some countries and examined why they did not manage to do so in others. Most recently we have seen the publication of edited books that recovered early nonviolent histories that have been overshadowed by nationalist and at times mythical narratives of violent resistance (Maciej Bartkowski ed., *Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles*), and more recent civil resistance campaigns where factors such as power, economic conditions and external intervention have been taken into account (Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*). The latest offering in this category, one that delves into the less obvious and under researched aspects of nonviolent struggle, even further is *Civil Resistance: Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle*, edited by Kurt Schock.



The book aims to explore the practice and dynamics of civil resistance. It points out that nonviolent action is something other than politics as usual, that it cannot be located on a gradual continuum that goes from conventional politics to violence. Civil resistance can be summarised by noting that economic dependence exists since, the resources of a state must be constantly replenished. If workers withdraw their labor, citizens refuse to pay taxes, or third parties such as allies or important international trading partners withdraw support, end relations, or impose sanctions, then state power may be undermined. The book states “thus, governments depend on the cooperation of their own citizens, but also on other states and increasingly on nonstate transnational entities” (p.18). However, the essays in this book investigate subtler dimensions of this more or less standard definition of civil resistance.

Schock, in his introductory essay, makes the point that to understand civil resistance there are four central dynamics: widespread mobilisation, weathering repression, severing the opponent from its sources of power, and constructing alternatives. Varying essays in this collection tackle different aspects of this dynamic, with several of them drawing not only on the literature of civil resistance, but also that of social movements and revolution. We are presented with a view of nonviolence that takes local and personal realities into account in ways that are only just now making an appearance in the literature on nonviolence.

The first half of the book explores the dynamics of civil resistance, sometimes through case studies and at other times by drawing together instances from several sources. The first paper, by Julie Norman, tackles on the issue of the ways in which nonviolence can be framed by examining the Palestinian struggle. While the first Palestinian Intifada was extensively written about in terms of nonviolence, the nonviolent resistance that was continued under the admittedly more violent Second Intifada has been all but overlooked. Norman investigates the reasons why popular mobilisation has been limited in the more recent struggle even though the scope of grievances has expanded and intensified, and why nonviolent activities became mainly restricted to protest, persuasion and advocacy instead of direct intervention or civil disobedience. She notes that, in particular for the youth who had no memory of the use of nonviolent resistance in the First Intifada, the effect of the Oslo





Peace Accords resulted in redefining nonviolence in a way that distanced it from active resistance. Nonviolence became synonymous with coexistence and this meant that it could be seen as a way of advocating normalisation of relations with Israel and therefore the acceptance of occupation. In other words, “the concept of nonviolence was reframed under Oslo from one of struggle and resistance to one of accommodation and pacification’ (p.41). Or even, given the preponderance of Western nonviolence trainers and donors who portrayed nonviolence as dialogue and peace building, nonviolence came to be seen as a Western construct designed to subdue Palestinians rather than bolster their resistance. She concludes that “Perhaps the most important challenge for activists is to reframe nonviolence as a form of strategic resistance, not a form on normalization or passivity” (p.51).

Janjira Sombatpoonsiri makes the point that while there is now quite a broad literature on nonviolence and humour, it must be remembered that one size does not fit all, that the tactical use of humour is contingent on the context of the resistance. Humour, as a form of communication with the wider public may be useful for the mobilisation of a resistance movement, and also to counter opponent’s oppression, but, activists need to take into account cultural senses of appropriateness. Using the Otpor movement, which led campaigns to overthrow the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic, as an example, the author demonstrates that in this case the “advantages of humour in nonviolent resistance campaigns are contingent on different natures of local politics in Serbia” (p.60). While there were towns where activists saw humorous actions as benefitting their local campaigns, in other towns they avoided staging humorous actions because they deemed them to be counterproductive. As Sombatpoonsiri notes, “Without the substantial cooperation and support of opposition parties, independent media, and NGOs, humorous protest actions proved counterproductive because they exposed Otpor activists to the risk of harsh repression” (p. 74), or because such protests were deemed by the locals to be culturally inappropriate and thus did not garner support. In these cases, activists could employ other tactics that were deemed more appropriate by the targeted communities. In other words, familiarity with the way of life of the local community means that activists understand cultural boundaries, which ensures that lines are not



crossed in ways that would resonate negatively with the local community. This insider knowledge ensures appropriate “common sense” in addition to rationalised plans and strategic calculations.

