

JOURNAL OF RESISTANCE STUDIES

SPECIAL ISSUE:
THE MATERIALITY OF RESISTANCE:
RESISTANCE OF CULTURAL-MATERIAL
ARTEFACTS AND BODIES

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EDITORIAL

The Materiality of Resistance: Resistance of Cultural-Material Artefacts and Bodies

Anna Johansson, Mona Lilja and Lena Martinsson

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Introduction

‘Resistance studies’ draws on several theoretical traditions. Not only does the field include social movement studies, everyday resistance research and revolution studies, but also contains studies on, for example, guerrilla warfare and terrorism. Moreover, resistance studies sometimes engage with specialist fields, such as feminist studies, queer studies, peace studies, critical race studies, critical legal studies, heritage studies, design and crafts, and so on. These many fields, theories, and discussions relate to resistance studies because ‘resistance’ challenges different forms of power, including discursive truth-regimes, as well as more material injustices of capitalism (Lilja and Vinthagen 2018).

This editorial, and the collection of articles in this issue, provides new insights into the knowledge that a focus on materiality can offer us, particularly with respect to various resisting conducts and political subjectivities. For the purpose of our argument, we have identified three major trajectories in the scholarly literature—new materialism, resistance studies, and feminist/queer studies—which together contribute to a more elaborated view of political struggle. By embracing these research strands, the issue seeks to fill a gap in existing research by displaying how matter makes power and resistance possible, how matter orients resistance, and how discourses and materiality are deeply entwined. The matter that matters in the moment of resistance involve, among others, books, paper, pavements, streets, public transport, buildings, taxis, as well as bodies, artefacts, gatherings, and economy.

The question that we wish to explore is, ‘How does the intersection, or even merging, between the discursive and material inform collective resistance as well as informal/individual resistance?’ We will elaborate upon this question below by exploring, firstly, how the discursive is continuously enmeshed with matter and nonhuman agencies, as well as directing our attention to the posthumanism of feminist theory, and secondly, we highlight the contributions of materiality to shaping resistance. Finally, the impact and condition of materialities for the emergence of resistance subjectivities will be addressed.

Feminism, Posthumanism and the Crossroad between Discourses and Matter

Matter has always been important for feminist and queer studies. Not only bodies, sex, sexualities, and desires, but also questions of economic redistribution are central examples of the role of matter in feminist scholarly work. However, instead of taking the materiality upon which culture is built as a starting point in her analyses, Judith Butler turns the understanding of materiality upside-down and asks, ‘Through what regulatory norms is sex itself materialized?’ What is important for her is to understand materiality as something that emerges together with norms. It is, she writes, ‘a process of materialization that stabilizes the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter’ (Butler 1993:9-10). The materiality is not stable. It becomes fixed and even looks natural through reiterations of embodied norms. For us Butler’s work is one of several entrances into the discussion about how discourses and norms become part of matter.

The process of materialisation is never without friction, and re-materialisation is always possible, such as when bodies appear in a different way than what is understood as natural or normal. This re-materialisation can become evident in protesting movements and assemblies. Resisting assemblies are where bodies gather, move and appear in a way that is beyond ordinary reiterations. In line with this, gathering bodies could both be understood as being motivated by various political purposes in different public spaces, as well as becoming in themselves a performative and potential re-materialising force (Butler 2015). The bodies of the assemblies occupy pavements, streets, and squares, which are utterly

materialising conditions for public assembly and public speech. The bodies become performative and transient producers or reproducers of the character of that material context (Butler 2015). Even this material context transforms when trucks or tanks, for example, suddenly become platforms for speakers. Then, the material environment is actively reconfigured and re-functioned (Lilja 2017).

Moreover, it is not only bodies or streets, but also artefacts—such as pamphlets, flags and textiles—that are of discursive-material importance in the moment of resistance (Johansson 2017; Lilja & Wasshede 2016; Alm & Martinsson 2016). Artefacts—such as various flags (for example, the red socialist or rainbow flags) or the veil and other forms of clothing—are different types of materialities in resistance practices. These materialities can make counter-communities of belonging possible, recognisable, and visible by playing a role in marking boundaries between those who belong and those who are excluded from them. Material artefacts stand out as ‘agentive’ forces that merge with discourses and become transformative (Butler 2015; Alaimo and Hekman 2008:4-7).

In line with Alaimo and Hekman (2008:4-7), Baaz and Lilja (2017) argue that acknowledging matter as an ‘agentive force’ can enrich the understanding of discursive formations and productions, and thus contribute to the understanding of the practice of resistance. In their investigation of the mobilizations and resistance at a world heritage site—the ninth century Khmer temple Preah Vihear, located in Cambodia—Baaz and Lilja (2017) detail the ways in which matter is significant to the (re)construction of discourses of the temple and conclude that:

There is no clear border between the subject and matter in a moment of resistance; different material circumstances interact with the bodies and minds of the subjects, which provide them with the conditions that they have to either work with or against. The material and various discursive categories interact and shape different forms of resistance (...) Baaz and Lilja (2017:308).

Not only are there blurry borders in the crossroads between culture-nature, but different material phenomena, bodily flesh, or the shape of different landscapes contributes to the development and transformation of a discursive-material order (Colebrook 2000; Grosz 1994). This is in

line with Karen Barad (2008), who argues that nature affects discourses, that they are not possible to separate, and that these things have political consequences. In line with Bennet (2010), Barad, then, embraces matter as 'vibrant' and underscores aliveness as a processual character of material 'things'.

'Nature' is yet another entry point into our understanding of political struggles. Among others, the climate is a dramatic and important example that today strikes back and transforms the conditions for non-humans and humans alike. Due to these transformations, new discourse-materialities and a range of resistances emerge. Even if we point out the importance of matter and ongoing performative materializations, we understand resistance as something that is made possible in the entanglement of discourse and matter.

Central to posthumanism is the attempt to undermine the binary opposition between humans and non-humans, as well as the hierarchy that has placed humans in a privileged position. As Wolfe (2011:47) poetically expresses it, 'the human occupies a new place in the universe, a universe now populated by what I am prepared to call nonhuman subjects'. Posthumanist scholars challenge previous notions of 'humans', stating that humans are entangled with animals, and nature with the machines we have created (Wolfe 2011; Braidotti 2016). The notions of 'cyborg' and 'virtual body' stress 'the processual and co-constitutive nature of human embodiment, knowledge production, and culture in relation to environment, objects, nonhuman animals, and technology' (Braidotti 2016:19). The posthuman subject is thus defined as, 'a composite assemblage of human, non-organic, machine and other elements' (Braidotti 2016:19).

As demonstrated by feminist theory, the 'human' is a concept connected to access to certain privileges and rights, and thus the presumably universal 'Man' is, in fact, masculine, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, etc. (see for example Braidotti 2016). In a feminist understanding of posthumanism, both the traditions of androcentric and anthropocentric humanism are criticized for having made all but the 'Man' into the Other and nonhuman—the colonized, the non-citizens, women, queers, animals etc.

Braidotti names her own stance as ‘critical posthuman’ and combines Foucauldian genealogies with ‘feminist politics of location’ to ‘provide embodied and embedded accounts of the multilayered and complex relations of power that structure our “being human”’ (Braidotti 2016:15). She calls for ‘careful cartographies of the different degrees and the extent to which any one of us can be said to be “human”’ (Braidotti 2016:15). Moreover, she also calls for a vision of ‘becoming posthuman’, which implies ‘a new way of combining ethical values with the well-being of an enlarged sense of community which includes one’s territorial or environmental inter-connections’ (Braidotti 2016:26-27). This so-called posthuman ethics extends the respect and care for others to include those things that are defined as non-human, such as nature and animals.

Materiality and Resistance

Feminist new materialism has inspired many research fields, among them resistance studies. Various scholars within resistance studies have brought attention to the need to expand the analysis of power and resistance beyond the study of cultural processes, discourses, and intersubjective meaning systems by also including materiality (Törnberg 2013; Lilja 2016; Von Busch 2017). Rather than rejecting the linguistic turn, the suggested approach is to combine the analysis of the symbolic/discursive aspects with that of the material.

Sociologist Anton Törnberg (2013) points to the lack of elaboration on the role of material agency in resistance practices. In his reading of texts by James Scott, who is a leading figure within Resistance Studies, Törnberg contends that Scott, in his later work *The Art of being Governed* (2009), shows that ‘material things such as crops, infrastructure, physical terrain, mountains and valleys are central parts of resistance strategies to avoid oppressive state control’. However, Törnberg is critical towards the way Scott treats materiality by reducing it to a background factor or a medium instead of treating it as an active participant. Thus, Törnberg suggests that the scope of analysis moves to the interplay between material agency and social relations in the hopes that a more complex understanding of the concept of resistance may contribute to new materialist literature.

Also Otto Von Busch (2017:68), in his article on materiality in consumer resistance, suggests that ‘a material perspective can open new dimensions of how humans and objects (or nonhumans) act in concert to open specific possibilities of resistance (...)’. Von Busch introduces the concept of ‘assemblages of resistance’ and suggests a methodology of ‘unpacking’ these assemblages by examining how the different elements ‘support, multiply, and act together as a unit’ in shaping resistance (2017:76). He further gives examples of how different types of matter are mobilized by activists and how materials ‘literally tie together their actions to others and towards their cause’ (2017:75).

In his discussions on resistance and matter, Von Busch delves into the example of the Spanish Yomango movement, which calls itself a ‘counter-lifestyle movement critically commenting on the role consumerism plays in contemporary society’ (2017:77), and sets the system of consumerism against itself. Yomango is understood by Von Busch to be an example of “hacking” consumerism. Yomango sees stealing as an act of resistance. To support a lifestyle that is organized around shoplifting, its participants have designed the cookie handbag. The cookie handbag of Yomango is a metal cookie box equipped with a shoulder strap. It has a metal casing which blocks out alarm tags inside. Von Busch considers it as an object endowed with aliveness, orienting human actors towards resistance in their everyday life. The bag is perceived as a materialization of the Yomango ideas, of creativity and disrespectfulness, thus symbolizing the possibility for resistance against surveillance as well against ‘regimes of ownership’. Moreover, it is endowed with a material agency by offering an ‘unsurveilled space for the possibility of stealing’ (2017:80). Thus, as Von Busch argues, the ‘thing power’ of the cookie box handbag is mobilized to strengthen and expand the impact of the resistance strategies used by Yomango.

Lilja and Baaz (2018) provide another example in which unpacking the matter-culture of resistance practices occurs. They discuss the potential of a Preah Vihear Temple ‘replica’ for resisting the discursive orders, which have previously legitimated war in the border area between Thailand and Cambodia. As a repeat of the ‘original’ temple, the replica borrows recognizable elements from the ‘original’ through references to it, although contextually separated from it (Derrida 1976). This creates

ambivalence, and the replica comes to challenge the idea of the Preah Vihear Temple as being exclusive and irreplaceable. Still, however, the material ‘copy’, at the same time, confirms and acknowledges the discursive importance of the ‘original’ temple. In addition, the replica adds to the discourses about the Preah Vihear Temple and its heritage, thus changing the meaning that is assigned to it. Overall, the material-symbolic artefact that the constructed replica constitutes resist, challenge and change the discourses of the ‘original’ Preah Vihear Temple.

Materialities and the emergence of resistance subjectivities

As stated above, materialities matter, not only for acts of resistance, but also for the emergence of resistance subjectivities. One way that materialities inform the emergence of resisting subjectivities is through matter that has some kind of ‘spatial’ meaning—places, centres, and houses. Physical, material settings, such as mass graves or political uprisings in public places, evoke different emotions and could thus become means of emotional management. As we decide which settings to visit or which to avoid, we are managing our emotions (Hochschild 1983; Baaz et al. Lilja 2018). Thus, if we visit political protests and demonstrations—spaces where emotions are generated and pass between the bodies at a political event—we manage our political ‘selves’ through the emotions that we have come to experience. In political uprisings, emotions—such as anger, frustration, and fear—have a tendency to become more intense as they circulate among the participants, which sometimes escalates the resistance. Physical, material settings, then, matter for the emergence of resistance subjectivities (Baaz, et al. Lilja 2018).

Also, the meeting with ‘things’ can create political subjects and motivate different kinds of resistance. The artists Valarie James and Antonia Gallegos have taken migrants’ items that they found—such as medication, perfume, children’s backpacks, shoes, family photos, and ID cards—and turned them into art in order to represent a complex story of desperation, death, family, and survival. The artists use what they experience as authentic artefacts to display the migrants’ vulnerability, letting their voices be heard. Their art displays how material objects bring us closer, and remove the distance, to abstract discourses and practices of migration. Events, traditions, and times, which seem theoretical and

distant, become more concrete and imaginable when we see or touch material 'things' that were present during these events, and we embrace them more intensely. Material closeness is experienced by someone when they pat something that has been touched by someone else. 'Authentic' objects move us and sometimes create resisting subjects as the artefacts interact with the bodies and minds of the viewers, producing an emotional experience of time-travelling, as well as giving rise to new perspectives and interpretations. Authentic artefacts help us welcome the stories of absent subjects into our lives and let them affect us and inform our lives in the here-and-now. As these configured, fictional stories come to life 'within' us, the boundaries between the self and others, the subject and object, and the past and present are dissolved. This experience sometimes motivates political actions and leads up to emerging resistance subjectivities. Overall, 'authentic' material-symbolic artefacts are used at museums as a form of resistance, with the aim of opening up new significations, new subjectivities and 'proxy' resistance practices with regard to migration and migrants (Lilja 2019).

Concluding Remarks

We have touched upon some themes emerging at the nexus of different fields—new materialism, resistance studies, and feminist/queer studies—and suggest that an appropriate unit of analysis for resistance study is the assemblage and processes of the material and symbolic constructions, practices, bodies, and artefacts of resistance. This issue will further explore these aspects. Among others, Brandon Sims elaborates on the material base or means of resistance. According to Sims, self-violence is one category of action among a range of resistance tactics that may be conceptualized by varying the locus of embodied harm or non-harm against self or other. Self-violent resistance should be embraced as a concept for academics and activists to situate self-imposed suffering among other forms of resistance, such as armed conflict, nonviolent action, and suicide attacks.

Evelina Johansson and Carl Wilén argue that in its attempt to supersede the difference between nature and humanity by granting agency to matter, feminist new materialism is led to sacrifice intentional action in a way that undermines core aspects of the emerging field of resistance studies. The authors strongly reject the monoism of new materialism, and

in an attempt to 'save' agency as a concept, they suggest an alternative position, designating intentional action by humans with intended, non-intended, or 'other-intended' consequences. These consequences might in some cases be understood as 'influenced' by non-human powers, such as natural catastrophes that can lead to economic crises. While Johansson and Wilén acknowledge the effect of nature or matter, it is, however, not seen as invested with agency.

Mona Lilja and Lena Martinsson argue, on the other hand, for increased scholarly attention to materiality and artefacts connected to political struggles. Artefacts like the veil and Manga comics, which form the focus of their paper, become important items that function as connecting nodes for resistance practices or discursive transformations. The artefacts are recognisable around the globe, but have very different histories. They have acquired different meanings and become part of (or are excluded from) particular political struggles and communities, as well as counter-communities of belonging, both transnationally and locally. The artefacts become parts of resistance and/or mobilise people into assuming or rejecting communities, identity positions, or subjectivities. The shifting discursive materialities of different artefacts make these items transformative and important factors for resistance and political struggles for change.

There are still a number of questions to attend to regarding the role of materiality in the study of power and resistance. For example, when viewing human intentionality as capable of being agentic in conjunction with nonhumans in complex assemblages (Bennet 2010), what options/limitations does that perspective offer us? And when the concept of human agency is replaced with the idea of affect, of having the capacity to affect or be affected (Bennet 2010; Fox and Allard 2017), does resistance become retheorized as 'a flux of forces or affects in an assemblage that produces micropolitical effects contrary to power or control' (Fox and Allard 2017)? Here, more theoretical elaborations are needed, and we hope that this issue will inspire more researchers of the transdisciplinary field of resistance studies to take on these and other challenges that are being posed by new materialism.

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Constituting Self-Violent Resistance: Materiality, Embodiment, and Speech Acts¹

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Abstract

Dramatic self-violent acts, such as self-immolations and hunger strikes, often draw attention, but do not interpret or constitute themselves. In this article, theories of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts clarify the constitution of self-violent resistance as a concept for academics and activists. A novel typology is introduced to situate self-imposed suffering among other forms of resistance, such as armed conflict, nonviolent action, and suicide attacks. An original discourse analysis of self-violence across India from 2011-2016 provides empirical examples of the power dynamics involved in constituting self-violent resistance. The analysis reveals how government officials may successfully frame self-violent resistance as personal desperation driven by mental disturbance, and how social movements use the bodies, objects, and physical spaces involved to declare a seemingly personal act as public resistance. This article contributes to the field of resistance studies by moving beyond generalized references to cultural frames in explaining self-violent resistance, clarifying the contested status of self-violence in relation to the usual violence/nonviolence dichotomy, and demonstrating how theories of embodiment and materiality reveal the differing logics behind self-violent, violent, and nonviolent tactics. Exploring what gets counted as self-violent resistance and who becomes authorized to conduct self-violent resistance is important not only as an exercise in concept formation but also for understanding how individual embodied practices become sites of wider struggle.

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In December 2010, a municipal inspector in Tunisia attempted to confiscate the fruit of 26-year-old street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi, and after the vendor resisted, slapped him in the face. Later that day, Bouazizi walked to the municipal building, doused himself with paint thinner, cried out: 'If you do not see me I will burn myself,' and lit himself on fire (Gough, 2013). The self-immolation was video-taped and widely disseminated as part of the Tunisian Revolution and the wider Arab Spring. Five years later in Hyderabad, India, another 26-year-old, Dalit activist and PhD student Rohith Vemula, was expelled from campus for his activism. Under immense social pressure, he went into a friend's dorm room and hung himself with the banner of the student political association to which he belonged (Vishnoi, 2016). His death was used to rally student movements across campuses for Dalit rights and against Hindu nationalism (2016a; Chopra, 2016). In other situations of conflict, activists have starved their bodies in hunger strikes, drowned themselves in dam-caused floodwaters (Lahiri, 2014, p. 69), and mutilated themselves during protests. Leaving a string of material symbols recorded in pictures, videos, and newspaper accounts, these dramatic self-violent acts often drew attention, but did not interpret or constitute themselves as forms of resistance.

Scholars are increasingly researching the impact of suicide protests, hunger strikes, and other forms of self-imposed suffering in conflict (Biggs, 2012, 2013; Lahiri, 2014; Roberts, 2007). However, this research needs a framework to conceptualize self-violent resistance and theorize about its relationship to other forms of resistance. This article provides that framework through a novel typology organized around whether physical harm is applied to the self, others, both, or neither. This article also explores, for both scholars and activists, the contested status of self-violence as resistance. Resistance activists must decide whether to label self-violent acts as appropriate forms of political struggle or to disavow the actions. Government officials, meanwhile, may put forward alternative labels, such as suicide and mental disturbance, to disallow bodies from being claimed as sites of protest (Wilcox, 2015). Ultimately, I argue that the combined lenses of materiality, embodiment, and speech acts helps to disclose the power and practices behind constituting self-violent acts as either resistance or personal desperation.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section outlines the existing literature on self-violence as a form of resistance. The second section presents theoretical concepts of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts. This section introduces a novel typology relating self-violent tactics to other forms of resistance. The third section comprises the empirical core of the article, an original discourse analysis of self-violence across India from the years 2011-2016. In this analysis, I first argue that speech acts related to the history and law of self-violent resistance help constitute the tactic as a meaningful, although contested, practice. I then use the Telangana statehood case to show how self-violent resistance within the context of a wider social movement follows a distinct logic compared to other forms of embodied resistance. Third, I demonstrate how an academic focus on mass movements risks making individual cases of self-violent resistance invisible. Fourth, I explore how government actors exercise power in constituting self-violent resistance as a public health issue rather than a form of protest.

The article makes several contributions to the field of resistance studies. First, the novel typology of resistance tactics provides a way to theorize and generate research questions between types of tactics based on differing logics of embodied violence or non-violence toward the self and the other. Second, the article reveals resistance tactics as contested categories, rather than categories established through the motivation of individual actors. Third, rather than general references to cultural frames, the analysis uses embodiment, materiality, and speech acts to present a nuanced view of why certain actions may gain acceptance as resistance in certain times and places but not others. Overall, the article provides numerous empirical examples of how a less-studied form of resistance may be understood through a threefold analysis of bodies, the material world, and discourse.

Self-Violence as a Resistance Tactic in Academic Literature

Self-violence, ranging from mild-self harm to suicide protest, is often described as a resistance tactic that occupies an unclear space between two more conventionally understood tactics: violence and nonviolence (John, 2015). Although Gene Sharp's catalogue of nonviolent actions

included mild-forms of self-imposed suffering, such as intentional exposure to the elements, and more extreme forms such as fasts-unto-death (Sharp, 1973, pp. 359 - 367), later catalogues of nonviolent action tend to question whether self-violence should be included (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Schock, 2015a, p. 10; Swarthmore, 2017). Research on self-violent resistance tends to compare forms of self-violence that only target the individual with forms that also aim to harm others, such as suicide terrorism (Bargu, 2014; Dabashi, 2012; Lahiri, 2015; Lester, 2014; Roberts, 2007). As Simanti Lahiri argues in one of the few book-length explorations of this topic, 'suicide protest is a form of self-directed violence that intends death, but which is often framed as non-violence' (Lahiri, 2014, p. 7). Elsewhere, Lahiri portrays suicide protest as 'self-abnegating and self-sacrificing,' with violence 'directed only to the self,' while portraying suicide bombers as intentionally aiming to harm others (2015, pp. 269-270). Suicide protest and self-violence as resistance, then, distinguishes itself as violence against the self and not against others.

A problem for scholars, however, has been whether to categorize these embodied actions based on either the political motivations of the actors committing self-harm or on the subsequent deployment of the act by a wider resistance movement. For example, authors have struggled to classify the self-immolation of Bouazizi, who may or may not have had political motivations for his act, yet inspired additional politically-motivated self-immolations and protests (Bargu, 2016; Lahiri, 2014, p. 136). Emphasizing motivations, however, raises questions about what counts as political, and whether suicide attacks or protests are undertaken as rational acts of resistance (Biggs, 2013; Gambetta, 2007; Roberts, 2007), suicidal impulses (Lankford, 2011; Lester, 2014), or coerced actions (Lankford, 2014). Other scholars, taking a critical perspective, argue that classifying and labeling political self-sacrifice based on motivation is the wrong approach (Michelsen, 2015), and that instead the experienced pain and publicly performed suffering asserts the body as a political subject (Bargu, 2014; Cho 2009; Michelsen, 2015; Wilcox, 2015). Adopting this critical stance, I further argue that certain speech acts granting significance to bodily and material configurations makes self-violence comprehensible as resistance, regardless of actor motivation. However, this constitution of self-violence often involves a

struggle between those who wish to declare the act as public resistance and those who wish to label the act as a personal disorder or escape. These distinctions are important for scholars attempting to count acts of self-violent resistance, who must grapple with the causes and consequences of these actions across various contexts.

Not limited to one country or culture, existing research on self-violent tactics has explored cases in places as varied as South Korea (Kim, 2002, 2008), India (Baldissera, 2011; Lahiri, 2014), Tibet (Gouin, 2014; Makley, 2015), Turkey (Bargu, 2014; Sevinç, 2008), Tunisia (Dabashi, 2012; Michelsen, 2015), Northern Ireland (Andriolo, 2006), and the United States (Biggs, 2012). Biggs used international newswires to compile a worldwide political self-immolation dataset, counting 569 individual cases from 1919-2012 (Biggs, 2008, 2012). In India, Lahiri (2014) counts 224 cases of suicide protest between the years 1975-1983, using the Times of India. Each researcher, to count self-violence, adopts different conceptualizations and criteria. Lahiri (2014, p. 6), for example, restricts suicide protest to acts that are intended to result in death, even if major physical harm does not result. By emphasizing the possibility of death, these conceptions of suicide protest are differentiated from related self-violent actions that are below the point of death, such as exposure to the elements or self-mutilation. Despite varying criteria in previous research, the literature is ambiguous on how self-violent tactics, from minor self-harm to suicide, are materially and bodily constituted and contested within specific contexts.

The second criteria self-violent resistance researchers address is the meaning of resistance. Most studies on self-violence and suicide protest come from a social movement perspective, and thus emphasize either a direct (Lahiri, 2014), indirect (Biggs, 2012), or even imagined (Kim, 2008) connection to a wider social movement. One early social-psychological study took a more expansive view of political protest, requiring only that the individual 'made a prior statement to indicate that the suicide was a means of protest' and that the suicide occurred in a public place (Crosby, Rhee, & Holland, 1977). At the most permissive end of the spectrum, Munster (2015) argues that all farmer suicides in India are inherently political protest as their grouping into a government counted statistic makes their suicide visible and potent as a collective

statement. Beyond the usual problems of counting social action, the key question is: do these self-violent acts have a unifying conceptual core that unites them in contrast to other forms of violent or non-violent action? Existing research tends to focus on specific forms of suicide protest, self-immolation, or hunger strikes, without theorizing a wider category of self-violence. What factors – pain, self-annihilation, motivation, publicity, stated goals, lack of mental health issues or personal desperation – matter when conceptualizing and counting self-violence as resistance? Having reviewed questions raised by existing research, in the next section I explore how theories of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts provide the analytical means for researching the constitution and contestation of a resistance tactic.

Constituting Self-Violence: Embodiment, Materiality, Declarative Speech Acts

	<i>Self-Violence</i>	<i>No Self-Violence</i>
<i>Other-Violence</i>	Suicide Terrorism Suicide Attacks	Armed Insurgency Assassination Riots
<i>No Other-Violence</i>	Suicide Protest Hunger Strikes Self-Imposed Suffering	Nonviolent Action Civil Resistance (i.e. Public Demonstrations, Economic Boycotts)

Table 1: Resistance Tactics Along Dimensions of Violence: Self and other

Before reviewing embodiment, materiality, and speech acts, I introduce a novel 2x2 typology of resistance tactics to orient and place self-violence into the wider catalogue of resistance tactics available. This typology helps overcome the conceptual confusion of attempting to uncomfortably fit self-violent resistance into a dichotomous violence/nonviolence categorization. In the typology (Table 1), the resistance type is categorized by whether a person or group physically harms, or attempts to harm, their own body or the body of another person during the tactic. In this way, suicide protests or hunger strikes are differentiated

from suicide terrorism or suicide attacks. The locus of physical violence centers on only the self in the former and both the self and the other in the latter. Likewise, this typology clarifies the relation of hunger strikes or suicide protest to forms of nonviolent action, where participants may court suffering at the hands of an opponent but refrain from inflicting physical harm on themselves or others.

The way purely self-violent tactics, such as self-immolations or hunger strikes, tend to be discussed in the discourses I analyze later in the article are brought into sharper relief using this typology. The self-violent tactics are often discussed in ways that emphasize the heightening of commitment shown by bodily self-sacrifice, similar to tactics that harm both self and other (i.e. suicide attacks). Unlike the other-directed violence of suicide attacks, however, self-immolations and hunger strikes tend to be framed as virtuous and self-sacrificing, similar to nonviolent tactics that refuse to harm others. Although, unlike nonviolent and other-violent tactics, the self-violent quadrant seems especially liable to counter-portrayals of being driven not by strategic motives but by suicidal impulses and personal desperation.

Any ideal-typical table necessarily distorts social life by focusing attention on certain characteristics and away from others. However, by directing attention to the embodied nature of all resistance tactics, researchers may ask productive questions, such as: What differing causal logics, based on embodiment, are thought to underpin different tactics? Do tactics within the same quadrant possess unifying features? What unique questions could be generated with either horizontal or vertical comparisons? How does the embodied nature of the tactic present limits or opportunities for resisters? How might resistance that harms the self but not others fit into common trajectories of a conflict?

All resistance involves embodiment, and presumably a tactic that attempts to occupy public space by the mass gathering of bodies operates by different strategic logics than tactics that attempt to annihilate bodies of enemies or tactics that destroy bodies marked as civilians. Focusing on material, embodied violence orients conflict researchers to a common-sense distinction, while avoiding simplistic violent/nonviolent dichotomies. In constituting a resistance tactic as either violent, nonviolent, or self-violent the body itself provides a useful marker.

Embodiment

Having introduced the embodied resistance typology, I now outline the threefold theoretical tools of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts which will be used to analyze the constitution of self-violent resistance. First, the so-called “corporeal turn” in resistance studies, or emphasis on the body and the affect or emotions of the body, is a useful entry-point for understanding the constitution of self-violence as a political tactic (Mutlu, 2013a). This approach ‘provides an understanding of the body as both the subject and object of discourses, practices, and policies of (in)security,’ and attempts to generate ‘insights into understanding the political agency of the body’ (Mutlu, 2013a, p. 146). This shift in focus has generated insights into the neglected role of the body itself in understanding war (Auchter, 2016; Cornish & Saunders, 2014) and the consequences of bodily pain on debates of torture in wartime (Scarry, 1985). In highlighting self-violent tactics such as hunger strikes or self-immolation, authors repeatedly emphasize pain, spectacle, and agency (Cho, 2009; Makley, 2015). Writing about Guantanamo prisoners, Wilcox argues that ‘the hunger strikers are living their pain agentically, in a way that they are not victimized by, and that, crucially, requires a material body that not only can experience pain, but also can weaken and die’ (2015, pp. 67-68). For Wilcox and others, the act of the hunger strike is interpreted as ‘seeking recognition as a political subject’ (Wilcox, 2015, p. 67) or as ‘an “act of speech” in which the suffering body communicates the injustice experienced by a community to a larger audience’ (Fierke, 2013, p. 37).

In hunger strikes and self-immolations, ‘the sacrifice of the material body is an act that communicates but without words’ (Fierke, 2013, p. 37), and generates thoughts and emotions for diverse audiences (Fierke, 2013; Lahiri, 2015). Self-violent acts often generate strong emotional responses and most authors emphasize the performative aspect or spectacle of self-violence (Gough, 2013; Lim, 2013; Makley, 2015). However, in my analysis of Indian cases, self-violence generated variation in the types of emotional responses and in the meanings attached to the acts. At a fundamental level, self-violent resistance should be understood as an embodied form of protest that requires the body to experience and perform some form of attempted or actual self-imposed harm. The

meaningfulness of self-violence as a resistance tactic, though, depends on speech acts setting the authorizations and intelligibility of these embodied acts.

Materiality

Less commonly discussed in the context of self-violent tactics, the “material turn” in studies of violence and nonviolence provides a useful lens for understanding the constitution of self-violence as resistance. The material turn admits that ‘objects have a social life that expands beyond their material existence,’ and that material objects are ‘central to our identities; we practice and perform our identities through objects’ (Mutlu, 2013b, p. 173). In reference to security and the body, Wilcox explores how the materiality of airport security, such as body scanners, are used to categorize bodies as safe or un-safe as part of state building (2015, pp. 115 - 124). In terms of civil resistance strategies, Butler notes how the gathering of specific bodies, especially in occupations of public spaces, interacts with the materiality of those spaces (Butler, 2015, p. 10). Other civil resistance scholars emphasize the deployment and contestation of symbolically important cultural items, resistance colors or flags, and occupation of meaningful physical spaces in the framing of nonviolent resistance movements (Schock, 2015a, 2015b; Sharp & Paulson, 2005).

Combining embodiment and materiality, some authors point to notions of entanglement (Hodder, 2012), assemblages (Bennett, 2010; Voelkner, 2012), or bundles (López, 2015) comprising bodies and objects. Lopez argues that ‘protests could be considered bundles where the relationship between the individual bodies, objects, and public places is fundamental in constituting and re-constituting identities and the ways they are perceived’ (2015, p. 178). The form of self-violent protest, refusing to enact harm on other bodies but inflicting harm on itself, relies upon an assemblage or bundle of material objects and bodies for making the act understood as public protest and not privately performed self-harm. Again, however, these material interactions with embodied resisters are given meaning, even if often contested meaning, through speech acts authorizing only certain acts as self-violent resistance.

Speech Acts

When the intertwined embodied and material actions of self-immolations, hunger strikes, or self-harm occur within a conflict, subsequent reporting and discourse may constitute these acts as self-violent resistance tactics, regardless of individual motivation or strategic intent. The self-violent actions are not performed separately from a discursive framework, but as Butler argues ‘embodied actions of various kinds signify in ways that are, strictly speaking, neither discursive nor prediscursive,’ but there exists a ‘chiasmic relation between forms of linguistic performativity and forms of bodily performativity’ (2015, pp. 8 - 9). To understand the role of discourse in constituting and contesting self-violent resistance, I borrow the concepts of declarative speech acts, standing declarations, and status functions from philosopher John Searle (2010). Declarative speech acts operate by ‘declaring that a state of affairs exists and thus bringing that state of affairs into existence,’ in other words by constituting reality (p. 12). Standing declarations follow a logical form that ‘X counts as Y in certain conditions’ and relies upon collective recognition (p. 96). Moreover, status functions exist when people collectively recognize that people or objects may perform certain functions under specific conditions.

In terms of self-violent resistance, status function declarations create the tactic through the form of collective recognition (or not) of certain subjects to use their bodies in self-violently political ways (or not) under certain conditions. In other words, certain bodily performances of self-harm are counted, or given social reality, as political acts of resistance and other bodily performances are labeled non-political, or at least not a form of self-violent resistance. Unlike usual appeals to “cultural frames,” these declarations are often contested within the same cultural contexts for similar types of cases. Focusing on the logical forms of speech acts guides the discourse analysis to focus not only on what “counts” as self-violent resistance, but also the material and embodied elements (such as physical harm, specific targeted buildings, or cultural objects) that are repeatedly invoked as meaningful markers in specific contexts. The logical form of status functions also clarifies the process of how certain bodies become authorized or not to commit resistance. The use of speech acts thus allows for a more precise tracing of constituting self-violence as either public resistance or private mental health suffering, compared

to the more general concept of cultural frames often invoked in the self-violence literature.²

Just as Wilcox argued that state regulation and forced feeding of hunger strikers constituted categories of bodies to be managed (Wilcox, 2015, p. 52), so the competing declarations of either self-violent resistance or private mental health suffering are assertions of power. Searle argues that the purpose of standing declarations and status functions is ‘not to invest objects or people with some special status valuable in itself, but to create and regulate power relationships between people’ (Searle, 2010, p. 106). Whether self-violent actions, such as those taken by Bouazizi in Tunisia or Rohith Vemula in India, are made sensible and granted collective recognition as resistance reveals the power dynamics behind counting, analyzing, and strategizing about resistance. As has been widely acknowledged, not all conflict tactics resonate in every setting (Gould & Moe, 2012), and ‘tastes in tactics’ vary (Jasper, 1997). Rather than tracing self-violent resistance to essentialized understandings of religion or culture (Gouin, 2014; King, 2000), the next section presents illustrations from across India in how self-violent resistance was constituted and contested through embodiment, materiality, and speech acts.

Empirical Analysis

Method and Overview

The empirical section of the paper demonstrates the value of a threefold analysis using embodiment, materiality, and speech acts and provides illustrations of the power dynamics involved in constituting acts as self-violent resistance. For the analysis, India was chosen because it has several of the largest and best-documented cases of self-violent resistance, including several conflicts with at least one-hundred political self-immolations (Biggs, 2012, 2013; Lahiri, 2014). For generating the discourse corpus, a search was conducted through LexisNexis using a

² Ultimately, what counts as self-violent resistance, and how the resistance is understood, varies across country and cultural contexts (Coburn, 2018). However, for feasibility, this article focuses on the process of contestation and constitution within one country.

string of keywords (India AND “self-immolation” OR “suicide protest” OR “fast-unto-death” OR “hunger strike”) and restricted to 2011–2016 for feasibility of coding. This resulted in more than 3,280 news articles or editorials from mostly national and regional English-language newspapers across India. Articles on Tibetan cases not occurring within India were discarded. More than 600 individual events were recorded into an Excel spreadsheet based on the following criteria: plausibility of protesting the government (shown through target locations, previous connection to a resistance movement, or other demonstrated political demand), and threatened, attempted, or completed self-harm. Each event came from at least one reputable source, with well-known cases generating multiple articles over time. Basic information was recorded into Excel, such as event location, numbers of actors, level of harm, conflict demand, and movement connections.

For these events, and other examples of self-violence appearing in the sources but without a clear protest element, an analysis was conducted noting: who was involved; the reported material elements, bodily details, and speech acts by participants, onlookers, authorities, and other actors; and follow-up contentions among police, authorities, political parties, social groups, and family members. NVivo was used for categorization and searches among these different elements, and to group articles on specific cases. Relying on English language reporting shaped the structure of the analysis; however, included extensively among the sources were two of the top 20 most-read newspapers in India (The Times of India and Hindustan Times). For a visual element, the analysis also included dozens of videos of self-immolations or other self-harm protests in India from this time-period that were posted on Twitter, Facebook, or India-based news sites. The Rohith Vemula case, in addition to news articles, included several hundred Twitter posts referencing his name that were downloaded using Ncapture. The following key findings emerged from the analysis: standing declarations made a wide-range of embodied and material actions intelligible as self-violent resistance; resistance movements deployed distinct logics of self-violent resistance as a tactic distinct from other forms of violent or nonviolent action; embodiment and materiality constituted self-violence as an individual resistance tactic apart from social movement connections; and governments exercised

power in constituting self-violence as personal mental disturbance rather than resistance. I discuss each finding in the following four sections.

History and Law in Constituting Self-Violent Resistance

First, self-violence is constituted and enabled as resistance in India through historical and legal standing declaration speech acts. These declarations include: 1) a political history of lauded, and sometimes compensated, martyrs who wrote their resistance onto their bodies through fire, starvation, or other self-inflicted harm; and 2) a legal code that made the incitement or abetment of suicide, often with political connotations, a crime. However, these standing declarations are not unproblematic and significant variation and contestation occurs over where and under what circumstances certain embodied actors are granted status as resisters and political subjects and others are denied that status and labeled objects of medical concern.

History

Lahiri traced suicide protest in India to early cases such as Gandhi's political 'fast-unto-death' undertaken to 'sting the Hindu conscious' into action against caste discrimination (2014, p. 30). Lahiri argued that 'a complex dance of cultural practice, personality, political innovation and critical political junctures helped establish fasting to the death and self-immolation as acceptable forms of political expression in India' (p. 20). Despite this history, the constitution of self-violent resistance, from extremes of suicide protest to self-harm short of death, remains contested and problematic.

Besides recognition of Gandhi's fast-unto-death, other existing declarative speech acts constitute self-violence as resistance. One repeated story regards Potti Sriramulu, who died in 1952 after fasting for almost a month. His fast-unto-death was for the creation of Andhra Pradesh, a goal that was achieved after significant riots and protests following his death. During this time-period, fasts were being conducted so often, without resulting in death or serious self-harm, that many government officials thought that not responding was the best political choice. Prime

Minister Nehru wrote the Chief Minister of Madras that he was unmoved by the fast and that he did 'not want to be driven to any reactions' (Lahiri, 2014, p. 51). As Sriramulu's body visibly weakened, though, parliament debated his cause and with his death three days of violent riots occurred (Lahiri, 2014). Even as the government explicitly ignored this embodied protest, a weakening body self-deprived of food in the public sphere, their treatment of the fast as a political tactic was clear. Although the fast was being used so often that the government did not consider it to be a 'serious political tactic' (Lahiri, 2014, p. 50), the government still recognized the act as a form of political resistance.

This history was repeatedly invoked during the time-period analyzed for this article. For example, leaders for a separate Telangana state connected their struggle conducted through self-immolation to his original self-violent resistance (Muthukrishnan, 2014; 2013a). Also, social activists compared current self-violent hunger strikers like Irom Sharmila or Anna Hazare to Sriramulu (Desai, 2011; 2011a), and remembrances to his sacrifice were frequently celebrated (2013b). Government officials and activists in the past and present constitute self-violent resistance by representing it as existing through these various declarative speech acts of reference and remembrance. The fasts - performed publicly on a material body that could be measured through weight fluctuations, visually represented through media as suffering from self-imposed harm in the public sphere, and finally leaving a dead body to be mourned - asserted a political stance and a body as a political subject. While a standing declaration acknowledging as resistance these specific assemblages of materiality (publicly visible spaces), embodiment (a visible body undergoing change and evident suffering), and supportive speech acts by resistance movements, many other hunger strikes of shorter duration failed to mark a clear enough suffering or change on the body and went unrecognized as resistance. The same can be said for the large numbers of threatened public self-immolations where petrol was poured, but police intervened before a match could be lit and significant bodily harm done. A status function analysis asks: who is authorized to commit a recognized act? These lauded historical and contemporary cases provide a blueprint for self-violent resistance but also circumscribes the material elements, such as visible harm on the body, that make the acts recognizable as resistance.

Moreover, forcing these fasts-unto-death into a violent or nonviolent binary label would strip the acts of the specific causal ideas about strategic effectiveness connected to a tactic that publicly imposes materially visible harm on one's own body while pointedly not imposing materially visible harm on other bodies. References in subsequent reporting indicate causal ideas attributed to the act such as evoking sympathy and showing extreme commitment in ways that mimic both nonviolent and violent logics respectively. Yet as the violent riots following Sriramulu's death demonstrate, a self-violent tactic does not necessarily guarantee that subsequent resisters will use the act to spur resistance on a nonviolent trajectory.

Law

Besides a history of lauded activists, another standing declaration constituting self-violent resistance was the recently repealed law criminalizing suicide. While proponents advocated for repealing the law because it generated stigma against those attempting suicide, some opponents argued that decriminalization would take away police tools used against self-violent resistance. A 2014 article on the repeal debate reported: 'Failed suicide bombers, cyanide-popping terrorists and intransigent agitators - these were some of the issues raised by at least five states that opposed the Centre's proposal to decriminalize attempt to commit suicide' (Jain, 2014). While encompassing both self and other-focused forms of self-violence, these comments demonstrate the power of the law in constituting a category of self-violent resistance. Other states with a history of self-violent resistance, such as Madhya Pradesh and Sikkim, argued that decriminalization would prevent police from 'dealing with persons who resort to fast unto death or self-immolation to press the government or authorities to accept their unreasonable or illegitimate demands' (Jain, 2014).