Examining youth mobilisation in the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine, Olena Nikolayenko demonstrates how a lack of nonviolent discipline and tactical innovation can damage a resistance campaign. For example, the breach of nonviolent discipline in 2000-2001 crippled the protest movement against the incumbent president, while a commitment to nonviolence increased the level of youth mobilisation against the regime in 2004. Here we have an example of strategic learning being put to use from one campaign to the next.

The topic of regime counterstrategies to outmanoeuvre resisters is surveyed by Sharon Erickson Nepstad in her examination of the civil resistance movements in Panama and Kenya. In Panama, General Noriega at first attempted to use force to break the growing nonviolent resistance movement. When this failed he focussed on fomenting tensions within the opposition movement and ensuring that his troops stayed loyal by making sure that they grew wealthy under his regime. The dictator in Kenya, Daniel arap Moi, engaged in a ruthless elimination of enemies, and guaranteed his own political survival by neutralising international sanctions by holding reasonably fair elections. An election may appear to be clean on election day but could be organised in a way that obstructed opposition pre-election efforts. Bribes, threats, harassment of opposition, and the passing of legislation that limited the chances of opposition victory at the poles were actions that were not evident at polling stations where observers saw citizens casting their ballots with few hindrances. From these cases Nepstad concludes that “a good strategy that withdraws multiple forms of citizen-based power from a regime is not always enough to achieve one’s goal” (p.133). In short, rulers have more tools than blatant repression to ensure that they remain in power. Their countermeasures can be far subtler than arrests and assaults, and perhaps more effective.

Nepstad’s analysis sets the scene for Brian Martin’s following chapter. Martin has written a great deal about the dynamics of nonviolent action, on how violent repression can backfire by undermining the legitimacy of authorities and mobilising support for the challengers, and also

how the authorities can choose tactics to inhibit a backfire. Martin has examined Gregg's "moral jiu-jitsu" and Sharp's "political jiu-jitsu", where the tables are turned on the oppressor, and has come up with a more comprehensive model he terms "backfire". For example, in East Timor following the Indonesian massacre of peaceful protesters rather than merely terrorising them into submission, the killings helped to create an international movement in support of East Timorese independence. The violence had backfired on the government and benefitted the protesters. Here Martin summarises the five types of tactics that governments such as that of Indonesia can use to reduce observer outrage: cover up the action; devalue the target; reinterpret what happened through lying, minimizing, blaming and framing; using official channels to give an appearance of justice; and intimidating or rewarding the people involved. These were all attempted by the regime. However, there are also activist responses that can be used to prevent the reduction of outrage: expose the actions (and this was the key in this case through video evidence of the massacre), validate the target, interpret events as injustice, avoid or discredit official channels, mobilise support, and resist intimidation and rewards.

Veonique Dudouet adds to the literature concerning third party interventions in nonviolent struggles for human rights and democracy (mostly concerned with protective accompaniment, for example by Peace Brigades International or Christian Peacemaker teams, and interposition, for example by Witness for Peace or the Gulf Peace Team) to include the direct and indirect role of symbolic, financial, or technical support by state, interstate and nonstate actors. She concludes that successful civil resistance "must be homegrown and developed over the course of several years, and the role of outside assistance in these victories can only be marginal and secondary" because "only local movements possess sufficient knowledge about their own context to secure their own paths towards liberation, but may need external actors to support them along the way" (p.194). In short, third-party support is useful but, such support must not impose on local struggles, and undermine their autonomy.

The second part of the book is more philosophical, and examines the frontiers of civil resistance. In this section definitions and assumptions are investigated and possible further avenues of study is suggested.

Regardless of this, Dustin Ells Howes' chapter on the defence of freedom with civil resistance in the early Roman Republic may have found a better home in a journal of political philosophy. It will probably prove a little too esoteric for most of the readers of a text concerned with lessons that can be learned from recent nonviolent struggles to help refine the art. After a detailed examination of a series of successful civil resistance campaigns by Roman plebeians in the fifth century BCE, he criticises the currently popular political position concerning the need to defend "freedom" through military violence.

Sean Chabot's paper, "Making Sense of Civil Resistance: From Theories and Techniques to Social Movement *Phronesis*", makes the point that while much of the writing on nonviolent action, for example that of Gene Sharp, may provide various theories of power, list many methods of activism, and examine the dynamics involved in civil resistance, it ignores the "practical wisdom that activists develop and employ in their immediate social contexts" (p.227). He notes that such wisdom and intelligent context-recognising action involves "more than awareness of basic principles, facts, theories, and techniques" (p. 236). While Sharp may "appeal to the heads" of nonviolent activists, their "the heart" must also be considered. Chabot asks theorists to find a deeper understanding of how social movement activists develop their moral visions, situational ethics, and practical wisdom. Here an invitation is extended for analysts to look at the pros and cons of careful planning versus the engagement in spontaneous actions.