The debate also highlights the contestation over speech act declarations constituting two separate status recognitions for bodies undergoing self-imposed suffering: one as medical objects to be managed and decriminalized, and the other as politically resisting subjects to be prosecuted. The state of Bihar, for example, wanted separate legal codes, one for 'persons driven to suicide due to medical illnesses,' and the

other for suicide bombers who failed to die in their attempted attacks (Jain, 2014). The government commission urging repeal, noting the contestation over labeling motivations, argued that suicidal acts 'may be described differently in different circumstances and at different times in the same community,' and that 'no deterrence is going to hold back those who want to die for a social or political cause or to leave the world either because of the loss of interest in life or for self-deliverance' (2008a). Opponents also argued that, if repealed, individuals could not be charged under the law and then force-fed, as activist Irom Sharmila was while kept alive by the government during her 14 year fast (Jain, 2014; Mathur, 2012). Concerning hunger striking prisoners, Wilcox argues: 'force-feeding makes the prisoners into objects of medical knowledge, a prerequisite for making them into objects that can be managed as dependents of the sovereign state' (2015, p. 71). Government actors declare starving bodies, such as Sharmila's, to be objects available for forced feeding and management through the suicide law; not because the protesting actors are unable to manage their own bodies, but because their public self-imposed suffering and the possibility of death poses a threat to established order. This acknowledgement, of using the law to materially manage activist bodies, contributes to the contestation of self-violence as resistance.

In addition, the law serves as a standing declaration constituting self-violent resistance through an abetment statute. This statute allows police to arrest those who aided or abetted the suicide. Individuals have used this to name a political opponent who drove them to self-immolation or suicide, thus provoking police investigations and prosecutions. For example, in 2014, Pinky, a college student in New Delhi, was with fellow students nonviolently protesting college management for poor grades by blocking traffic and holding a sit-in at the main college gate. During the protest Pinky poured petrol on herself and lit herself on fire. Based on a subsequent recorded statement, police began an investigation of college teaching staff for abetment of suicide, a move encouraged by various political figures within the state (2014a; 2014b). In multiple other cases, suicide notes were left indicating the conflict opponent who was to blame and the conflict grievance. This abetment law not only provides a strategy for those employing self-violent resistance, but also adds to a standing

declaration constituting embodied self-harm as resistance. As theoretical notions of assemblage and entanglement reveal, what matters in this legal constitution of resistance is not individual actor motivation, but an investigatable trail of material objects, such as suicide notes and recorded statements, public physical locations, gathered protesting bodies, and visible evidence of bodily harm.

The strategy of prosecuting the conflict targets of suicide resistance, however, is contested by forces within the state, including the judiciary. In a controversial case, five Nepali family members living in Gujarat, who were about to be evicted, set themselves on fire in front of the civic body office. By subjecting their bodies to fire outside of a governmental office, instead of privately in their homes, the family members brought their form of protest to a recognizably public sphere. Subsequently, the landlords were arrested and charged with abetment of suicide. A judge ultimately ruled in favor of the landlords, arguing that the government had a responsibility to discourage and prevent suicides (2015a). This counter-declaration, with the status function of rights and obligations under the law, attempts to establish the suicides not as protest to be acknowledged, but as a health crisis to be managed.

Taking the government declaration at face-value, however, would mislead resistance scholars, who could instead emphasize how bodies on fire in front of a public building served as embodied and material assemblages pointing to resistance. These and similar cases, reported with a clear script of accusation, suicide attempt, and attempted prosecution (or at least investigation), establishes the assemblage of elements in these cases. Embodied acts of self-harm are performed in front of material structures representing public authority as a resistance tactic to force legal action against conflict targets. As discussed throughout this section, the legal and historical standing declarations, combined with a productive discourse highlighting repeated embodied and material elements, establishes constitutive rules for a category of action that might be meaningfully labeled as self-violent resistance.

Telangana: Self-Violence as Martyrdom

Having examined the constitution of self-violent resistance through history and law, I now use the Telangana statehood movement to

illustrate two main points: 1) that social movements are a powerful force for constituting self-violence as resistance, even as they establish status functions limiting who can claim authority to commit the acts; and 2) that self-violent resistance follows a distinct logic compared to other forms of embodied resistance tactics. Extensive use of suicide protest as a collective resistance tactic has occurred in the movement for Telangana statehood, with an estimated 800 – 1,000 suicides committed for the Telangana cause (Muppidi, 2015). Telangana and Andhra Pradesh were organized along linguistic lines as one merged state in 1956 after the previously mentioned fast-unto-death of Potti Sriramulu. Soon after the re-organization, activists in Telangana began agitating for a separate state based on a perceived dominance of Andhra interests in the merged state (Janardhan & Raghavendra, 2013). Suicide protests supporting Telangana statehood began to increase in 2010, with student leaders and youth leading the adoption of the tactic (2011b). A leader of the Telangana movement, Deputy Chief Minister Narasimha, noted: ‘So many youths have sacrificed their lives for Telangana. There were hundreds of self-immolations for this cause...and it was perhaps unique in the world’ (2013c). The following examples demonstrate how leaders such as Narasimha declared these suicides as self-violent resistance tactics in the context of a broader nonviolent struggle, demonstrating the distinct causal logic of effectiveness attributed to self-violence.

The reported suicides for Telangana followed a common threefold pattern of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts. In one example a nineteen-year-old engineering student wrote pro-Telangana slogans on the wall of his college and then lit himself on fire, dying in the process (2013d). Another example comes from a 2012 article: ‘Bhojya Naik, a 21-year-old MBA student, self-immolated reportedly shouting “Jai Telangana” slogans in front of the Kakatiya University Arts College here. Shocked students and passers-by tried in vain to douse the flames, hours later, he succumbed to his burns’ (2012a). Just as Lopez remarked on bundles of bodies, objects, and public places constituting protests, the repeated physicality of shouted or written slogan, public location, and bodies in flames repeats throughout the Telangana self-immolation accounts. The slogans give clarity to these as political acts of embodied resistance and the self-inflicted pain upon individual bodies is evident in

the shocked responses of witnesses, even though the intensity of pain is de-emphasized in the written accounts.

Beyond individuals asserting their political subjectivity through self-inflicted suffering, the actions of supportive leaders served to affirm these specific bodies as authorized to self-immolate for the cause. After Naik's death, leaders of various pro-Telangana political parties came to the area: 'They declared him a martyr and took out a grand funeral procession' (2012a). Leaders of the main political movement for statehood, Telangana Rashtra Samiti, made suicide martyrdom a central part of their rhetorical appeals. Before statehood was granted, leaders of the party promised financial compensation to family members of officially tallied martyrs. The chairman of the Telangana Legislative Council declared after taking office that 2,000 martyrs had given their lives for the cause. This number was then revised lower to 900 martyrs, and finally only 459 families were given financial compensation in 2014 (2012a; Redi, 2014). The list served as a status function authorizing only certain actors to be officially recognized, and compensated, for constituted acts of self-violent martyrdom. This powerful official declaration, with the weight of a status function creating obligations, caused controversy by omitting names that some felt were clear political suicides, such as well-documented cases of students who self-immolated in public and left suicide notes in support of Telangana, and including names that were questionable as political suicides (2012a). As previously mentioned, inquiring into the use of speech acts reveals not just the social classification and categorization of resistance tactics, but also the power dynamics claimed by social movements and governments in successfully naming and authorizing some resistance acts but not others. If standing declarations follow the form of x counts as y in certain conditions, then in these cases leaders were able to successfully count thousands of self-violent martyrdoms when it bolstered their resistance claims and exercised power to reduce that number once they committed themselves to a status function obligation of bestowing financial compensation to self-violent resisters' families.

If scholars focused only on the discursive element, however, and ignored a material and embodied analysis of the Telangana conflict, what would be lost? Focusing solely on subsequent representation of the acts

misses the need for actual physical harm to be self-inflicted on material bodies. While all resistance tactics involve elements of materiality and embodiment, the focus shifts here to material bodies in the public sphere openly suffering self-imposed harm. Thinking about the typology introduced in Table 1, resistance may be aimed at the physical destruction of other bodies or mass destruction of physical locations (as in other-harm focused armed conflict), or resistance that pointedly refrains from both self-harm and other-harm (nonviolent action). These embodied forms of violence and nonviolence likely operate from different causal logics compared to self-violent resistance. In Telangana, movement leaders in a resistance struggle that explicitly maintained nonviolent discipline for over a decade of struggle, nevertheless consistently highlighted - through recorded videos, remembrances, memorials, and statements - the widespread material harm done to self-immolated bodies. As one pro-Telangana leader appealed to the central government: ‘How many youths have to die? In the last two days, as many youths ended their lives and how many more deaths does the Congress want to see? (2011c).

Movement leaders’ public statements positioned the self-directed bodily destruction as a signifier of commitment, the willingness to not harm other bodies a signifier of purity, and the self-harmed as innocent. The self-violence was often used by leaders as a motivator to call for more intensive nonviolent actions, such as bandhs (general strikes) and mass demonstrations. The rhetoric and practices encouraging these sacrifices became so intense that leaders eventually disavowed the actions. A student leader, referencing two well-known cases, declared: ‘Remembering self-immolation from Srikanthachari to the recent Bhojya Naik, we shall vow not to give up our lives. I would erase the quote “Do or Die” from my mind. All I know is “Do But Don’t Die” (2012b). This admission of strategic planning demonstrates the tension between the strategic logics of a resistance tactic requiring bodily self-sacrifice to demonstrate commitment (similar to suicide bombings) versus resistance tactics that maintain nonviolence against self and other.

As scholar and Telangana activist Himadeep Muppidi admits, ‘bodies entangled in ropes, scorched by fire and corroded by pesticide constitute a poignant and mournful opening’ into discussion of the

Telangana cause (2015, p. 9). She admits to ambivalence about deploying these suicides as constituted political tactics, however, noting:

are deaths – killings, suicides, the violent destruction of bodies – the only compelling tune of global politics? Are we too well trained into reading the trans local significance of an issue only as an elementary function of the corpses that it stacks up or the pain it produces? (2015, p. 9).

For both scholars and activists, there is a risk that constituting suicide and self-harm as a strategic political tactic elevates bodily destruction to a desired status in resistance. However, to frame suicide protestors solely as mentally unstable victims, as objects acted upon by movement leaders' extreme rhetoric, would be to deny political agency to these resisting bodies. Politicians opposed to the Telangana cause promoted this victim framing for their own political purposes of dismissing these bodies as resisting subjects. Scholars and activists are confronted with how the constitution of an act of self-harm may perpetuate the suffering of those seeking empowerment, and yet to disown the act as a constituted form of resistance would be to deny agency and the right to embodied action to those committed to a cause. Gaining control over the constitution and declarative labelling of these acts is ultimately a form of exercised power.

Self-Violent Resistance for Individual Redress

The emphasis by academics on cases of self-violent resistance in the context of wider social movements, such as Telangana, obscures an equally prominent set of cases across India of personal self-violent resistance to structural injustice. Just as in the social movement cases, these self-violent acts for individual redress are given shape and made meaningful through a threefold lens of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts. Past research on self-violent resistance, coming from a social movement tradition, focuses almost exclusively on counting individual acts connected to wider social movements. Biggs, in one accounting of suicide protests, explicitly rejects those committed for 'personal or familial grievances' (Biggs, 2012a, p. 1). However, in analyzing potential cases across India, I found that individual acts of self-violence with plausible personal protest motives were frequent, including at least 70 completed or attempted

self-immolations. Many cases involved accusations of police or judicial inaction over sexual assault, unfair labor conditions, or landlord abuses. In one case a 17-year-old girl from a village in Punjab was hospitalized after a self-immolation attempt. While in the hospital she recorded a video accusing several local boys of harassment and sexual abuse that had not been addressed by the authorities. After making the video she died of her injuries and the police arrested the accused perpetrators (2015b). As noted in the theory section on entanglement, assemblages, or bundles, an act becomes meaningful as protest under specific configurations of individual bodies, objects, and public places. In the cases of individual redress, a discourse of self-violence as resistance, celebrated in history and established by the law against suicide, makes these embodied actions meaningful as resistance.

A few examples from the cases analyzed represent these patterns clearly. In a 2014 case, a low-income contractor lit himself on fire in front of the head government engineering office to protest an alleged bribe demand and the subsequent failure of the police to investigate the case (Bhatia, 2015). In another case a 55-year-old ex-serviceman harassed by loan sharks, self-immolated outside of a local government office to protest police inaction after a local politician demolished his house (Dominique, 2014). In 2012, a 38-year-old railway employee poured petrol on herself and lit herself on fire in front of a railway manager's office. She was reportedly protesting a lack of action after filing a complaint against co-workers for attempting to rape her (2012c). In a 2014 case, four sisters between the ages of 23 and 37 doused themselves in kerosene in front of a district collectorate office and reportedly attempted to self-immolate before police intervened. The sisters then delivered a petition alleging that villagers tried to force them into prostitution, and when they refused, socially ostracized them and denied them access to the local water tap. After the attempted self-immolation, a local officer agreed to investigate their case (Sivarajah, 2014).

Each reported instance reveals similar assemblages of embodiment, materiality, and speech acts. Bodies were either set on fire or doused in kerosene with a threat of bodily destruction by fire portrayed. Written petitions or spoken declarations attested to a grievance. Physical public structures, especially government buildings related to the grievance, and

the material remnants of a suicide attempt, such as matches and petrol, were noted. While the written reports offer a mostly sanitized and pain-free account, the television reports and videos spread by social media document the intense suffering and audible pain experienced during these public acts. The reporting often took for granted that individuals acted out of legitimate grievance and in many cases the resistance was reported as successful, with authorities opening investigations or prosecutions against conflict targets mentioned by the self-violent resisters.

Academics and activists may be wary of constituting individual self-violence as resistance because of the difficulty in establishing motivation outside of a social movement context. Instead, they may constitute these acts as suicides of desperation. However, by committing these acts in public in front of grievance-related buildings, individuals add to the sense that these are publicly, rather than privately, enacted suicides. One may interpret individuals as either affected by the physical government structures representing the impediment of a quest for justice, or the physical structures as sites chosen by individuals demonstrating their pain bodily and agentially. Whether viewing the building as an actant influencing the individual to commit self-violence or interpreting the building as a specifically chosen target, the public physical space provides researchers a scheme for recognizing these cases as self-violent resistance against shared grievances.³ Publicly enacted suffering at government buildings in front of an audience of fellow citizens and government representatives is a jarring sight that, regardless of individual motivation, serves to resist perceived injustice and prod follow-up action.

One scholar of the Occupy Movement, using a materiality lens, argues that ‘when objects and architectures are repeatedly encountered at sites of struggle, they become stickier and stickier – laden with meaning and potent with feelings’ (Feigenbaum, 2014, p. 17). In the discourse I analyzed, bodies in self-inflicted pain outside of government buildings had clearly come to constitute a recognized form of meaningful resistance. These individual bodies undergoing self-violence raise the question of

³ The term actant, from Latour (2007), means “a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can do things” (Bennett, 2010, p. viii).

what should count as resistance? Resistance scholars attuned only to tactics of large-scale social mobilizations are likely to miss the perhaps more common everyday forms of self-violent resistance to social problems (such as rape, police unresponsiveness, or judicial inefficiency). In some cases, fellow citizens did take up the cause of individuals to publicly assemble against a declared wider injustice, but in many other cases the public reporting of these events ended, with no clear picture of the wider set of power-relationships necessary to understand the constitution of these acts. For researchers of self-violent action, paying attention to the assemblage of bodies and objects repeated through the individual stories makes visible a neglected form of political resistance.

Contesting Constitution of Self-Violent Resistance

Having analyzed the constitution of self-violent resistance for social movement and individual cases through historical and legal discourse emphasizing embodiment and materiality, I turn now to the exercise of power in contesting that constitution. In this section I use the case of Rohith Vemula to illustrate how government actors exercise power in constituting self-violent resistance as a public health issue, and how embodied and material factors could be used by resistance movements to instead promote self-violence as resistance. In comparison to the well-known Bouazizi Tunisian case and the Telangana cases, the suicide of Vemula in India was deeply contested as an act of self-violent resistance.

Vemula, an activist and PhD student, belonged to a Dalit political association, Ambedkar Students Association. In 2015, the head of a competing nationalist student union accused Vemula and four other students of assault, and a regional nationalist politician wrote a letter to the university requesting punishment. Vemula and the other students were expelled from their dorm and had their tuition assistance revoked. After several days of sleep-out protests on campus, Vemula went inside a friend's room and hanged himself with an Ambedkar Student Association banner. Friends eventually found him; they took no pictures but did copy the suicide note he left (2016a; Chopra, 2016). In his suicide note, Vemula reportedly did not blame anyone for his suicide but highlighted the injustices of Indian social identity structures (Dev, 2016). In comparison to Bouazizi's suicide, which was recorded in public with the

dramatic visual of a person on fire, Vemula's suicide was conducted in a private physical location and was typical in India during an epidemic of student suicides (Chua, 2014; 2016b). After Vemula's death, cartoon images were distributed showing a likeness of his body hanging from the distinctive t-shaped logo of Hyderabad University, but none of the images became iconic in the same way as in Bouazizi's case.

While resisters were able to portray Bouazizi as an apolitical street vendor fed up with government repression, Vemula was unambiguously political. Even in his suicide he chose to hang himself with the banner of the political student group to which he belonged. Outrage over Vemula's suicide was channeled through regional Dalit political groups. This political agitation began on nearby campuses among Dalit student groups (2016a; 2016c). Protests invoking Vemula's name included hunger strikes (2016e), attacks on the houses of campus Hindu-nationalist administrators (2016f), and student strikes from classes (Chopra & Janyala, 2016). These self-violent, non-violent, and occasionally violent protests temporarily shut down some campuses, drew widespread backlash from Hindu nationalist groups, and faced state repression (2016g). Unlike the Telangana cases, however, the subsequent mobilizations were portrayed as a benefit to a mistreated individual rather than as inspired by a heroic martyr. In other words, Vemula was portrayed as an object of victimization, rather than lauded as a subject who martyred himself for a cause.

Although the details in Rohith's case were well known, the symbolic representations never cohered around a single discursive category, such as martyr. Protesters began referring to him as Ekalavya, the student in the ancient Indian epic of the Mahabharata who cuts off his thumb as payment to his teacher when demanded. One widely shared cartoon, for example, was titled 'Caste in Education', and on the left side showed someone cutting off their finger with a bloody knife under the word Mahabharata. On the right side was written the year 2016 with a noose and a suicide note in the frame. Here, a traditional story of victimization in education was re-deployed for modern day relevance.

However, this material creation did not solidify Vemula's status as a self-violent resister. Instead, in media commentary his death was portrayed as a misfortune, a great tragedy, and a personal suicide. One supporter

said: ‘Rohith’s tragedy should have stirred our collective conscience, including that of our government. Unfortunately, we have a heartless government that refuses to listen to the cries of despair coming from the marginalised sections of our society’ (2016h). Most forcefully Vemula was labeled as a victim murdered, through negligence, by the nationalist government. This last declaration of murder especially takes advantage of the previously mentioned law that allowed for government officials to be charged with aiding and abetting suicide (2016i). For example, those advocating for Dalit rights demanded criminal prosecutions against the head of Hyderabad University and several national leaders (2016c). Charges were eventually filed against several high-level government officials in connection with Vemula’s suicide, even though they were not directly implicated in any way (2016i).

The government also exercised power by framing his suicide in non-political terms. For example, the government released a new rule for centrally funded universities ‘to run a mandatory orientation program to sensitize all “academic administrators about understanding and handling problems faced by socially, educationally and economically disadvantaged students”’ (2016j). The nationalist government actively countered the protests related to Vemula’s death, perhaps fearful of a repeat of the suicide protests on campuses during the early 1990’s and more recently in Telangana. The prime minister publicly expressed sadness over Vemula’s death (2016k), while also chastising what he termed as anti-nationalist sentiment on campuses (Kaushal, 2016). Another Hindu-nationalist politician, opposed to the Dalit politics of Vemula, argued in the media that Vemula was not a hero because he did not fight but committed suicide (2016l). In general, the government treated the suicide as reflecting maladjustment among Dalit students. The government response was to promote life skills training for Dalit students and sensitivity training, rather than addressing Vemula’s deeper political concerns (Chopra, 2016; Nagarajan, 2016). Ultimately, neither sympathetic social movement actors or government opponents accepted a declaration of Vemula’s suicide as self-violent resistance.