In the penultimate, and a substantive chapter, Stellan Vinthagen examines the degree to which the knowledge of nonviolent action held by scholars is relevant or of practical use to nonviolent activists. His call is to develop "more practical, more creative, and more effective nonviolent action campaigns in the future" (p. 260), harking back to a Gandhian position which places heavy emphasis on ethics and morals rather than just techniques. To achieve this, he asks for a better utilisation of the literature related to studies of social movements and revolution. Vinthagen suggests three forms of nonviolent action beside the commonly examined instrumental ones that offer a method for altering the distribution of power and attaining specified goals. He also sees nonviolent



action as a normative action (the building up of new personal habits and social institutions as seen, for example, in Gandhi's "constructive program"), self-expressive articulation (the countering of dehumanising enemy images in ways that allow for the demonstration of dignity, common humanity, solidarity, and possibly, again in Gandhian terms, the use of voluntary suffering in order to reach the "heart" of the opponent), and communicative rationality (the finding of forms of meetings, the exchange of views, arguments and opinions that creatively develop ways of communicating and the building of trust). Vinthagen claims that all four dimensions "need to be applied simultaneously in order to develop an effective nonviolent action campaign" (p. 281), and he calls for further research to explore this model of nonviolent action. Harking back to Chabot's paper, it would be interesting to see how this suggested spontaneous approach, taking cognisance of subjective realities, will square with the generally accepted position that in order to achieve maximum effectiveness nonviolent action must be carefully planned.

In the final substantive paper, Chaiwat Satha-Anand revisits the definitions of nonviolence, coming to the conclusion that rather than there being a division between principled and pragmatic nonviolence, the division may be illusory or at least that the line between them is blurry, and that we should try "to regain the sight of connectedness lost" (p. 298).

As already mentioned above, several of these chapters link in with the observations and arguments of other chapters. For example, Chabot's chapter ties in with the chapters by Sombatpoonsiri and Dudouet. They all discuss the importance of insider knowledge to help understand the motivations for various approaches taken by activists and this allows for some deeper understanding of the dynamics that play such an important part in the success or otherwise of civil resistance action against repressive regimes. It also links with the examination of subjective perspectives of nonviolent activists as examined in Vinthagen's chapter. In a similar way, Martin's chapter, in its highlighting of official channels as a means of reducing outrage over injustices, ties in with Norman's observations concerning the Oslo accords and Nepstad's analysis of the Kenyan elections. While the editor has pointed out some of these links through notations in brackets, the book may have been even more cohesive if the





contributors had been able to read each other's drafts beforehand and were encouraged to make their own connections. But this is merely a quibble.

For those who want to probe more deeply into the analysis provided in some of these chapters, it should be pointed out that several of them are in fact useful summaries of arguments dealt with in greater detail elsewhere. For this reason, it may be instructive to look up Brian Martin's book *Justice Ignited: The Dynamics of Backfire*, Janjira Sombatpoonsiri's book *Humor and Nonviolent Struggle in Serbia*, and Stellan Vinthagen's book *A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works*.

In his summarising final chapter, Schock expresses his hope that *Civil Resistance* has moved the debates concerning nonviolent activism "beyond some of the limitations of the existing theory and approach to civil resistance" and has managed to "open up the possibilities of integration or dialectical synthesis" to include insights from the broader social science literature and to open further avenues of research (p. 314), and this valuable new addition to the growing field of literature concerning nonviolent struggle has done both. While it points to areas that require further study as our insight into the dynamics of nonviolence increases, it also provides a re-reminder that those who still do not take this literature seriously ignore it at their own cost.

*Thomas Weber*

## **Janjira Sombatpoonsiri: Humor & Nonviolent Struggle in Serbia**

*Syracuse University Press, 2015 ISBN 978-0-8156-3407-2*

Sombatpoonsiri's book "Humor & Nonviolent Struggle in Serbia" is the first book length account of the Serbian organisation Otpor and its role in the overthrowing of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Sombatpoonsiri has chosen to focus on the group's use of humour, but she also covers issues such as how Otpor was organised, its relationships with independent media, its opposition parties, and many non-humorous activities.