An analysis focused on materiality and embodiment points in competing directions compared to previous cases examined. The assemblage of bodily suffering and death, coupled with objects such as

the political banner and suicide note, helps those declaring the case as self-violent resistance. The private physical location works in the opposite direction, helping those declaring the act a medical tragedy or symptom of neglect. An object analysis of the subsequent representations of Vemula's suicide demonstrates the importance of this material in constituting self-violence as either a resistance tactic or a personal tragedy. While the Telangana suicides were successfully portrayed as martyrdom committed by political subjects, both opponents and supporters collectively assented to labeling Vemula's suicide as a tragedy befalling a victim. As Searle argues, the purpose of creating social facts is power 'but the whole apparatus – creation, maintenance, and resulting power – works only because of collective acceptance or recognition' (2010, p. 103). In this case, in a country with a history of self-violent resistance accepted as a social fact, collective recognition of this fact as applied to Vemula was denied by both government officials and movement activists.

Labeling an embodied act as self-violent resistance is not done simply as an academic exercise of categorization. As previously mentioned, Wilcox argued that the U.S. government asserted power in declaring hunger strikers to be medical bodies to be materially managed, instead of self-violent resisters demanding bodily autonomy. Similarly, the Indian government declared Vemula as a body that was driven to suicide by a lack of coping skills, and not a body with the agency to impose self-suffering for a political cause. In other words, his body was declared to be a defective body, acting out of material dysfunction rather than intentionality. In the language of status function declarations, his body was not "authorized" to act in a politically self-sacrificing manner, and the language of prevention was deployed to show how health policies could have stopped his act. As previously argued, basing a concept of self-violent resistance on the motivations of individual actors leads to mixed or unclear results. The assemblage of material factors implicated in his death could be interpreted as pointing towards different categorizations: the private room pointing towards a personal suicide and the political association banner used to hang himself pointing towards political resistance. His suicide note, while explicitly not blaming anyone, contained unambiguously political protest themes. The subsequent contestation over what to label his act, either medical suicide or suicide

protest, reveals the strategic issues at stake for resistance movements.

Conclusion

After reviewing hundreds of potential cases of self-violent protest throughout India, clear patterns emerged. These patterns benefit from applying materiality, embodiment, and speech acts as key theoretical lenses. First, the line between private and public becomes blurred as sometimes individuals with personal grievances self-harm publicly in front of government buildings, while individuals with collective grievances self-harm privately in their rooms. Second, some self-violent protestors give clear linguistic evidence of their resistance motives, through shouted slogans or suicide notes, while others leave their embodied self-violence unaccompanied by any self-interpretation. Third, material objects indicating a political cause or cultural affiliation may be implicated, such as traditional weapons used to draw blood (Chanda, 2017) or a political banner used to hang oneself. In the self-immolations, the repetition of material objects such as petrol, match, and fire, and the occasional intervention of a police officer, adds an element of generic form to the self-violent acts. Indeed, self-violent resistance is an assemblage of the surrounding materials and the body itself but made comprehensible through a standing declaration making these combinations parts of a meaningful category. In India this standing declaration was developed from a celebrated history of self-violent resistance and a legal code criminalizing the tactic, and it continues to be constituted as additional cases are given collective recognition.

However, resistance tactics are inherently contested and constituted categories, rather than categories established through the motivation of individual actors. Despite the prevalence of repeated material and embodied elements, questions about how to “count” or recognize self-violent resistance remains. For example, among the cases analyzed, dozens of self-immolations related to domestic violence appeared in the reported record. Reading these cases, most performed privately at home with no material accompanying message, it feels emotionally wrong to deny their status as political protests and bodies capable of political subjectivity. Importantly, the question is not just what counts as self-violent resistance, but what should count as self-violent resistance? Do private deaths with

no clear protest motive automatically defy categorization as a resistance tactic? Similar themes have been addressed by other resistance scholars under the term of everyday forms of resistance (Scott, 2008). Should the sheer number of farmer suicides and self-harm across agrarian regions of India count as resistance acts, or only the suicides taken dramatically in public settings during collective protests (Kumar & Najjar, 2015; Munster, 2015; Varma, 2015)?

Dramatic self-violent acts do not interpret or constitute themselves. Scholars should focus not only on the criteria of self-violent resistance – public role, clear political message, connection to a social movement – but should also examine whether the surrounding discourse supports a standing declaration of constructed self-violent resistance. Which powerful actors support such a possibility, and which oppose or ignore such a possibility? As Searle argues, one method for exercising power is ‘the power of manipulating the subject’s perception of available options’(2010, p. 149). Relegating self-violence to a health problem to be managed through force-feeding or prevention policies is to remove a bodily form of resistance that has been practiced across multiple contexts. Labeling self-violence as a health problem constitutes bodies as objects to be managed or pitied, rather than as resisting bodies acting out political subjectivity.

Self-violent resistance researchers may be tempted to provide overly-determined explanations of self-violence across different countries based on essentialized understandings of culture and religion, or by referring generically to different cultural frames. As demonstrated repeatedly through the cases of Telangana and Vemula, constitution of self-violent resistance relies upon declarations of actors within the conflict. Whether a tactic will be recognized and resonant depends not on an unchanging cultural location, but on the actions of leaders and movements, even when the wider discourse could support a meaningful framing of self-violent resistance. Attention to the dynamics of materiality, embodiment, and declarative speech acts focuses researchers on the contested processes that allow some self-violence to be labeled as resistance and other self-violence to be declared a health problem.

Ultimately, self-violence is one category of action among a range of resistance tactics that may be conceptualized as varying by the locus

of embodied harm or non-harm against self or other. As suggested by the article's case illustrations, and made explicit in the novel typology introduced, each quadrant of resistance is likely considered by conflict participants as effective based on differing strategic logics. Future research could explore in more detail how self-violent resistance is understood by various actors in relation to these other violent and nonviolent tactics. For instance, do actors belonging to movements or groups adopting predominately nonviolent forms of resistance view suicide protest or self-harm differently from groups that adopt predominately violent forms of resistance? In the cases I analyzed, self-violent resistance was sometimes followed by massive displays of nonviolent civil resistance and at other times by violent forms of resistance. How do actors involved in different conflict settings view the application of violence towards themselves and others? The embodied and material nature of resistance tactics are open to competing declarations about their nature. Just as proponents of nonviolent tactics often must defend against the label of passivity, or differentiate nonviolence from pacifism (Howes, 2013), so too should activists and scholars continue to conceptualize the tactic of self-violent resistance.

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Resistance, Materiality and the Spectre of Cartesianism: A Contribution to the Critique of Feminist New Materialism

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Abstract

An important camp within the emerging field of resistance studies has been characterised by a tendency to study and theorise matters of culture, language, and discourse at the expense of matter itself. For researchers interested in feminist resistance, feminist new materialism – with its focus on the entanglements of ‘natureculture’, matter, the body, sexual difference, agency, and change – might appear to offer productive theoretical tools that can help shift the focus towards materiality. Through a reading of selected works of influential feminist new materialists, this article critically analyses how resistance can be articulated within the theoretical scope of feminist new materialism. While the authors agree with the identified gains of a material turn within resistance studies and in relation to feminist resistance, it is shown that new materialism is of little help in this regard. In a first step, it is argued that the new materialist attempt to undermine the modern and postmodern forms of Cartesian dualism ends up reproducing its fundamental premise through the equation of difference and independence on the one hand, and of identity and unity on the other. In a second step, the authors argue that the failed attempt to challenge Cartesian dualism gives rise to two theoretical problems with important implications for feminist resistance. On the one hand, in its efforts to transcend older versions of materiality as unalterable and constant, feminist new materialism comes to privilege change and the register of historical specificity at the expense of limits and the register of the transhistorical, in a way that disguises resistance rooted in the relatively stable condition of vulnerability. On the other hand, in its attempt to supersede the difference

between nature and humanity by granting agency to matter, feminist new materialism is led to sacrifice intentional action in a way that undermines core aspects of the emerging field of resistance studies.

Introduction: Resistance Studies and Materiality

It would be of no avail to offer a general assessment of the status of materiality within the emerging field of ‘resistance studies’, since it is rooted in distinctly different traditions of investigation of resistance. As a field, resistance studies relate to ‘the state-oriented, structuralist, and public scope of “contentious politics” (itself a combination of social movement studies, revolution studies, and studies on guerrilla warfare, civil warfare, and terrorism)’; it engages with ‘informal “everyday forms of resistance” within subaltern studies, the history-from-below movement, and “autonomist” approaches to radical politics within post-Marxist and poststructuralist studies’, and it often takes inspiration from different specialist fields, such as ‘gender studies and feminism, queer studies, peace studies, political science, sociology, critical race studies, anthropology, pedagogics, psychology, media and communication studies, critical legal studies, heritage studies, design and crafts, and so on’ (Lilja and Vinthagen 2018 p. 213). The relation between these different theoretical traditions, disciplines, models, areas of empirical investigations, and discussions is due to the fact that resistance challenges all forms of domination (Lilja and Vinthagen 2018 p. 213). Naturally, within the traditions combined in resistance studies, the status of materiality alters from a fundamental to a negligible standing.

However, even if a general assessment of the status of materiality would be in vain, several scholars have identified an influential camp within the emerging field of resistance studies, which during the last decades have tended to study and theorise matters of culture, language, and discourse at the expense of matter itself (Törnberg 2013; Busch 2017; Lilja 2017). A similar diagnosis can be made in respect of contemporary feminist theory, where the primary focus has operated at the level of discourse rather than matter (Alaimo and Hekman 2008, p. 1ff; also Grosz 2008, p. 22; Colebrook 2008, p. 52). Doubtless, phenomena such as discursive resistance, identity construction, language, and performativity are important in the study and practice of resistance. However, this focus

can tend to conceal or overlook the materiality of resistance not only in the analytical frameworks used, but also in the empirical material studied. In paying insufficient attention to key material resources of various forms – such as property relations, structural conditions of the state and its institutions, repression, the patterns of the city, space, place, the body, and sexual difference – crucial dimensions of resistance are lost while at the same time important contributions from several of the theoretical and empirical traditions investigating resistance, which in fact has influenced and/or been a part of the field of resistance studies, are excluded or disguised. Against this background, the recently emerging thought collective of ‘new materialists’ would seem to be a natural place to look for inspiration in trying to combat this lack of interest in materiality within the field of resistance studies (see Törnberg 2013; Von Busch 2017). For researchers interested in feminist resistance, it is the feminist version of new materialism that appears to be most pertinent, since it addresses the entanglements of ‘natureculture’, the body, sexual difference, agency, and change in a way that promises a break from the dominant poststructuralist culturalist orientation.

Through a reading of selected works of influential feminist new materialists – such as Stacy Alaimo, Karen Barad, Elisabeth Grosz, Susan Hekman, Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin – the main purpose of this article is to critically analyse how resistance can be articulated within the theoretical scope of feminist new materialism and to point out its limitations in relation to feminist resistance. Since our purpose is to analyse the feminist new materialist theoretical intervention in general, rather than to investigate existing internal theoretical distinctions and conflicts, we will focus more on the similarities than on the extant differences between these theorists. Moreover, it is beyond the scope of the current article to assess and survey the actual impact of the feminist new materialism on other areas of feminist resistance research. Our concerns in what follows are restricted to the emerging field of resistance studies and its understandings of resistance (which we will come back to below).

The investigation will proceed in four steps, which are reflected in the four subsequent sections. In a *first step*, we will analyse the dominant patterns of feminist new materialist theorisation of the relation between

nature and society, of agency, of the body, and of sexual difference against the background of a preceding feminist and progressive tradition premised on a suspicion towards nature. In a second step, we will critically investigate the ways in which the new materialists have sought to undermine and transgress both modern and postmodern forms of Cartesian dualism and dichotomies between nature and society. A detailed analysis of the attempt to move beyond Cartesianism is warranted because this effort is at the heart of the new materialist project as a whole and – more importantly – because it contains specific implications for the theory and empirical study of resistance. In our view, the attempt to break loose from Cartesian dualism is a failed one insofar as its advocates end up reproducing the fundamental premise of the thought of René Descartes himself, through the equation of difference and independence on the one hand, and of identity and unity on the other. While a significant result in itself, in terms of the aims of the present article the more pertinent finding is that the failed attempt to challenge Cartesian dualism gives rise to two distinct theoretical weaknesses. These relate to the problem of a) limits and vulnerability, and b) intentionality. Both weaknesses are of central importance for the study of feminist resistance and we will investigate them separately. Hence, in a third step, we will deepen the analysis of the new materialist effort to transcend older versions of materiality as unalterable and constant. Our conclusion is that feminist new materialism comes to privilege change and the register of historical specificity at the expense of limits and the register of the transhistorical, in such a way that disguises resistance rooted in the relatively stable condition of vulnerability and natural limits of the body. Lastly, in a fourth step, we will develop our reading of the new materialist attempt to transcend Cartesianism and the difference between nature and society by granting agency to matter. We find that feminist new materialism is led to sacrifice the notion of intentional action in a way that undermines central aspects of the emerging field of resistance studies. In light of such findings, while we agree in principle with the call for a material turn within resistance studies and in relation to feminist resistance, we doubt that new materialism can be of much help on this front. That is, insofar as vulnerability and intentionality is important for the study and practice of resistance, our argument is that the status of materiality within resistance

studies ought not to be defined by new materialist theory. However, it will not be enough to propose a re-introduction of materiality in general. Rather, what is needed is a discussion and an analysis of what status and boundaries the notion of materiality ought to be granted within the field in relation to other important notions, not least the nature and material *limits* and *stability* of bodily vulnerability (our third step of analysis) and the *difference* between human intentionality and the materiality of nature (our fourth step of analysis).

Sexual Difference from Static Being to Free Becoming

Nature has a prominent place as a contested political category in the history of resistance. Before the French Revolution of 1789, the socio-political content of nature incarnated the promise of a new world of equality and freedom, and was identified with progress and radical demands for social and political change (Losurdo 2004, p. 60; see also Jameson 2009, p. 327). The category of nature was mobilised against *l'ancien régime* and its advocates; it was used as a challenge to the existing order and it was understood as the foundation of the statement that the aim of every political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of human beings, who self-evidently 'are born and remain free and equal in right'.⁴ In this way, the declaration of 1789 aligned itself with the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who positioned nature as an element in opposition to the existing order with his famous formulation: 'Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains' (Rousseau 2010 [1762], p. 33).

During the Revolution, nature's socio-political content started to switch sides as it came to be consolidated as a major category of reaction at the time of the Restoration, mobilised against what was seen to be the new artificial and unnatural regime, basing its legitimacy on the abstract concepts of freedom, equality, and popular sovereignty (Losurdo 2004, pp. 60–1). For Edmund Burke, the abstract claims of legal equality

⁴ "Déclarations des droits de l'homme et du citoyen" (1789), see <http://www.conseil-constitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/francais/la-constitution/la-constitution-du-4-octobre-1958/declaration-des-droits-de-l-homme-et-du-citoyen-de-1789.5076.html>

violate the ‘natural order of things’; they are in fact the ‘most abominable of usurpations’, which specifically threaten ‘nature’s prerogative’ (Burke 2014 [1790], pp. 8, 50). The conservative and reactionary project thus criticised the new status quo with the help of the category of nature and argued for a return to the state of natural perfection (Losurdo 2004, p. 60). While nature, as before the Revolution, was still posited as a political category outside of, and denied by, the political order and used as a source of critique, the present order had changed. Before the Revolution, in principle the political regime was rooted in self-evident political and economic difference; after the Revolution, it was rooted in self-evident political equality, which meant that the social and economic differences that undeniably continued to exist now had to be explained and legitimised rather than merely taken for granted (Hunt 1996, p. 15; Hunt 2007, pp. 16, 29, 147, 148). However, both progressives and conservatives were in agreement insofar as nature was seen as a transhistorical and static category.

The rupture in the history of ideas of nature immediately came to involve the early women’s movement. However, the use of nature in this regard was more ambivalent than in the political discourse of the progressives (who excised the category of nature from their discourse) and that of the conservatives (who affirmed the category of nature within their discourse). The source of ambivalence can be located in the fact that the changing socio-political content of nature also involved the specificity of the female body as a contested site of feminist politics. Mary Wollstonecraft, writing her political manifestos in the midst of the shifting meanings of nature, demonstrates what was at stake. On the one hand, she exposed the contradiction involved in the exclusion of women from the category of the natural rights of man, thus positioning her critique within the pre-revolutionary progressive meaning of nature. On the other hand, she also placed herself within what was to become the post-revolutionary progressive discourse when distancing the argument from the use of the specific nature of the female body for political purposes, even if she acknowledged the existence of sexual difference (Wollstonecraft 1993 [1792], pp. 67, 101). From the intervention of Wollstonecraft, it is possible to draw a line of continuity up to the present day, with feminist arguments placing the feminist project (albeit at times

ambivalently) within the distancing gesture towards nature in general, and the nature of the specificity of the female body in particular. From its very inception, feminist theory was, as Kate Soper has noted, structured around ‘the challenge it delivered to the presumed “naturalness” of male supremacy’ (1995, p. 121; see also Gunnarsson 2012, p. 3).

The excommunication of the female body from the mainstream of the feminist project left culture and society as the main representatives of radicalism and change. One example of such excommunication can be found in the work of the influential anthropologist Gayle Rubin, which is partly premised on the construction of an opposition between the politically significant sociality of gender and the politically insignificant materiality of sex (Rubin 1975). Another example can be found in the equally influential theorist Judith Butler, who criticised the dichotomy of gender and sex that functions as a basis for Rubin’s theoretical contribution. Butler argued that both sex and gender ought to be conceived of as constructed if we are to avoid biologism (Butler 1999, p. 94). In this sense, Butler can be understood to be part of the culture-centred feminism that to a high degree dominated the 20th century. For Butler, it is mainly language and discourse that are capable of radical performativity, while materiality is constructed within a psychoanalytic figure of thought, adhering to the uncontrollable and traumatic register of the Real. Even if materiality might destabilise the discursive order by constantly reoccurring, it is always by virtue of being abject and unmentionable. Hence, we can never really get to the real body, which comes ‘from a place that cannot be found and which, strictly speaking, cannot be said to exist’ (Butler 1986, p. 39). By implication, while the potentiality of resistance within this perspective on the body might have a capacity for negation and destabilisation, it nevertheless lacks constructive and creative dimensions (Alaimo and Hekman 2008, p. 3; Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 145)⁵.

⁵ For an example of a defence of the bodily in the work of Butler, see Edenheim (2016). Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman make a similar point to us in this regard, arguing that “[e]ven though many social constructivist theories grant the existence of material reality, that reality is often posited as a realm entirely separate from that of language, discourse, and culture” (Alaimo and Hekman 2008, p. 3).

It is against this background of a culture/discourse-centred feminist hegemony that the feminist new materialists articulate their theoretical intervention (Alaimo and Hekman 2008, p. 1ff; Grosz 2008, p. 22; Colebrook 2008, p. 52). Barad offers her own distinctive engagement in the debate with the following diagnosis of the hegemonic status of culture alongside a critique of the theoretical trend that has granted language too much power:

[I]t seems that at every turn lately ... every “thing” – even materiality – is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation.’ She continues:

‘Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters. There is an important sense in which the only thing that does not seem to matter anymore is matter (Barad 2003, p. 801).

Moreover, the new materialists argue that nature, materiality, and the body ought not be understood as a static and passive object moulded by culture and society – a notion that unites pre-revolutionary progressives and post-revolutionary conservatives alike – but as living, plural, constantly changing, and active. An important task for new materialist theory is thus to undermine the asymmetry and return to matter its agential power (Barad 2007, p. 177). Alaimo and Hekman also invoke the language of agency: ‘Nature is agentic – it acts, and those actions have consequences for both the human and nonhuman world’ (2008, p. 5). Dolphijn and Tuin, in a similar spirit to that of Barad, Alaimo and Hekman, describe new materialism as a move away from the practice of reducing the body, nature, and materiality to a passive mass in the grip of thought, culture or the soul. If this move is to be possible, Dolphijn and Tuin argue, the modernist and postmodernist traditions of thought must be short-circuited, since they imply a dualistic and hierarchical practice, not least with the binary opposition between nature and society. New materialism is described as nothing less than ‘a revolution in thought’, inasmuch as it goes beyond merely supplementing existing thought, and provides us with a ‘new metaphysics’. On this view, new materialism ‘traverses and thereby rewrites thinking *as a whole*, leaving nothing untouched, redirecting every possible idea according to its new sense of orientation’ (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 13).

As a result, in this new metaphysics, materiality should not be seen as separable from culture, nor as a simple result of it; matter is not caught within the discursive net, nor is the discourse determined by materiality (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 85). Instead of the modern and postmodern Cartesian dualism, nature and culture ought to be understood as an ‘intra-active’ relation of ‘natureculture’ (Haraway 2003). The notion of ‘intra-action’ was coined by Barad, who argues against the image of materiality as a passive mass without agency and instead proposes an ontology of performativity in which materiality is understood as a constant coming into being. For Barad, rather than being static, matter is changing and therefore historical: ‘Matter is substance in its intra-active becoming – not a thing, but a doing, a congealing of agency. Matter is a stabilizing and destabilizing process of iterative intra-activity’ (Barad 2007, p. 210). Instead of understanding the relation between different material entities as one of interaction, whereby entities are posed as previously constituted, materiality is understood to be constituted in the very meeting and intra-action. In this sense, new materialism, in Barad’s version, is a theory of *monism* and *immanence*, based on the concept of entanglements (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 85). The concept of entanglement implies ‘not simply to be intertwined with another, as in the joining of separate entities, but to lack an independent, self-contained existence’ (Barad 2007, p. ix).

In addition to grounding the new materialist metaphysics of monism and immanence, the concept of entanglement, in combination with Barad’s agential perspective on matter, also has implications for how agency and intentionality are theorised. From the new materialist perspective, preserving the notion of intentional action of individuals or collectives as an important feature of agency appears as an obstacle to the theoretical ambition of transgressing the difference between nature and materiality on the one hand, and humanity and its societies on the other. Within the theoretical perspective developed by Barad, the ‘space of agency is much larger than that postulated in many other critical social theories’, since ‘matter plays an agentic role in its iterative materialization’ (Barad 2007, p. 177; Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 55). In contrast to ‘humanist’ theories of agency, this perspective does not see human intentionality as a fundamental part of agency. Rather, agency is something that happens; it is a ‘doing’, an intra-action that cannot be

designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (Barad 2003, pp. 826–7; Barad 2007, p. 178).

So far, we have analysed the new materialist objective of deconstructing the binary opposition between matter and culture, and its implications for how agency is understood as intra-action rather than as involving intentionality. We will now analyse how the feminist new materialists proceed with a conception of the body and, more specifically, the sexed body that is rooted in their attempt to overcome the matter-culture dichotomy. In an article on Darwinism and feminism, Grosz, much like other new materialists, promotes a conception of the body as a potentiality rather than something that is simply moulded by culture. The body is ‘the virtualities, the potentialities, within biological existence that enable cultural, social, and historical forces to work with and transform that existence’ (Grosz 2008, p. 24; Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 33). This conception of the body is connected to her critique of the poststructuralist construction of matter, which she identifies with Butler’s work. According to Grosz, Butler’s work contains ‘an elision of the question of nature and of matter [...] Mattering becomes more important than matter! Being “important,” having significance, having a place, mattering, is more important than matter, substance or materiality’ (Ausch, Doane, and Perez 2000). So, while Butler is interested in performativity and becoming, she does not, according to Grosz, seriously reckon with the matter and the material becoming of the body in itself.

But what are the implications of the new materialist notion of matter and bodies as agentic and transformative with respect to the problem of sexual difference? The conclusion drawn by Dolphijn and Tuin (2012), rooted in their conception of materiality as on-going historicity, is that sexual difference ought to be understood as a plurality of performative differences of particular bodies. By way of understanding sexual difference as materially rooted without positing binary and fixed meanings, they aim to overcome the tragic paradox that Joan Scott (1997) formulated in her work on French feminist struggles: in their attempts to abolish sexual difference, feminists have to constantly recall and emphasise the very differences they want to abolish. According to Dolphijn and Tuin, this kind of conflict signals a dualistic logic between the biological and the social: ‘These paradoxes, in the context of feminism, concern the false

opposition between biological essentialism and social constructivism, a problem inherent to “the dualist logic of modernity” (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 139). In opposition to the tradition of Cartesian dualism, they want to develop a performative ontology of sexual difference:

We call this “sexual differing”, that is, an allowance for sexual difference actually to differ. It involves a rewriting of sexual difference and sexuality not by means of dualist premises, but as a practical philosophy in which difference in itself comes to being (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 141).

Here, it is a question of sexual differing, a differing that does not accept the distinction between sex and gender, but conceptualises sexual difference as becoming rather than mere being. According to this perspective, it is impossible to separate the dynamic category of gender from the supposedly static category of sex. As such, the rules of the game appear to have changed. Instead of avoiding sexual difference as feminists interested in radical and progressive change, we ought to affirm it as a category of destabilising becoming. The Wollstonecraftian scepticism towards sexual difference as a political category, which has influenced generations of feminists, now seems to have become supplanted, and sexual difference, or rather sexual differing, now appears to be a plausible point of departure for feminist resistance.

Before returning to the problem of sexual difference and resistance in the final two parts of the article, we first have to deepen the analysis of the attempt to undermine the Cartesian dualism between nature and society at the heart of the new materialist project, since this attempt leads to specific consequences for the conditions of possibility for the theory and study of resistance. Our attempt to offer a more detailed analysis of the new materialist attempt to break loose from the heritage of Descartes will be aided by recent arguments put forward by Andreas Malm (2018), Terry Eagleton (2016), and Lena Gunnarsson (2013).

The Spectre of Cartesianism and the Possibility of Non-Binary Distinctions

As should be clear by now, the main target of new materialism is dualistic thinking – from Descartes to Butler, as the argument claims. If there is something genuinely ‘new’ in new materialism, however, it is certainly not

to be found in its attempt to overcome the philosophical problem space constructed by Descartes. Moreover, the new materialists are not alone in their efforts in transcending dualisms; the latter has become something of an unquestioned imperative within feminist theory (Gunnarsson 2013, p. 13). Indeed, if one were tempted to ‘challenge’ one form of dualism or another, it might be wise to recall that, as Vicki Kirkby writes, ‘it has become somewhat routine within critical discourse to diagnose binary oppositions as if they are pathological symptoms’ (Kirkby 2008, p. 215; Gunnarsson 2013, p. 13). Nevertheless, it is against the dualist tradition that the revolution in thought is imagined, the newness of new materialism is derived, and the philosophy of a new metaphysics of monism and immanence is proposed.

Of course, at a concrete level, there exists an important difference between the Cartesian tradition and the new materialists in the sense that monism and immanence are theoretically distinct from dualism and transcendence. However, when the new materialists propose a monistic theory of immanence, by which the dualistic conceptualisation of the difference between nature and society is rejected, the solution appears to be premised on a deeper reliance on the way in which nature and society have been initially conceptualised in the dualist tradition as categories located in entirely separate spheres. Without that initial distance, and the implied notion that difference equals independence, the observation that nature and society are inseparable and combined does not warrant their collapse in identity. Without the notion that *difference* equals *independence*, one could simply hold that nature and society are different and inseparable (Malm 2018, pp. 48–51). Interestingly, the opposition between dualism and monism, founded at a deeper level on the mutual agreement that difference equals independence, actually leads the new materialists back to René Descartes himself. For Descartes wrote that two substances are really distinct only ‘when each of them can exist without the other’, and that (and this is nothing but the corollary statement of the first) ‘to conceive of the union of two things is to conceive of them as one thing’ (2003 [1641], pp. 15, 86, 62, 152; Malm 2018, p. 50ff.).

One can find an example of the implicit mutual agreement between new materialism and Descartes’ statement when Barad ventures to undermine the *difference* between nature and society, between human

and non-human, by way of the concept of intra-action, describing the maligned alternative as liberal atomism founded on the notion 'of individually *determinate* entities with *inherent* properties' (Barad 2003, pp. 812–13, 817). Without the initial notion of 'determinate entities' with 'inherent properties', the notion of intra-action loses its force. Dolphijn and Tuin offer another example when they emphasise that they are not against the idea of difference *per se*, but rather what they conceive of as a modernist conception of difference as relational, negative, and reductive, whereby every object has its distinct properties. As an alternative, they propose that we understand difference 'along the lines of an affirmative intensity, which in the end turns into a non-dualism, a monist philosophy of difference' (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, p. 121). Difference is thus something plural and constantly shifting, which comes into being as a continuous differing. There are no stable differences, only differences that emerge locally and contingently (Dolphijn and Tuin 2012, pp. 121, 127, 153). Thus, Dolphijn and Tuin present a conception of difference emerging from a profound and privileged form of sameness or monism, which we are in need of since:

Whether it concerns earthquakes, art, social revolutions, or simply thinking, the material and the discursive are only taken apart in the authoritative gesture of the scholar or by the commonsensical [sic] thinker; while in the event, in life itself, *the two seeming layers are by all means indiscernible* (2012, pp. 291–2, emphasis added).

Without the initial notion of 'the two seeming layers' being discernible and stable, the proposed monism would be less acute. The same figure of thought can be detected when Noela Davis presents new materialists as seeking to 'theorize an *entanglement* and *non-separability* of the biological with/in sociality, and what they criticize in much feminism is the conventional assumption that the biological and the social are *two separate* and *discrete* systems that then somehow interact' (2009, p. 67, emphasis added). Without the notion of two 'separate and discrete systems', the 'entanglement and non-separability' are unwarranted.

Hence, when the new materialists counter the dualist statement of fundamental difference with the monist statement of fundamental sameness, entanglement, and inseparability, they only appear to be the flip

side of the Cartesian notion stating that difference equals independence and that union equals collapse in identity. By implication, new materialism – as much as the Cartesian form of thought that comprises one of its chief targets of criticism – is premised on the dualism or binary opposition between difference and independence on the one hand, and unity, dependence, and identity on the other. Thus, the new materialist monism appears to be little more than an extreme response emanating from the heritage of extreme dualism, and therefore a *consequence of Cartesianism* rather than a successful rejection of this tradition (Malm 2018, p. 51).

The Cartesian binary opposition between difference and unity at work in new materialism excludes the logical possibility of holding that distinctions and differences can, as Gunnarsson argues, simply signify that two things are not identical at the same time as they cannot be neatly separated from each other or must be mutually independent (Gunnarsson 2013, p. 14). And it is not necessarily problematic to maintain that objects and processes can be simultaneously both different *and* united. Even if, as Eagleton argues, it is not hard to find reasonable arguments for why one ought to reject the false dichotomy between dumb matter and immortal spirit, the conclusion might still be that humans are not ‘set apart from the material world (as for idealist humanism), or mere pieces of matter (as for mechanical materialism)’; ‘They are indeed pieces’, Eagleton continues,

But pieces of matter of a peculiar kind. Or, as Marx puts it: human beings are part of Nature, which is to think of the two as inseparable; but we can also speak of them as being “linked”, which is to point up their difference’ (Eagleton 2016, p. 12).

In other words, human beings might have properties that are identical with and yet irreducible to nature (Bhaskar 1998, pp. 97–9).

The attempt to begin the work to undermine the Cartesian heritage by trying to think both difference and unity beyond the new materialist dichotomy can be further clarified via the Hegelian conception of abstraction. The distinction between abstract and concrete is all too often understood as a distinction between what actually has existence (the concrete) and illusion (the abstract). In the Hegelian tradition, the

distinguishing characteristic of the abstract is instead its indeterminateness and simplicity, unlike the concrete concentration of many determinations (Hegel 1969 [1816], pp. 70, 77). Marx locates himself in the centre of the Hegelian meaning of abstraction when he writes: 'The concrete is concrete because it is the concentration of many determinations, hence unity of the diverse' (Marx 1993 [1857], p. 101). Thus, the abstract is no less real than the concrete; the fact that, as Marx writes elsewhere, 'Hunger is hunger' is no less real than the fact that 'hunger gratified by cooked meat eaten with a knife and fork is a different hunger from that which bolts down raw meat with the aid of hand, nail and tooth' (Marx 1993 [1857], p. 92).

Hence, human hunger can be understood as an abstract natural property that is *identical* in all places and at all times, at the very same time as the concrete form of appearance of hunger is *different* in every historically specific social context conditioned by the organisation of property relations and cultural circumstances. Likewise, at an abstract level one could understand humanity and, in prolongation, society as consisting of the same material substance as nature, with the former being dependent upon and inseparable from the latter. From here, two different paths are possible: one is that of new materialism, which reaches the deeper Cartesian conclusion that by virtue of the identity and inseparability of nature and society, no relatively stable difference between them can be defended, which leads them to the conclusion of a double monism of both substance and properties, as well as a rejection of the difference between abstract and concrete; or the other path, which we find more persuasive, whereby nature, humanity, and society are seen as identical and consisting of one and the same substance at an abstract level, but that both humanity and society (in different ways, of course) at a more concrete level have properties that are irreducible to nature (e.g. Malm 2018, pp. 53, 59). Of these two alternatives, only the latter can undermine the spectre of Cartesian dualism and the binary opposition stating identity or difference.

In light of this, we would argue that a central task for radical contemporary theory is the deconstruction and annihilation of the binary opposition and dualism between identity and difference, unity and distinction, inseparability and separation, dependence and independence,

which could leave a space within which the binarity between the terms can be constructed as less rigid yet without losing their distinctness. That is to say, if we want to break loose from the Cartesian heritage, and in respect of the credibility of such an attempt we are evidently in agreement with the new materialists, the urgent task is to deconstruct the binary oppositions that have structured and given meaning to the new materialist project from the very outset.

In fact, if differences and distinctions are turned into the problem as such and subsequently abandoned, it would not be possible to theorise and investigate the relation and dialectic between nature and society or that between change and stability, since a relation presupposes a difference between the terms that is constituted by and/or constitutes the relation (Gunnarsson 2013, p. 14). In addition, if the dialectic between nature, human beings, society, change, and stability is logically excluded, crucial features of resistance studies will be buried. What is at stake is, on the one hand, the condition of possibility of the notion of vulnerability rooted in sexual difference, and on the other, intentional action. The new materialists sacrifice both of these key concepts in their failed attempt to undermine the Cartesian tradition. Let us then move on to a more detailed consideration of, first, the problem of vulnerability, and second, the problem of intentional action.

Materiality as Limit and Transgression: On Vulnerability and Resistance

When introducing and arguing for the importance of a feminist new materialist intervention, Alaimo and Hekman take female bodies and their specific sufferings and pleasures as a starting point. According to them:

Women *have* bodies; these bodies have pain as well as pleasure. They also have diseases that are subject to medical interventions that may or may not cure those bodies. We need a way to talk about these bodies and the materiality they inhabit (Alaimo and Hekman 2008, p. 4).

Hence, Alaimo and Hekman do not simply describe their perspective as being theoretically motivated; they also appear to articulate political incentives. But what kind of specific sufferings and pleasures and what

forms of resistance can be related to the bodies to which the authors are referring? One obvious example would be the birth-giving body, which is often female-identified though not always (Obedin-Maliver and Makadon 2016), with its pleasures, needs, potential complications and, not least, specific limits. Another example, mentioned by Alaimo and Hekman (2008) themselves, is the history of medical research that has taken the male body as study of object and norm. Other examples, not only related to the female body, could be found in every form of resistance or movement that wholly or partly mobilises around the limits of the body, such as acts of resistance against long working days, or bad or dangerous working conditions. These examples demonstrate that bodies are deeply political, and that the security and health of some bodies can be perceived as less valuable than others. But does the specific way in which the feminist new materialists present materiality provide effective tools for the political struggles that Alaimo and Hekman implicitly use to legitimise the new materialist feminist perspective? Considering these examples alongside our previous analysis of the dominant patterns of the feminist new materialist theorisation of change in the second section above, we will develop a critique of the feminist new materialist conception of changing matter and investigate related notions such as limits, predictability, unpredictability, the register of the historically specific and of the transhistorical, strength, vulnerability, and sexual difference in relation to feminist resistance. At the bottom of these notions, we find the unsuccessful endeavour to counter the Cartesian dualism between nature and society through the theoretical gesture granting agency and change to nature. We will not argue that the move to understand nature in terms of change is a mistake as such, but rather that it in the new materialist project contains a problematic exclusion of stability and transhistorical properties, which are important in so far as the study and practice of resistance are considered.

In his book on materialism, Eagleton relates the active notion of matter within new materialism to poststructuralism and different versions of vitalism: the matter in new materialism is, he writes, 'regarded as a sort of materiality without substance, as fluid and protean as the post-structuralist notion of textuality. Like textuality, the stuff is infinite, indeterminate, unpredictable, non-stratified, diffuse, free-floating, heterogeneous and untotalisable' (2016, p. 11). In this way,

Eagleton continues, new materialism not only describes the world as ever changing, but also tends to invest change, energy, and force with value – even though ‘all dynamism might in fact not deserve admiration’ (2016, p. 14). In relation to the fact that the new materialists can be identified as inheritors of the thought of Gilles Deleuze, the admiration of change should not come as a surprise. ‘For the most part’, Eagleton writes,

Deleuze can see constraint only as negative, a view that faithfully reflects the marketplace ideology he otherwise finds objectionable ... with a handful of qualifying clauses, we are offered a banal antithesis between the vital, creative, desirous, and dynamic (to be unequivocally endorsed) and the oppressive realm of stable material forms (to be implicitly demonised) ... What we are offered, then, is a Romantic-libertarian philosophy of unbridled affirmation and incessant innovation, as though the creative and innovative were unambiguously on the side of the angels (2016, p. 16).

In a similar manner, Gunnarsson (2013) has uncovered and criticised the feminist new materialist glorification of the dynamic and the ungovernable. As both Eagleton and Gunnarsson point out, the fact that feminism is about social change does not necessarily imply that totally unpredictable and chaotic change ought to be feminism’s main goal. The point is that change as such is not politically radical. For most feminist movements, it is instead *emancipatory change* that is of interest, and such change may or may not be (and is often somewhere in between these two poles) planned, structured, and organised. In other words, the unruly body as such cannot be taken *a priori* as a radical political actor. Bodies are in part constantly changing, which leads to mutations of both desirable and undesirable kinds (Gunnarsson 2013, p. 9).

In extending the critical investigation of the difference between desirable and undesirable change, one should pose the question of whether emancipatory feminist resistance requires the transformation of bodily matter. If so, how are we to think about what seems *not to be* constantly changing, what seems not to be unpredictable, but rather quite expected – for example, the transhistorical condition that bodies without food, water, emotional and physical care, shelter against heat and cold, will hardly survive for any length of time? In its celebration of

free and unrestrained matter, the body that is ascribed a radical political potentiality of resistance within the new materialist project precludes the restricted, weak, and limited body. The notion of limits as negative per se conforms quite well, as Eagleton shows, to the neoliberal ideology of the market that most new materialists and feminists in fact seek to criticise (2016, p. 25).

In an interview with Butler, Vikki Bell asks how she relates to philosophical vitalism, many proponents of which – such as Spinoza and Deleuze – are central to the feminist new materialists. In response, Butler concedes that she does not want to reject the vitalist interest in the potentiality of becoming, which she argues has some affinity with her reading of Foucault and the possibility of the self to become something else, but she also describes how she believes that concepts such as finitude and vulnerability might have greater ethical potential:

[P]erhaps it is more important, more timely, to consider notions of life that are bound up with transience, which is not necessarily an exclusively negative thing. One could argue that the precariousness of life is the ground or basis upon which our obligations to shelter life emerge. I also think, maybe, it's a kind of modest conceit that keeping in mind the transience or precariousness of life allows us to value life differently or more vigilantly, so it does translate into a more ethical position for me (Bell 2010, p. 150).

According to Butler, life is something that is both constantly changing and finite. Hence, even if there are important differences between Eagleton and Butler, it is the vulnerable, limited, and needy body that the latter has recently turned toward theoretically, and that the former has invoked as the foundation for a materialistic ethics and Marxist politics (Butler 2004; Eagleton 2011). Even if both Eagleton and the later Butler proceed from concrete situated bodies, they also emphasise abstract (in the Hegelian sense) transhistorical aspects of human existence beyond contexts and circumstances. It is these characteristics that both thinkers want to mobilise politically against a system that contradicts foundational bodily needs. Many of the bodily questions of resistance present today are about claims set out from this limit, against the exploitation of bodies that cannot *take any more* (for example, long working hours), or that

are in need of care (for example, the need of assistance or treatment in order to live a liveable life). Birth-giving bodies need qualified attention and care, and midwives need breaks and decent working conditions in order to guarantee the quality of the care they provide. Here, it is not the body as transgressive, fluid or agentic that is at stake; rather, it is the body as vulnerable and finite that forms the point of departure for political demands for systemic change in the *specific direction* of adaptation to the body's limits. The presupposition for that kind of demand is, of course, that one can distinguish the differences (to repeat: difference does not necessarily equal independence) between the nature of the transhistorical material needs of the body and the historically specific social organisation of, for example, maternal care.

However, even if the respective conceptions of vulnerability set out by Eagleton and Butler signal a step forward in relation to new materialism, it remains sexless within their theorisations. Hence, they comprehend vulnerability in general terms. But sex-specific forms of vulnerability and sex-specific needs also have to be politicised, rather than merely dissolved into some form of sexual plurality or variation. If the conception of 'sexual differing' appears to obscure and disguise the female bodies worn out on nursing floors, or those given inadequate aid at the same hospitals and not provided with any care at all, the privileging of change would find those bodies uninteresting, since they are about the limits of the body rather than the constant change of materiality. In this sense, one could argue that the new materialist ideal of immanence privileges a Romantic-libertarian model of transgression; the monism of feminist new materialism is a kind of transcendence in disguise. In the last instance, it is the possibility of a symmetrical focus on vulnerability and limits on the one hand, and change and transgression (planned and unplanned) on the other, together with the relation between the register of the historically specific and the transhistorical, that becomes lost in the new materialist notion of matter.