Silly and provocative street pranks was one of Otpor's trademarks, and Sombatpoonsiri places this use of humour within a strong Serbian tradition of black humour. This type of humour is expressed in absurd theatre, satirical pop culture, and tragicomic films. Additionally, the author traces the tradition of use of satire by performers at protest events during the early 1990's, and in slogans that were used by demonstrators. During the extensive protests in Belgrade in the winter of 1996/97 humour began to be used systematically as a way of doing protest that created joy and reduced hostility. A carnivalesque atmosphere made protest events fun and enjoyable, and contributed to what civil resistance scholars refer to as "nonviolent discipline" among the protesters. When demonstrators minimised hostility and protest did not end in riots, the regime did not have any excuses for violent crackdowns. Carnivals (and many other forms of humour) are celebration of life over death; they open up the mind towards other possible futures and different ways of perceiving the world.

Otpor emerged towards the end of 1998, and was initiated by students who had been active participants in previous years' protests. Sombatpoonsiri shows how their experiences with the use of humour and carnival influenced Otpor's decisions about what tactics and methods to rely on. She also convincingly argues how the tradition of black humour provided a large reservoir of ideas to draw from when the use of humour became more strategic and systematic. Sombatpoonsiri has separated Otpor's use of humour into three types.

The first type of humour is the *Satirical street theatre*, which for instance ridiculed the regime's propaganda and its leading figures. This reached an immediate audience of passers-by, but was primarily a gateway to extensive media coverage by independent media. *Parodic protest actions*, which is the second type of humour categorized in the book, reclaimed national symbols and events, undermining the regime by turning its own rhetoric against it. Although, the labelling of these two categories might seem a bit peculiar to a humour research (for instance parody is frequently an aspect of satire), Sombatpoonsiri provides a systematic tour through all of Otpor's humorous actions and shows how different types of humour could serve different purpose. This is an extremely valuable contribution towards a better understanding of how multifaceted humour is and the different functions it can serve for a nonviolent resis-



tance movement. When it comes to the third category called *carnavalesque events* it is not obvious what was humorous about concerts, festivals, and food that were given away at concert events. In this section the theme of humour feels a bit forced upon activity which were important parts of Otpor's campaign, but, not necessarily funny. Many of them could just as well have been included under a heading of "non-humorous activities".

Chapter 6 is a unique mapping of the varying circumstances Otpor operated under in different parts of Serbia. This chapter is an important reminder to everyone about allied opposition movement and its effects. To the Otpor, the affiliation of the allied party in the local government made a considerable difference in their movement. This was a boon to the Otpor, as, for instance, such affiliation made it easier for arrested activists to get released. Even in places where the allied-opposition were not strong, its presence meant that Otpor could count on help with renting of offices or getting access to vehicles for transportation of materials.

Also, in this chapter Sombatpoonsiri focuses on humour, and how different circumstances provide a context that are favourable or unfavourable to the use of humour. In addition, the chapter briefly mentions that humour was considered counterproductive in some location or too dangerous in regime strongholds. These themes should be explored further in future research, but, it is important to bear in mind that humour can have many different faces. Otpor relied primarily on provocative humour that ridiculed the regime and did not experiment much with more inclusive forms of humour. Sombatpoonsiri notes that in some places where the opposition and independent media were weak, less provocative humour was considered successful, and future research on the use of humour in other places might lead us to uncover the potential of humour.

Based on 49 interviews with former Otpor activists and people who cooperated with the organisation, Sombatpoonsiri tells the story from Otpor's point of view. This perspective gives detailed insights into what meaning the use of humour had for Otpor members and their thoughts about its effectiveness, which could not have been obtained through any other method. However, the interviews took place ten years after the overthrow of Milosevic, and the reader is left to reflect alone





about the possible consequence of the passing of time. From life-story interviews it is well known that interviewees create a coherent narrative, emphasising some parts of their lives more than others to “make sense” of the stories they create over time. Thus, I wonder about the ways in which Otpor members might have told the story about the role of humour differently, compared to when they were in the middle of the struggle. Is it possible that in hindsight, the use of humour is framed in more strategic terms than a decade before? Without doubting Otpor’s strategic approach to humour, it nevertheless seems reasonable to ask if some of the actions might just have happened in the heat of the moment because they were part of the “repertoire” of Otpor’s way of protesting, rather than the result of deliberate strategic choices every time.

I highly recommend the book to everyone with an interest in civil resistance and nonviolent action because of the thorough documentation of an organisation that played a crucial role in bringing down a dictator. Sombatpoonsiri’s research has also placed cultural aspects of nonviolent struggles firmly on the map for scholars of civil resistance. She has shown how important humour was as a “discursive subversion” of the claims to truth put forward by the Milosevic regime. The book will also be an important read for scholars of humour, and should be an eye-opener to those who think that humour cannot lead to any “real” resistance.

*Majken Jul Sørensen, University of Wollongong and Karlstad University*



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