In this section, we have analysed how the failed effort of emancipation from the Cartesian dualism between nature and society, by way of granting agency to matter, has led to the priority of the changing and agentic body, which we see as a weakness, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of feminist resistance, insofar as political claims

based on the weakness or precarity of the body are downplayed, but also to the extent that change in itself cannot be said to bring about social justice. Change sometimes jeopardises the limits of specific bodies in specific social contexts, which indicates the need for organised change if emancipatory ends are to be attained. We will now turn to the potential problems that arise when disconnecting agency from human intentionality, a theoretical manoeuvre that Barad describes as pivotal to her agential realist perspective (2007, p. 177).

Feminist New Materialism and the Field of Resistance Studies

Whether involved in resistance from below against patriarchy, sexism, capitalism, racism, fascism or other relations of power or forms of states, most activists would probably agree that intentional action (individual or collective) is a crucial dimension of their practice. Not unexpectedly, the problem of intentionality (and related phenomena such as aims, purposes, or some form of interests related to action) is also an important area of contention when resistance is theorised within the emerging field of resistance studies (Baaz et al. 2016, p. 140).

Nevertheless, if there exists such an agreement between activists and academic theorists of resistance, the implication need not be that intentional action is perceived as the *differentia specifica* of resistance, deciding whether or not the phenomenon we encounter can be analysed as resistance. Recently, Mikael Baaz, Mona Lilja, Michael Schulz, and Stellan Vinthagen have convincingly proposed a definition that *excludes* intentional action:

Irrespective of intentions, we view resistance as (i) an act, (ii) performed by someone upholding a subaltern position or someone acting on behalf of and/or in solidarity with someone in a subaltern position, and (iii) (most often) responding to power (or, as we will see below, other resistance practices, which in turn emerge as a response to power) (Baaz et al. 2016, p. 142).

Their most important argument for excluding intentions from the concept of resistance is that a wide array of important phenomena for

resistance studies would then also have to be excluded from empirical research, not least various forms of everyday resistance and resistance that is not directly and manifestly intended to affect power (Baaz et al. 2016, p. 140). As an example, Baaz et al. point to the fact that one of the largest contemporary resistance movements would be excluded if intentionality were included in the definition of resistance. They write:

Digital file sharing in which millions (who mainly seek free films, music, and software) actually undermine some of the biggest transnational corporations in the world – within the entertainment industry and software business – and, by extension, an essential feature of contemporary informational capitalism, namely, intellectual property rights (Baaz et al. 2016, p. 140).

In other words, including intentions in the definition would make invisible unintended or ‘other-intended’ resistance, which are forms of resistance that nevertheless undermine power relations by dint of their consequences (Baaz et al. 2016, p. 140). Hence, this preferred definition of resistance rejects the requirement that a direct relation between a *specifically intended* consequence and the *actual consequence* of an action be provided.

However, the implication of the argument is not that the problem of intentions is seen as irrelevant to the study of resistance altogether. On the contrary, knowledge and interpretation of actors’ intentions is, as Baaz et al. write:

helpful in those cases where it is made possible. An explicit aim and perhaps even a conscious strategy to undermine power will have consequences for how the resisters act. Such explicit and strategic resistance will also be easier to categorize for an observer (2016, p. 142).

In addition, the argument for not including intentions in the definition of resistance is *rooted in* a more foundational reason – namely that resistance against a specific power relation can be an unintended or ‘other-intended’ consequence; that is, resistance can be an effect not intended to be something at all or intended to be something other than its result. Even if unintended consequences reasonably can be the effect of impersonal or non-human powers – such as natural catastrophe,

technical failure, economic crisis, etc. – the notion of an act being ‘other-intended’ presupposes the existence of human beings’ intentional action. If resistance is ‘other-intended’, the premise is that the existence of an intention of some form or another precedes the action resulting in a *different result than the intended one*. Hence, since the critique of definitions of resistance that include intentions relies on the fact that an act can have ‘other-intended’ consequences, *intentional actions in general* appear to be the implicit theoretical presupposition of the very definition of resistance that excludes the direct relation between *specific intentions* to undermine a specific power relation and *the actual consequences*.

Irrespective of whether or not one accepts the latter argument, it is clear that Baaz et al. include intentional action and related notions as important features of the study of resistance in general. Hence, regarding the definition of resistance, one could construct a continuum with one extreme only including intentions and the other holding intentions outside of not only the definition of resistance but also resistance studies altogether. Between those two poles, it would be possible to situate the position developed by Baaz et al., which holds that intentions should be excluded from the definition of resistance but included as an important aspect of the field of resistance studies.

The new materialists are, of course, well aware that it would be difficult to win the argument that a tree or a stone has intentions in the way in which it is common (and perhaps not entirely unreasonable) to think about intentions, that is to say, as a way of the human mind directing itself toward a specific object. Instead, as we discussed earlier, most new materialists have opted to reduce the category of agency so that it is not ‘aligned with human intentionality or subjectivity’, and is instead a matter of intra-acting and being ‘an enactment, not something that someone or something has’ (Barad 2003, p. 826). To the extent that feminist new materialism relies on the theoretical gesture of jettisoning human intentionality from the specificity of the category of agency or action, they are only able to support the extreme end of the continuum (that excludes intentional action from not only the definition of resistance but also the field of resistance studies altogether).

At this point, what becomes even clearer is that what is at stake in the new materialists’ failed attempt to break free from Cartesianism,

alongside the notions of vulnerability, stability, limits, and the register of the transhistorical, is the abandonment or refusal of the concept of intentional collective action. Since the new materialists sacrifice the possibility of intentional action when they grant agency to non-human and human actors alike, a central pillar of the project of resistance studies is undermined. That is, irrespective of whether the intentional action of human beings is implicitly presupposed in the very definition of the concept of resistance itself, or is identified as an important part of the study of resistance in general, the feminist new materialist argument is incompatible with the premises of the field.

As a result, we can conclude that through its reproduction of the deeper form of Cartesian dualism, the monism of feminist new materialism, from the perspective of resistance itself, rules out the following possibilities: 1) to intentionally act in accordance with an analysis of the differences between, for example, the material specificity of the birth-giving body on the one hand, and the power relations between men as men and women as women on the other (since nature and society are collapsed into one another); 2) to intentionally formulate criticism of a system not adapted in relation to the limits and stability of the material fragility of the body and act according to that form of criticism (since change is glorified and limits are perceived as belonging to an outmoded mechanical materialism); and 3) to act intentionally at all (since human intentionality is sacrificed as a result of the will to grant agency to both the human and the non-human). Again: the third possibility that is ruled out also undermines the inclusion of intentionality as an important aspect of the theorisation and empirical research of resistance – in the form argued for by Baaz et al.

Therefore, a theoretical position that can contain both abstract identity (human beings, society, and nature consist of the same substance) and concrete differences of properties (among other things, the property of intentional action of human beings cannot be reduced to nature) is an important precondition for the field of resistance studies and for the empirical analysis of resistance, since it rescues the notion of intentional collective action, which is at risk of being dissolved when non-human matter is invested with agency.

A natural alternative would be to 1) save *agency* as a concept

denoting collective and individual intentional action by human beings with intended, non-intended or 'other-intended' consequences and calling the influence of 2) *non-human powers* (earthquakes that trigger an economic crisis, for example) and 3) *impersonal powers* rooted in, without being reducible to, the actions of human beings (economic crisis triggered by the inability to pay back housing loans, for example) for conditions, outcomes, effects, causal effects, etc. No one as yet has argued that it would be easy to distinguish between these, but the fact that it is difficult or impossible *for us* to distinguish between y and x (an epistemological question) does not warrant the conclusion that there exist no differences at all (an ontological question). Just because we cannot discern the milk from the coffee in our *café au lait*, this need not mean that the difference between coffee and milk does not exist (or that they are not both identical as forms of liquid at the same time as they have different properties at a more concrete level).

Moreover, the defence of the category of intentional action does not necessarily lead to an empty notion of liberal negative freedom. Eagleton provides a precise formulation of the alternatives, which is worth quoting at length:

If reductive materialism finds it hard to make room for the human subject, not least for the subject as agent, so too does this 'new' version of the doctrine. Whereas mechanical materialism suspects that human agency is an illusion, vitalist materialism is out to decentre the all-sovereign subject into the mesh of material forces that constitute it. In drawing attention to those forces, however, it sometimes fails to recognise that one can be an autonomous agent without being magically free of determinations. Autonomy is rather a question of relating to such determinations in a peculiar way. To be self-determining does not mean ceasing to be dependent on the world around us. In fact, it is only through dependence (on those who nurture us, for example) that we can achieve a degree of independence in the first place. The autonomous subject set up by most postmodern thought is a straw man. To be free of all determinations would not be freedom at all (2016, pp. 13–14).

Put simply: the liberal autonomous subject is not the necessary consequence of a defence of the specificity of individual or collective human intentional action.

Conclusion

The existing research gap characterising important parts of the emerging field of resistance studies that consists of not taking materiality into account is worrying and constitutes a weakness of the field. In this sense, it is not surprising that new materialism appears to provide a promising theoretical toolbox for resistance studies, since its proponents reprise exactly the critique of the theoretical tendency, increasingly hegemonic during the last four decades or so, that views everything as a matter of language. Hostility towards this dominant theoretical trend serves to motivate and underpin the new materialism.

By our account, the intervention of the new materialists contains a contribution in two limited ways. First, while the new materialists can hardly be celebrated as the inventors of the conception of active matter (for examples of such notions about 400 years old, see Wolfe 2016), the common denominator of the pre-revolutionary progressive and the post-revolutionary socio-political content of nature as solely a transhistorical, static, and unchanging category is challenged in a plausible way. The problem is that the content is only reversed: instead of opening up the way for a symmetrical focus on change and stability, on the transhistorical and the historically specific, the new materialists move towards the opposite end of the continuum by emphasising change and contingency.

Second, we agree with the new materialist critique of poststructuralist culturalism as all too dominant. However, we also agree with the poststructuralist critique (Ahmed 2008, p. 24; Hemmings 2009, p. 36; Bruining 2016, p. 22) of the founding gestures and claims to newness of the new materialists as a way of legitimising and overstating the novelty of their own project. But the problem here is *not* that the new materialists fail to acknowledge their debt to poststructuralism; rather, it is that feminist new materialism does not manage to move far enough away from poststructuralism.

If, as Baaz et al. (2016, p. 138) state, not anything goes in relation to the study of resistance, it might be a good idea to retain a sceptical stance

towards new materialism, whether feminist or not, when one attempts to include materiality in the study of resistance. Our conclusion is that the field of resistance studies would have little to gain from reproducing Cartesian dualism with the resultant short-circuiting of an analysis of the dialectic between nature and society, irrespective of whether that monism is presented under the banner of poststructuralism or new materialism; there is little to be gained from privileging becoming and change at the expense of being, limits, stability, and vulnerability; from excommunicating the possibility of collective intentional action from below to resist power relations. In the last instance, is it so scandalous to establish a difference between human and non-human actors? Perhaps such conclusions appear deeply problematic to some because, as Eagleton suggests, they ‘fear that to highlight the difference between humans and the rest of Nature is to establish an invidious hierarchy’. But, Eagleton continues, ‘men and women are indeed in some ways more creative than hedgehogs. They are also unspeakably more destructive, much for the same reasons. Those who deny the former are at risk of ignoring the latter’ (2016, p. 12).

Finally, in the dialogue about how matter ought to matter within the field of resistance studies, our critical investigation of feminist new materialism provides some hints as to what might be crucial ingredients within a defensible notion of materiality. It will be important to develop a concept of matter that is capable of containing the relation between difference and identity, nature and society, change and stability, abstract and concrete, the historically specific and the transhistorical, as well as intended and unintended consequences.

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Travelling Artefacts: The Role of Recognition, Belongings and Acts of Resistance

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Abstract

This paper, by using manga comics and the veil as examples, argues that increased scholarly attention to artefacts involved in political struggles could add new insights to previous research on resistance and social change. The paper examines how the recognition of artefacts is entwined with different expressions and techniques of power and resistance. These artefacts, which are recognisable around the globe, acquire different meanings and become part of (or are excluded from) particular political struggles and communities of belonging, both transnationally and locally. Power and political struggles are both interwoven with material contexts and sometimes revolve around different artefacts. Artefacts become affective parts of resistance and mobilise people into assuming or rejecting communities, identity positions or subjectivities. The shifting discursive materialities of different artefacts make these items transformative and important factors in political struggles.

Introduction

Through political struggles and acts of resistance, cultural notions and practices of gender and sexuality undergo transformations on a global level. These transformations and conflicts can be understood to be both transnational and very local and particular processes. In this paper, by using manga comics and the veil¹ as examples, we argue that it is important to pay attention to the role that artefacts play in these political struggles and acts of resistance. The paper revolves around two related,

¹ In this article we use the concept of the veil as an umbrella term, which is common practice among scholars in the field (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Amer, 2014).

and in some senses overlapping, aims. Firstly, the paper examines how artefacts become entwined with different expressions and techniques of power and resistance in their travels around the globe. Secondly, the article displays how artefacts, acquire different meanings and influence, become part of, or are excluded by particular political struggles, nations and communities of belonging.

To fulfil these aims, we will exemplify our discussion with two travelling artefacts: manga comics and the veil. The veil is recognised around the globe and is, as we will show, a gendered artefact that is centuries old and of contradictory importance for colonial forces, governments and the creation of imagined national communities in both West and East (Rose, 2004; Abu-Lughod, 2013; Amer, 2014; Scott, 2018). Manga comics build on recognisable discourses and references to different religions, but these comics are quite new. The comics challenge gender and sexuality norms in different ways and in different localities around the globe. This article builds on empirical examples surrounding the two artefacts from reports, books, debates and media, as well as from interviews that were carried out in 2016 with eight female Swedish manga fans in relation to manga comics.

The two artefacts are closely connected to gender and sexuality, as well as to secularism and religion. They are well recognised by people around the globe. At the same time, they can easily become part of, or become rejected within, different contexts, norms and political discourses. What role they will come to play in the future is far from predictable. This double nature of the artefacts – their worldwide recognisability and their many specific and particular expressions – is central to this paper.

Theoretical Starting Points: Artefacts and Resistance

We argue that travelling artefacts, such as the veil or manga, serve as transnational as well as national and local nodes for complex processes of recognition, and they are of importance for political struggles and communities of belonging. We understand ‘recognition’ in two interrelated ways. The first is as a perception of something we have seen or experienced before, and we have an idea about what it is. The second is that we as individuals or groups are seen and acknowledged as human beings who have the right to live ‘liveable lives’, as Judith Butler articulates

it. She also writes that recognition is essential in the constitution of socially viable beings. The role of norms is essential in relation to who will become recognised (Butler, 2004).²

As we will discuss below, the role of norms relates to how one recognises oneself in relation to these artefacts. As 'discursive materialities', the artefacts become important for emerging communities of belonging. Both manga and the veil, for instance, can work as boundary objects that tie people to each other and thereby contribute to the creation of counter-hegemonic communities of belonging in which one feels recognised and seen.

The veil and manga are not only transnationally recognised artefacts but are also connected with normative principles that are recognisable around the world. The veil, for example, is recognised from various discourses such as subordination, feminism, religion, freedom of religion or women's rights, while manga comics often facilitate feelings and discourses of love or hate, around which the comics revolve. The fact that some artefacts are used or seen around the world, as well as the general discourses attached to them, together make them easy for many people in different settings around the world to feel embraced by these artefacts while simultaneously embracing them. The opposite is also happening: these artefacts can work in a way that excludes some, making them feel like foreigners in relation to others.

It is possible for artefacts to be both disidentified and identified with. In line with this notion, they can be understood as floating signifiers that are recognised from previous discourses; they can also be reconstructed across discourses and between different imageries, thereby occasionally taking on new or transformed meanings in new settings (cf. Hall, 1997). The artefacts, which are not simply passive containers of different meanings, do not simply represent discourses. They are discursive materialities, and as such they are performative and partake in the ongoing processes of both creating and dividing communities (cf. Butler, 2004; Barad, 2008; Mouffe, 2013). The transnational recognisability

² The concept of recognition is a recurrent concept in feminist and queer studies. In the 1990s, Nancy Fraser and Judith Butler debated the concept of recognition and the materiality of redistribution (Fraser, 1995, 1998; Butler, 1997).

of artefacts becomes a means or an entrance, as we will see below, for developing specific translocal notions that make struggles and resistance practices – as well as counter-hegemonic communities of belonging – possible.³

Our understanding of artefacts as not simply passive objects that transport meanings is drawn partly from the works of Bruno Latour (2005) and partly from discussions on the ‘new materialism’. The scholars of new materialism have identified the ‘linguistic turn’ as insufficient for promoting an adequate understanding of the interplay between meaning and matter (e.g. Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Lemke, 2015). The linguistic turn’s focus on language downgrades matter, which should be conceived as being active rather than passive (Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Martinsson, 2006, 2010).

Within the new materialism, some of the representatives of discourse theory and the ‘cultural turn’ have been interpreted from a new perspective. Among other work in the strand of thought on new materialism, Foucault’s work is often mentioned as an influential source and inspiration for materialist scholarship. In particular, Foucault’s concept of the body serves as a positive reference (Barad, 2008; Lemke, 2015; Lilja and Lilja, 2018). Foucault stated that:

what is needed is to make it visible through an analysis in which the biological and the historical are not consecutive to one another ... but are bound together in an increasingly complex fashion in accordance

³ Inderpal Grewal (1999, 2005), for example, has focussed on cultural artefacts (travelling material and/or discursive goods) in her discussion of the formation of new ‘consumer’ subjects. Among other factors, she displays the importance of objects as being transnationally recognisable as well as highlighting their universal character when they travel across borders. While exemplifying her theoretical outlines with the Barbie doll, Grewal argues that one important aspect of transnationalism is how goods, media, discourses, concepts and information become ‘transcoded’ – that is, involved in processes of localisation at different sites and in different nations (Grewal, 1999: 801). Barbie, Grewal argues, is a material, cultural artefact that is negotiated in different sites. Due to Barbie’s generic expression and the possibility of adjusting her look, the doll harbours different subject positions in different places and creates new consumer subjects on a transnational basis.

with the development of the modern technologies of power that takes life as their objective. (Foucault, 1981: 151-152)

Thus, Foucault concerned himself with the biological and how it is to be seen as bound together with the historical in complex involvements with power. He also argued that:

I do not envision a 'history of mentalities' that would take account of bodies only through the manner in which they have been perceived and given meaning and value; but a 'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and most vital in them has been invested. (Foucault, 1981: 151-152)

Foucault was also more specifically interested in the notion of a 'government of things' and the comprehensive reality that includes material environments as well as the specific constellations and technical networks between humans and non-humans (Lemke, 2015: 17).

The above insight means that, in this paper, we will focus on the agency of matter and the idea that artefacts are more than passive social constructions. Artefacts such as manga comics and the veil stand out as performative forces that are intertwined in various discourses (e.g. Haraway, 1991; Alaimo and Hekman, 2008). Thus, not only humans but also animals, artefacts, objects, buildings, technologies, machines and nature are involved in the becoming of the world (Barad, 2008; Åsberg, Hultman and Lee, 2012; Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). The agency of matter thereby makes it relevant to discuss materiality, artefacts and political struggles.

As stated above, we are interested in how the recognition of artefacts such as manga comics and the veil sometimes creates communities of belonging as well as different expressions and techniques of power and resistance. We also understand recognition as a both dislinking and linkage between non-human and human actors.

Conventionally, power and the study of power have been associated with coercion, the military power of states or the capacity to force one's will on others. From the 1970s onwards, however, scholars such as Steven Lukes (1974, 1986) and Foucault (1976, 1981, 1986) started to challenge this so-called one-dimensional understanding of power by addressing power as fluent and as being embedded in networks performed through

different techniques. With this introduction of new understandings of power, we have also changed how we comprehend resistance. Resistance practices challenge all forms of domination: not just the particular configuration of power relations that we call decision-making power but also discursive ‘truth regimes’ such as (for example) a hegemonic, secular Eurocentrism or normative orders of gender, race, class, status and caste hierarchies. Power is seldom singular but simultaneously relates to or intersects with other forms of power. The hegemonic discourse of secularism, for instance, can sometimes be connected with race or gender (Scott, 2018). Similarly, just as different forms of power support each other, different resistance practices also interact with and fuel each other (Lilja, et al., 2017).

All in all, the field of resistance studies is expanding and increasingly nuanced and multifaceted. It embraces resistance as a practice that might be played out by large, organised groups and movements as well as by individuals and subcultures. Resistance might be articulated through, or against, power relations or be inspired by other resisters, as in ‘copy-cat’ resistance. ‘Resistance’ refers to an act or patterns of actions that have the possibility of undermining or negotiating different power relations – but sometimes resistance ends up reproducing and strengthening the relations of dominance (Baaz, et al. 2017).

As we have argued above, both power and political struggles are entwined with material contexts and sometimes revolve around different artefacts. Artefacts can be used for resistance or, when they are recognised, to mobilise people into assuming or rejecting communities, identity positions or subjectivities. The shifting discursive materiality of different artefacts makes them transformative and important factors in political struggles.

Methods and Materials: Two Artefacts

This paper advances our discussion by drawing on currently published research literature, with the aim of furthering theoretical work in this field. The paper elaborates on how the recognition of artefacts creates communities of belonging, as well as how the artefacts are entwined with different expressions and techniques of power and resistance. Two cultural artefacts – manga comics and the veil – have been chosen in order to be able to exemplify the above objectives from different angles.

Encouraged by the works of Alvesson and Kärreman (2011), we will use the examples of manga comics and the veil to contribute to the development of theoretical and methodological understandings of the role of artefacts for resistance and discursive transformations.

Methodologically, this article draws heavily on what Lila Abu-Lughod has presented as ‘writing against cultures’. She writes about the danger of generalising about cultures and how doing so prevents us from ‘appreciating or even accounting for people’s experiences and the contingencies with which we all live’ (2013: 6). While Abu-Lughod has written extensively on the complexity found in villages, in her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013), she also focusses on the complex political processes of which the veil is an integral part. Our work is inspired by this book – even if we focus on counter-communities and resistance to a higher degree – and by the emergence of pluralism and transformations connected to the artefacts.

We have chosen manga comics and the veil as empirical examples because both are part of transformative processes and political struggles that transcend national borders; they are also both principally understood as coming from “outside the West”. Many have identified the veil as a patriarchal threat to what is often described as the ‘European values’ of democracy (Scott, 2018). At the same time, scholars and activists alike have challenged the notion of hegemonic secularism as the only position from which one can act as a political subject (Asad et al., 2009; Scott, 2018). Manga, for its part, has challenged norms on gender and sexuality in different localities around the globe through its multiple references to Buddhism, Shintō, Christian iconography and mythological figures in a postmodern manner.

We will start the analytical section of this paper by outlining a few examples of how the veil fuels both power and resistance, primarily in a European and, specifically, Swedish context: a context that is not possible to understand without reference to a transnational space. As we will show, the veil is widely recognised from the hegemonic secular order in Sweden and from a dominant understanding of Sweden as the most gender-equal country in the world (Martinsson, Griffin and Giritli Nygren, 2016) as an expression of oppression against women. The veil has thereby been contrasted against an imagined Swedish community (Anderson, 2006).

At the same time – and with reference to norms that are recognisable around the globe, such as the rights to one's body and to freedom of religion – the veil has also become a node for political mobilisation for groups of women in the European (and specifically the Swedish) context.

Over a period of three years, from 2015-2018, we have followed different forms of national and transnational debate about the veil and resistance performances, such as when a group of Iranian women unveiled themselves in public 2018 – news that soon spread around the globe. We have taken part in Muslim-feminist events in Sweden such as demonstrations, panel discussions and film screenings; we have also listened to speeches and have conducted interviews with the organisers of these events (e.g. Berg, Lundahl and Martinsson, 2016). We have followed politicians' work at the municipal, national and EU levels related to the veil. In the late 1990s, one of the co-authors (Mona Lilja) took a long field trip to Palestine, where she interviewed women about their political participation. We have chosen the material used in this paper to illustrate artefacts as an engine of political acts; thus, we do not aim to paint a comprehensive picture of the historical development of the discourses and practices related to the Muslim veil.

Then, in the analytical part of this paper, we will use a few examples to demonstrate how manga clothes, comics and related material travel around the world and create new subject positions, communities and lifestyles, both in Sweden and elsewhere. While the topics (love, hate, sex, etc.) of manga comics are well recognised, they are still addressed in new ways, thus making the comics attractive to the youth of different places; the comics also become points of departure for identities and negotiated narratives of gender and sexuality. Along with our descriptions of the interviews, which Cathrin Wasshede and Mona Lilja conducted in 2016 with eight female Swedish manga fans, our analysis of manga comics also builds on empirical examples from reports, books and the media.

Artefacts as Nodes for Power and Resistance: The Veil

In this section, we will discuss how the veil is recognised in and wrapped up with different technologies of power and therefore also breeds different forms of resistance. In addition, we will reveal how discourses that move and change around the globe become a means to (or an entrance for)

developing local struggles, identities, exclusions and communities of belonging in relation to the veil.

The veil connects different (and sometimes contradictory) voices, movements and political groups with each other and creates deep chasms between others. To illustrate this situation, we will focus on a debate about the veil that has been conducted in Sweden in recent years. Some people see the veil, and what it is said to express, as a threat to 'Sweden' and what are understood to be Swedish or even universal values. Others seek to normalise the veil in Swedish society and to challenge the notion of religion (and particularly Islam) as being dangerous, non-Swedish and oppressive to women. Those who promote the former standpoint connect the veil to misogyny and oppression against women and, as such, see it as a threat to what is generally understood to be a secular Swedish gender-equality norm. Politicians on both the left and the far right, certain sectors of women's movements and some journalists have expressed that the veil is a threat to so-called Swedish values.

Our first example is an organisation called Kvinnors rätt (the Women's right)⁴, which struggles against what the group identifies as honour-related violence. The leader of Kvinnors rätt is Maria Rashidi. Rashidi has appeared in interviews about her life and struggles, has written many op-ed articles and is active on Twitter. She was born in Iran, where she was later married. After growing up and being able to dress as she liked, following the 1979 revolution she was forced to wear a hijab (veil). After seeking refuge in Sweden, she suffered an acid attack arranged by her ex-husband.⁵ Despite this history, Rashidi still views Sweden as a country where she can be free, which she believes is 'a universal right for every human being' (Rashidi, 2016). She recognises the veil as part of a dangerous patriarchal system that can change an entire nation, such as Iran, as well as the lives of the women who live there: 'With the veil women take on themselves a religion and its ethical rules and values. "The cloth" works as a tool for gender segregation ... [and] limitations of freedom are interwoven in the veil' (Rashidi, 2015).

⁴ <http://www.kvinnorsratt.se/svenska/index.php>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yyylKxz9AXo> <https://www.expressen.se/debatt/problemet-ar-djupare-an-burkiniforbud/>

In this poignant statement, Rashidi assigns the veil the role of a domesticating and segregating force. The veil becomes inseparable from a special setup of ethical rules and values. The ‘cloth’, in Rashidi’s understanding as well as our own, is an active agent. But for Rashidi, this cloth works with one clear oppressive orientation, and – in contrast to Abu-Lughod (2013), for example, who discusses the role of the government and Western/Eastern knowledge production – Rashidi sees the problem as lying in religion.

At the same time, many other women, both in Sweden and globally, share Rashidi’s experiences of oppression, and they also share her thinking. Many women have experienced how their bodies have become a place for violent political fights and control from states and families alike. Rashidi, and many women in a similar position to her, have struggled to make their lives both recognisable and liveable. For Rashidi, Sweden has become a place of belonging – a place that is now challenged. With the emergence of the organisation Kvinnors rätt, a community of belonging and resistance has been created, and the resistance has many expressions. The struggle against the market is one. In 2015, the veil became one of many accessories – a typical article of clothing – in the advertising campaigns of two large Swedish companies, and Rashidi and Kvinnors rätt reacted strongly (Berg et al., 2016). She stated to the daily newspaper *Metro*: ‘To make a campaign and promote the veil is according to us to oppress women and a form of gender apartheid and we must stand up’ to it (*Metro*, Linnea Carlén, 12 October 2015). Rashidi and others thus see the normalisation of the veil as equivalent to normalising a patriarchal religious system that threatens gender equality.

In Sweden, Rashidi and Kvinnors rätt resist what they understand to be religious, patriarchal influences that have come from abroad. In this outlook, Sweden, as an imagined community, is under threat, and so is the idea of gender equality and women’s freedom. Rashidi turns the situation into a question for the Swedish people; she wants to warn Swedish society. While it is easy to follow Rashidi’s thinking, it is also important to note that it is built on an understanding that the veil has just one essential meaning: it is part of an oppressive patriarchal order that has seemed to remain untouched during its transnational move from Iran to Sweden as well as its moves between different classes and groups of people.

As we have already touched upon, we can also view resistance against the compulsory use of the veil on a transnational level. When women in Iran unveiled themselves in public 2018 (which is against the law) and placed their veils on sticks, they acted on more than the local or national levels. Once their images were viewed throughout the world, it became clear that they had acted on a transnational level. Their resistance was easy to recognise. Resistance against the veil is widespread and can be found at different times and in different political settings. In Palestine, for example, the women whom Lilja interviewed in 1999 refused to wear the hijab arguing that ' Hamas discourse reduces women to symbols of moralistic, righteous and religious forms of nationalism'. One woman continued: 'they use different ways to convince women that they have to be covered. For nationalist reasons or for religious reasons'. Travelling unveiled in Gaza became dangerous for these women, who were exposed to violent punishment; men threw stones at them for not covering their hair and bodies. The veil became the marker of 'us' on the West Bank, to be distinguished from 'them' in the Gaza Strip.

Frantz Fanon articulated a contradictory (but also in a sense similar) historical example in the text *Algeria Unveiled*. Fanon not only discussed the Western obsession with the veil but also reminded us of how Algerian colonisers unveiled women in order to 'save them' from medieval tradition (Fanon, 2003). In this case, unveiling women becomes part of a colonising strategy. This resembles the situation in France in 2004, where schoolchildren were prohibited from wearing conspicuous articles of clothing that might tell something of their religious affiliation. This ban affected Muslim girls in particular (Scott, 2007). Another example is a March 2017 verdict from the Court of Justice of the European Union, which made it possible to dismiss (or not employ) a woman in veil if she worked or would work in a position where she might represent the employer in public, for example as a receptionist.

What we can see in all these very different examples from Sweden, France, Iran, Gaza and Algeria is how the construction of nations and colonies has become entangled with the veil and women's bodies. Again, matter and artefacts such as the veil have become the node around which both practices of power and resistance revolve.

In Sweden today, as well as in other parts of Europe, secular notions

of self and others often become a base for discussions about the veil. Joan Wallach Scott, the renowned pioneer of gender studies, writes critically in her book *Sex and Secularism* (2018) about how secularism and Europe are widely seen as being synonymous with 'the historical triumph of enlightenment over religion'. She shows that Islam is often discursively constructed as 'the other', writing that 'in this discourse secularism guarantees freedom and gender equality while Islam is synonymous with oppression' (p. 1), an image she states is wrong. Even secularism follows gender hierarchies, and the secular discourse sometimes becomes an oppressive force in itself, which then breeds resistance.

Scott also argues that many European countries, such as France, have failed to integrate their former colonial subjects as full citizens. As mentioned earlier, the colonial struggle against the veil has a long history; instead of working politically to change structures of inequality, many people have continued to construct the use of the veil as the problem. In Scott's earlier book *The Politics of the Veil* (2007), she demonstrates how the veil has become part of an objectification of Muslim people, who are understood to be non-French. This outlook may be illustrated by the mayor of Cannes, who, after the terror attack in Nice in 2016, banned women from wearing burkinis at the beach. The mayor's words were reported in international media and discussed on social media. The *New York Times* wrote:

The mayor's ordinance, which runs until Aug. 31, bars people from entering or swimming at the city's public beaches in attire that is not 'respectful of good morals and secularism' and that does not respect 'rules of hygiene and security'. Offenders risk a fine of 38 euros, or about \$42. (Breedon and Blaise, 2016).

Secularism, or the secular discourse, thus becomes the unspoken norm. The veil is not recognised as moral, hygienic or respectful, and it even challenges the security of the state (cf. Asad et al., 2009). Linda Berg and Mikela Lundahl (2016: 270) analysed 'Burkini-Gate' with reference to a quotation by Sara Ahmed, who stated that women in burkinis were 'recognized as the stranger, somebody we know as not knowing, rather than somebody we simply do not know' (Ahmed, 2000: 49). We find this twist of both disrecognition and recognition important. To be

recognised by someone as ‘the other’ is, we suggest, fundamental to the emergence of counter-hegemonic communities of belonging. The burkini ban was resisted in blogs and comics and in other types of protests. As an artefact, the burkini became part of the creation of religiously and culturally imagined transnational counter-communities, which closely interacted with general feminist claims about the right to one’s body and about the capitalist market, as well as with the universal right to freedom of religion, all of which are principles that many people can identify with. The universal principle of the right to freedom of religion in some sense thus became the starting point for disparate, particular resistance practices when people wrote blog posts, comic strips and the like, in order to protest against the ban of an artefact – the burkini. Overall, the burkini ban and the resistance it sparked show how the veil is an ‘affective’ and recognisable artefact that connects some people to each other and disconnects others, thus making resistance against a secular fundamentalism, along with the creation and illumination of political groups, possible.

Even in Sweden, secularism has become an imagined national trait (Thurfjell, 2015). In 2017, the leader of the Liberal Party, Jan Björklund, argued in articles and on Swedish television that the veil threatens ‘Swedish values’ of gender equality and that the veil is a ‘symbol for oppression against women’. In Björklund’s argumentation, in which colonial discourses on saving women are easy to recognise, the veil is the antithesis to universal rights and democracy. Like Rashidi, he also assigns the veil just one meaning: a symbol of the oppression of women. In Björklund’s rhetoric, the veil is something typical of other, far-away non-democratic places. In an op-ed article, he commented critically on how Swedish trade minister Ann Linde had worn a veil during an official visit to Iran:

I wonder what girls and women in the [Swedish] suburbs think when they see the Swedish minister in veil during the visit. The picture sends very unfortunate signals and is spreading now in our suburbs and complicates the fight against honour-related oppression. (Björklund, 2017)

In this quotation, Björklund connects the veil to honour-related oppression, which again is a construction of the veil as a symbol of oppression. He also connects the problem with the veil – honour-related oppression – to Swedish suburbia. The *Swedish* minister sends ‘unfortunate signals’ to the Swedish suburbs when she wears a veil in Iran. She should not have done that. In the TV programme ‘Is the Veil an Expression for Oppression against Women?’ (Agenda 2017), he reiterated these notions. When the presenter of the programme asked him in which way the veil was an expression of oppression against women, Björklund answered that ‘it has to do with honour-related oppression, and in big parts of the Muslim world, women are subordinate to men’. He also stated that honour-related oppression is ‘contagious in our immigrant-dense suburbs’. Through articulations like these, the suburbs become constructed as not normal, but dangerous and non-Swedish (Ericsson, Molina and Ristilammi, 2002).

Through the same articulation, Islam also becomes a problematic force connected with distant lands. Scott understands such political rhetoric, which is common throughout Europe, and elsewhere to be as dangerous as nationalistic rhetoric and practice (2018). What we find important here is, firstly, that Björklund recognises neither the suburbs as being Swedish nor Swedish women in veil as being part of the Swedish community. As in Scott’s discussion, the veil becomes a node for constructing what is and what is not the nation. Secondly, Björklund’s understanding of the veil is similar to Rashidi’s; in contrast to Rashidi, however, he is in a position of power, being the leader of the Liberal Party and the former Swedish minister of education. Instead of resisting an order that he is subordinate to (or, like Rashidi, threatened by), he is a voice of a strong hegemonic order.

The person Björklund debated during the above mentioned TV programme was the Muslim feminist and anti-racist writer and activist Bilan Osman. Osman had previously been part of a group of women who had started a hijab uprising in Sweden in 2013. The uprising started after a woman was violently attacked because she wore a veil. As part of the uprising, women – including non-Muslim women – were encouraged to wear a hijab for a day in order to normalise it, to turn the hijab into a recognisable cultural artefact and a node around which mobilisation

could take place. In other words, the uprising was an attempt to resist the demonising rhetoric that they were exposed to – a rhetoric that made them non-Swedish. It was a way for everyone – including non-Muslim women, or Muslim women who did not wear the hijab – to support those who did, and thereby challenged exclusionary practices and became a part of a counter-hegemonic movement.

In the TV-debate, Osman argued that Björklund had his concepts all wrong when he in a reductional way connected Muslim countries, honour-related oppression, the veil and the situation in exposed suburbs in Sweden with one another. She thoroughly analysed his notions and said, among other things, that Muslim countries are very diverse and cannot be spoken about in such a stereotypical way. Osman stated that feminist movements were underway in several countries where Islam is the dominant religion and that the veil is often connected to resistance against hegemonic orders. In doing so, she was referring to an imagined transnational community (cf. Anderson, 2006) of resistant and political Muslim feminists. Osman disrupted, and thus offered resistance to, the discourse about feminism and gender equality being phenomena that belong exclusively in Western secular contexts.

She also challenged the notion that women from the Swedish suburbs always come from (and import) fundamentalist cultures and are oppressed by their families. Other stories exist as well. The world outside Sweden should not be reduced. Through this decolonial act of resistance, she blurred the constructed border between secularism – as the condition for supposed universal values such as gender equality, women's rights or even feminism – and religion, as conservative and oppressive. Not least, she opened up the opportunity for a pluralistic way of understanding nations and the veil.

Osman also resisted essentialist understandings of the veil as a symbol of oppression against women, or as being non-Swedish, in a radio interview a few months prior to her appearance on the above-mentioned TV programme. She described why she wore a veil as follows:

I dress in veil as Muslim, I dress in veil as feminist, I dress in veil as a person who doesn't believe in norms, so I dress in veil [for] many different reasons.... I understand myself as someone who believes ... [that] the veil is a way to show one's identity. (Osman, 2016)

While Rashidi and Björklund only acknowledge one way to understand the veil and Islam, Osman displayed, both in the TV programme and on the radio interview, that the veil plays different roles and has different meanings. Without questioning that some women are indeed forced to wear the veil, the veil could also be, as she argues in the TV programme, a sign of resistance; strong feminist movements are also afoot in Muslim countries. She resisted Björklund's notion that the veil is merely a symbol of oppression. In the quotation from the radio programme, she displays how she understands the veil to be something that is possible to connect with many different positions and strategies. It is not only possible to dress in a veil if one happens to be a feminist; Osman underlines that she does it *as a feminist*. And being a feminist is entirely consistent with being a believer. The veil has a multitude of possible meanings and agencies and can therefore contribute to making critical communities of belonging recognisable (cf. Mouffe, 2013). Through this more complex understanding of the veil as something that emerges and becomes transformed together with different positions, political situations, norms and discourses, we argue that Osman, and many others like her, not only struggle for the right to wear the hijab and to be treated equally and not discriminated against; she also challenges and actively resists secularity as the sole condition for critique (cf. Asad et al., 2009). With this struggle, Osman and other feminist Muslims challenge and open the door for more possible ways of being a gendered person in Europe.

The different stands that Osman, Rashidi and Björklund represent could exemplify the many specific translocal articulations of different transnational and recognisable notions of freedom of religion, or women's rights. It is also obvious that pluralistic reiterations like these are in conflict with one another. Who has the right to analysis? Who could be understood as being part of a feminist movement? It is also obvious that these processes are connected with discourses of national belonging and colonialism. Who is 'Swedish', 'French' or 'European'? As Butler writes:

The discursive move to establish 'the people' in one way or another is a bid to have a certain border recognised, whether we understand that as a border of a nation or as the frontiers of that class of people to be considered 'recognisable' as a people. (Butler, 2015: 5)

The veil thus becomes part of this struggle of who is to be recognisable as part of the big imagined community of 'the people'.

The Translocal Emergence of Cultural Artefacts: Manga as a Node of Resistance

Above we discussed how the veil, as a material artefact, has become a locus of power and a locus of different forms of resistance among a variety of communities. A similar pattern is visible among manga comics, which have spawned new communities and gendered negotiations. During our interviews with Swedish manga fans, they pictured the idea of Japan in manga comics as an exotic and wonderful place where carrying out resistance – in terms of gender-bending, in this case – is possible. Our respondents' narratives reveal how new realities have emerged around manga comics in the Swedish context. In addition, new national and transnational communities have gathered around those manga comics that – based on interpretations of the comics and their images of a sexually free Japan – tend to resist or transform different gender norms. Several of our interviewees saw manga comics – especially the genres of boys' love (BL) and yaoi (which we will subsequently describe as one genre, BL/yaoi) – as a possibility for heterosexual women to bend suggested gender roles and reclaim their sexuality (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). BL/yaoi comics involve two or more fictional men who are romantically and/or sexually involved with each other. While BL/yaoi is predominantly a women's literature genre, this does not mean that there are no men who find entertainment in the genre (Ambulo and Batin, 2016; McLelland et al., 2015).

While the BL/yaoi genre was commercialised in the late 1970s, the genre has recently gained popularity thanks to the emergence of the internet, which has allowed fans to access manga comics from various venues. As a result, manga fandoms have emerged all over the world (e.g. Ito, 2012; Levi, McHarry and Pagliassotti, 2010; Tsai, 2016; Kinsella, 1998). Fan fiction, fan artwork and other fan materials have boosted appreciation of the genre. Fans use websites such as fanfiction.net and archiveofourown.org to write and/or read BL/yaoi comics. In addition, videos with BL/yaoi content have also spread on YouTube (Ambulo and Batin, 2016).

Young Swedes tend to be highly proficient in English and to have widespread internet access. With these factors in their favour, young Swedish manga fans tend to engage in a variety of fan activities (Olin-Scheller and Sundqvist, 2015). A number of annual conventions also contribute to the hype surrounding manga comics: ConFusion, an association/convention for East Asian culture, and NärCon, a convention for gaming and East Asian culture, are among the largest fandoms in Sweden (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016).

The respondents described the sexual pleasures and desires connected with BL/yaoi, and the fact that the comics have two men and no women, as a possibility to stretch gendered sexual norms. One interviewee expressed it this way: 'Yaoi is interesting for young women ... who want to read comics about sex without being forced into a female subject position'. Many of the 'manga nerds' we interviewed yearned for gender-fluid relationships in which one person does not necessarily need to take control of the relationship. Exploring and widening the sexual sphere then becomes a way to resist heteronormative ideas about female sexuality and gender binarism. According to James Welker (2006), BL/yaoi serves as a form of 'liberation not just from the patriarchy but also from gender dualism and heteronormativity' (Welker, 2006: 843). When the Swedish women we interviewed described their enjoyment of BL/yaoi, they highlighted the negotiation of dominating discourses of gender and sexuality as being important, as the following quote attests:

Some manga, especially for girls, use role-playing with gender and sexuality. There are more variations in the way women and men are depicted [than in reality]. This opens up the possibility for the reader to identify as something other than what that person is born as. Young people in Sweden like it. They want to be able to be who they want to be and to bend gender norms. I met two girls who realised while reading Yaoi that they were in love with each other. So, they defined themselves as gay people: women in love. However, when they dress up in cosplay they choose to act as gay men. Such gender bending is wonderful! (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016, 296)

Thus, several of our interviewees saw BL/yaoi as a way for heterosexual women to reclaim their sexuality and to bend gender norms.

The women we interviewed explicitly talked about their commitment to manga as a feminist, even a queer feminist, project. Tricia Abigail Santos Fermin, who noticed a similar pattern while researching manga in the Philippines, argues that BL/yaoi offers tools and spaces for Filipina women to ‘temporarily remove themselves from androcentric society’s regimentation of their sexuality and be free to confront, explore and realise their desires in a non-threatening and distanced manner’ (Fermin, 2013). The sexual and political desires of manga nerds seem to interact in this case, thereby creating gender-bending and sexually transgressive practices (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016).

The respondents described cultural artefacts such as manga comics, clothing and the materialities of cosplay conventions, among other things, as being intertwined in the becoming of different subject positions. One interviewee seemed to confirm this notion when she stated that ‘in the West, [Japanese] gender role-playing becomes real, and we take it seriously’ (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). Overall, the embodied experiences related to the cultural artefact of manga comics, in the form of BL/yaoi, produce certain subjectivities (gay identifications), practices (gender-bending, sexually transgressive practices) and materialities (such as clothes). In this way, matter – in the form of pictures, texts, comics, the internet, computer data and the like – becomes part of the processes of becoming (cf. Haraway, 1991; Alaimo and Hekman, 2008; Barad, 2008; Åsberg et al., 2012; Black, 2014, Lilja and Wasshede, 2016).

As we will argue below, the transnational recognisability and translocal articulation of manga and its specific context together create a nexus from which manga-related subject positions are recognised, constructed and maintained around cultural artefacts. For instance, many young people who are establishing the figuration of the manga nerd build on the understanding of manga comics as something they have in common with others around the globe – a feeling of transnational belonging that can give them access to the ongoing transformation of gender while simultaneously letting gender be part of, and transformed by, themselves, their bodies and their local context. By the comics’ attractiveness to the youth of countries all over the world, manga fans claim that the comics touch upon values and discourses beyond the local and national. When we interviewed young women living in Sweden who

saw manga comics as an all-inclusive cultural artefact, one expressed her views in this fashion: ‘Manga is deeply human. It involves human and general topics, such as: Will I be accepted? Will I be loved? These are very basic concerns’ (woman, interview, Sweden, February 2015; Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). Thus, during the recognition process, youths in different contexts identify and acknowledge the emotional concepts such as love and hate around which manga comics revolve. The general character of the issues makes them easily recognisable and allows for many people to embrace them.

Given that manga addresses a variety of issues such as love, hate and sexual desire – which many people can recognise but in different ways within different contexts – the genre attracts readers from different transnational localities. Still, it is the combination of the local and global aspects of manga comics that makes them desirable. The general ‘deeply human’ character of manga thus becomes an entrance to, developing particular or specific ‘cultures’ and communities of belonging around manga (and its emotional concepts) in different localities. Self-described manga nerds in different contexts and communities understand manga comics as a way of feeling unique and different, thus allowing them to perform a particular, and not a generally recognised, subject position (women, interview, Sweden, February 2015). Discursive borders are often drawn between the norms and subject positions that revolve around manga comics and ‘mainstream culture’. One interviewee posited manga as ‘punk’, stating that manga had become boring once more young people started to embrace it: ‘Then it wasn’t mine anymore, it was everybody’s’ (woman interview, Sweden, March 2015).

Thus, addressing general notions that are reiterated around the world (such as love or hate) in combination with a very specific, particular identity position that allows one to feel unique (the manga nerd) seems to be part of the attraction of manga as a cultural artefact. The combination of general and worldwide and specific norms imprinted in the comics makes them appealing to young people outside of Japan, where new communities of belonging and new subject positions are created and become the base for different kinds of gendered resistance (Lilja and Wasshede, 2016). Grewal (2005) noted a similar pattern in her discussion of the ‘travelling’ of the Barbie doll. Through Barbie’s

ability to have her look adjusted in particular ways, the transformable, material cultural artefact has become attractive for consumer subjects on a transnational basis. Artefacts, which have a character that can be both recognised around the globe and transformed and performed in particular ways in different, specific localities, hence are interesting subjects around which resistance emerges and change revolves.

Conclusions

In order to develop an understanding of transformations of gender and sexuality both globally and locally, we have argued in this paper that it is important to pay attention to artefacts as parts of power regimes and resistance. We argue that artefacts are important in the emergence of both hegemonic communities and the counter-hegemonic communities that resist them, from small groups of political activists to national and transnational imagined communities. We must also acknowledge processes of recognition as linkages or dis-linkages between humans and non-human actors. Having the ability to recognise oneself with communities both locally and transnationally (while also being recognised by such communities) is an important process in which artefacts play a salient role. Processes of recognition, by connecting us to communities, enable resistance and contribute to making counter-hegemonic communities possible.

The veil and manga, our analytical examples, work in both similar and divergent ways. They merge with specific political, colonial, religious, historical and local discourses and thereby create a range of particular meanings. At the same time, they can both be understood to be artefacts that are crucial in creating a feeling of belonging – of being recognised as part of something larger than us that goes beyond different localities, nation-states or ideologies. Another community of belonging exists – another ‘we’ that transgresses the ordinary normative orders. We therefore argue that these transnational communities of belonging are important for the ongoing emergence of resistance and transformations of gender and sexuality. The artefacts can both re-create and challenge stereotypical notions of gender, sexuality, religion, secularism, communities and politics.

Through our examples we have displayed a divide between recognising or not recognising the pluralities of meanings and identities connected to different artefacts. The invisibility of alternative knowledge around the artefacts leaves the possibility for resistance unnoticed. The veil is one such example. Women's bodies have become fields for political and nationalistic struggles. The veil is sometimes and in different contexts both forced on or prohibited to women. Women can be punished for not wearing or for wearing the veil. In both cases women become objects for forces and oppression, and in both cases the veil is understood in a reductionist way. In this article a Muslim feminist Bilan Osman, has displayed the importance of a pluralistic understanding of the veil and how this pluralism makes different communities of belonging, politics and resistance possible. With a pluralistic and transformative understanding of the veil, she blurs the divide between secularism/politics and religion and between Sweden, the West and the rest. With this understanding follows the emergence of counter-hegemonic communities both national and transnational.

Our two artefacts have several interesting and important differences. In the above discussion we have displayed tensions between different experiences of the veil and how the veil has become of importance for national, global and colonial power regimes: a situation that has fuelled numerous sorts of resistance over the centuries. Manga, in contrast, is quite new and is recognisable around the globe. As we have shown, the comics, and how they merge with a range of local practices and discourse, can create alternative imaginations and multiple meanings around gender and sexuality. In addition, new discourses and bodies and new resisting subjects emerge. Manga comics, as artefacts, thus quite dramatically challenge the orders of gender and sexuality. Still, they seem to fly under the radar and, interestingly enough, are not generally recognised as being political in nature. Or, to put it another way, this resistance is not typically recognised as a threat to the idea of the nation, as seems to be the case with the veil.

Bringing new perspectives to the fore, and displaying the multitude of discourses that culturally hegemonic practices have shut out, together compose a powerful practice of resistance. As we have discussed above, both manga nerds and many veiled women challenge reductive

hegemonic meanings by reviving hidden or repressed understandings of religious and/or gendered subjects.

Finally, we argue that focussing on artefacts is a relevant method for grasping transnational movements without forgetting the importance of specific contradictory, particular and local articulations and transformations. By following artefacts, we can also reveal stereotypical understandings and homogenous cultures and can detect the pluralism of societies, belongings and resistance both beyond and inside national borders. By focussing on artefacts like manga comics and the veil, we also go beyond studies of organisations (including non-governmental organisations) and their role in transformations. We find our method to be of importance for understanding civil societies and resistance in a transnational era. This focus on artefacts has helped us to go beyond Eurocentric and colonial explanations but not Eurocentric effects. We have found another entrance for understanding movements and resistance and the very complex way of understanding the many contradictory transformations of gender and sexuality.

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COMMENTS

**‘Riots’ during the 2010/11
Tunisian Revolution
A Response to Case’s Article in JRS
Vol.4 Number 1.**

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Abstract

Case’s (2018) analysis of unarmed violence during the 2011 Egyptian Revolution has furthered the argument for the need to assess unarmed political violence in the context of civilian resistance movements. This response to Case draws on interview data from participants in the 2010/11 Tunisian Revolution, who detailed the use of both nonviolent and violent methods and tactics. With the findings applied against the criteria of mobilisation, resilience and leverage that Case derived from Schock (2013), the Tunisia case fundamentally offers further supporting evidence for Case’s conclusions. However, the Tunisian events also highlighted the problems with reducing the analysis of nonviolence to its pragmatic-strategic components in the relation to violent methods. This is particularly significant given the constructive work and the establishment of alternative political and economic structures that were attempted in Tunisia. Such efforts were linked to the ‘aspirational nonviolence’ that interviewees revealed, in the pursuit of aims under a broad concept of ‘dignity’. Therefore, although Case’s expanded concept of civilian resistance to include unarmed political violence is a sound analytical tool, and drawing on violent methods may offer a greater variety of means of resistance, there is still considerable scope to study and practice enhanced methods of nonviolent resistance, with due consideration for ‘moral’ questions over how we organised politically and economically, and the pursuit of nonviolent social revolution.

Introduction

Case’s (2018) article in *Journal of Resistance Studies* (JRS) has raised pertinent issues in relation to the literature on civil resistance and nonviolence, concerning how it has dealt with the presence and role of violence within campaigns and actions considered to be nonviolent. Case’s use of Egypt as a case study was particularly intriguing, given the striking parallels with the results of my PhD research into the methods of protest during the 2010/11 Tunisian revolution. Case’s position is briefly outlined below, followed by a broad introduction to my research method and findings. The elements of nonviolence and violence in the Tunisian case are then applied to Case’s assessment of salient dynamics of civil resistance derived from Schock (2013), in terms of mobilisation, resilience and leverage. The theoretical and practical implications of Case’s (2018) study in relation to unarmed violence are generally supported by my Tunisia findings. However, I also discuss ‘aspirational nonviolence’ and constructive work as significant aspects of nonviolence in Tunisia, detailing their implications for resistance.

Case’s Position

The fundamental argument Case (2018) outlines is that civilian resistance movements, although widely considered in existing research to be characterised by nonviolence, have ‘involved rioting and other acts of unarmed collective political violence’ (p.10). Unarmed political violence concerns such acts as, ‘destruction, sabotage, arson, and physical altercations with police or political opponents—not in contrast to but *within* the context of the types of movements the scholars call nonviolent [original emphasis]’ (p.10). Meanwhile, ‘riot’ is used by Case to, ‘indicate collective, unarmed political action by a group of civilians involving destruction of property and/or harm to people’ (p.14). Case acknowledges that terms such as ‘riot’ are contended (p.13); my aim here is not to elaborate on terminology but concertedly engage with the substance of Case’s assessment. However, Case emphasises that studies such as Chenoweth and Stephan’s (2011) equate ‘violence in civilian-based movements’ with, ‘a limited version of the violence in armed struggle’, overlooking unarmed violence as defined above (Case, 2018,

p.16). Throughout my PhD thesis I referred to protesters' 'violence' without discrimination; although not definitionally useful, this emerged from an equivalent position to Case (pp.20-21), that such violence should be recognised as being precisely that.

Method

My PhD research involved the collection of primary data through in-depth interviews, in accordance with a grounded theory method (GTM)¹. The interviews were undertaken with individuals involved in the protests during 2010/11, with many having prior experience of resistance to President Ben Ali's regime. The following section provides a brief overview of the concepts pertaining to nonviolent and violent dynamics that emerged, as developed from the interview analysis and critical engagement with relevant literature. Below, interviewees' pseudonymised names are italicised.

Violent and Nonviolent Dynamics in Tunisia

The main concepts concerning this paper are broadly summarised here, all of which are touched upon in the following discussion:

The framing or presentation of the revolutionary movement, which was enabled and occurred not just online but through various channels of communication;

The question of leadership and the nature of 'actocracy';

Military and security force defections.

These concepts were and are highly pertinent to the nature of nonviolence, although concepts developed specifically concerning the nature of nonviolence were:

The lack of 'pragmatic' and 'principled' distinction in nonviolence;

The rationalisation of violent activities, particularly as revenge, in self-

¹ Given the necessary brevity of this response, I will be happy to enter personal correspondence to provide details of my GTM method and the substantial evidence collected.

defence and in contrast with regime violence;

The cultural or socially-specific context of nonviolence in Tunisia, nonviolence as a cultural object or nonviolence as an aspiration, which for example enabled coalescence around nonviolence as a stark contrast with regime violence;

The sense of mutual sacrifice, the loss of fear and unity;

Grassroots political and societal organisations emerging in the early post-Ben Ali period and the suppression of revolutionary momentum;

‘Dignity’ as an overarching revolutionary aim;

The lack of exogenous influence.

These concepts clearly have relevance to Case’s assessment of violence ‘*within* the context of the types of movements the scholars call nonviolent [original emphasis]’ (p.10). The following will first relate my evidence to Case’s analysis. Subsequently, I will discuss some of the prominent aspects of nonviolence in Tunisia based on the above concepts, as some qualifications are warranted to extend the understanding of nonviolence and violence’s relationship.

Assessment of Unarmed Violence according to Case’s dynamics

Case (2018) himself considered Schock’s (2013, pp.281-282) three principal concepts of civil resistance theory, namely mobilisation, resilience and leverage, suggesting that each is, ‘enhanced by making unarmed violence legible within movement repertoires’ (Case, 2018, p.24). Here I will take each in turn, reflecting on the evidence from Tunisia.

Mobilisation

Case (2018) suggests that riots ‘might frighten some people away from participation in nonviolent actions, but they might also politicise people and rouse them to action’ (p.25), with responsiveness of activists required in relation to the varied forms of potential participation and changing ‘structural and systemic constraints and opportunities’ (p.25). Further,

Case suggested that acts of violence may play a crucial role or spark a campaign, while being relevant to collective action frames that ‘the campaign influences and is influenced by’ (pp.22-23).

Concerning broader dynamics of mobilisation, during the Egyptian revolution Case (2018) points to various acts, such as police stations’ destruction, that created room for nonviolent demonstrations and occupations to occur (p.32). Various interviewees commented on how Tunisia’s larger demonstrations and protests, particularly in January and building up to the substantial demonstrations from 11th-14th January, were diverse in their participants, for example including very young and elderly individuals (*Eya, Nazir, Dalia, Achraf*), reflecting nonviolent demonstrations’ participation advantages. However, Case’s qualification regarding Egypt is pertinent in the Tunisian case also, because various participants related their direct clashes and fighting with the security forces, in a manner that helped to liberate spaces such as university campuses and areas of towns and cities where the police then found it difficult to operate (*Ayoub, Nader, Aycha, Dalia, Noman*). Thus, protests and demonstrations could emerge and be perpetuated, as well as sit-ins and strikes sustained. Nonviolence’s ability to attract sympathy was questioned by Case (2018, p.28) and will be returned to below, but in the Tunisian context, it was not apparent that commitment to nonviolence was comprehensive, nor necessary. *Dalia* explained that in Sousse, the local population around the university proved a very effective ‘incubator’; further qualifications would be Ehsan’s questioning of the extent of the broader population’s mobilisation—he placed it at perhaps 1%, although this is purely speculative—while another Sousse-based UGET member (*Ayoub*) emphasised the opposition and indifference the larger protests faced as they marched through neighbourhoods.

It was apparent that the regime’s brutality while attempting to suppress the demonstrations had a consistent counter-effect in galvanising individuals to join protests, while protester violence in response was rationalised and perceived as limited compared to the regime’s violence. Remaining strictly with Case’s analysis of mobilisation and violence for now, it indeed seemed apparent that protesters’ violence was broadly accepted and did not hinder mobilisation, because the regime’s severe violence created a ‘nothing to lose’ mentality (*Emna, Ridha, Bassem, Nazir,*

Eya). Considerable admiration and solidarity with those demonstrators ‘facing the bullets’, particularly those in the interior, was expressed (*Mariam, Nazir, Bassem, Nader, Emna, Ridha, Kenza*). However, that protesters were comparatively less violent, were ‘unarmed’ and indeed drew on nonviolent methods I believe played into an emerging narrative of ‘peaceful demonstrators’, which is expanded on below.

Resilience

Case (2018) connected a campaign’s resilience to a diversity of tactics, suggesting that although a ‘tactical cost/benefit analysis’ of unarmed violence’s potentially detrimental effects on a campaign’s resilience is warranted, ‘there may be significant *emotional* benefits to riots, both for participants and onlookers, which strategically enhance a movement’s overall resilience’; this is also reconcilable with ‘rational’ action (Case, 2018, p.26).

‘Spontaneity’ (to mean leaderless) has been perceived as an advantage of the Tunisian protests, at times linked to the prominence of internet communication technologies and online organisation (Bamyeh, 2012, pp.50-51; Castells, 2012, pp.17-18; Ghonim, 2012, p.293), as well as to nonviolence (Kirkpatrick & Sanger, 2011; Ramadan, 2012; see Kahlaoui, 2013, p.152). My PhD research indicated that heavy qualifications must be made at least to the first two. While this does not strictly concern nonviolence or violence, *Ridha*, a prominent activist, blogger and citizen journalist, referred to the concept of ‘actocracy’, which seemed to be significant to resilience. Very briefly, this pertains to the diverse, dynamic, fluid and decentralised nature of leadership rather than its absence, something reflected in Sghiri’s (2013, p.28) first-hand account; as *Ridha* suggested: ‘It’s acts that decide what’s going on’. De Filippi’s (2015) definition of actocracy is helpful: ‘a community of dispersed individuals’ with a ‘shared view and commitment to achieving a common objective’ may be governed by a system of ‘extremely informal’ norms, ‘often based on the principles of *actocracy* (i.e. the first to act is the one to rule), collective agreement and implicit consensus’ (p.303). Altering this to, ‘the first to act is the one to lead’, we may see how organised activity resulted in varied nonviolent and violent actions. This also seems to be linked to the compulsion to act in response to regime violence, which

pervaded the interviews. *Noman* stressed the importance of responding to protester deaths, relating that '[we] don't really have a strategy or tactic but it was just direct clashes [with police.] It was more an emotional movement, more than a rational or tactical movement'. Regardless, *Noman's* explanation downplays what was achieved through the logic of 'actocracy', while the 'emotive' movement still saw its elements of violence rationalised (*Hamza, Mariam*), with the will to act and counteractions by the regime galvanising others to participate due to their anger.

Here consideration should be given to nonviolent discipline, which has been emphasised as crucial during the 2010/11 WANA events (Boesak, 2011, p.4; Bamyeh, 2012, p.56; Ettang, 2014, p.418; Khatib & Lust, 2014, p.9). Case (2018) pointed to Pinckney's (2016) research to question the conclusion that the breakdown of nonviolent discipline during three of the colour revolutions had, 'a negative impact on the overall campaign', because, 'all three cases in the study were ultimately successful in ousting their respective heads of state' (pp.23-24). If we take a similar measure of success in the Tunisian case as being the departure of President Ben Ali, it is apparent that the absence of nonviolent discipline also did not undermine the Tunisian protests. Interviewees did relate to me instances where they personally attempted to maintain nonviolence during their involvement in events (*Ayoub, Nazir, Dalia*). Yet the violence that did occur was largely rationalised by both users and spectators of it, including when it was unequivocally admitted as being in revenge. As a broader comment to assessments of violence in the WANA region, the rationalisation of violence counters orientalist conceptions of undirected 'rage' (p.xviii). Indeed, the rationalisation of violence more reflected Fanon's (1990) sense of a 'cleansing' or cathartic violence (p.74); the destruction of police stations, RCD party infrastructure, Ben Ali-Trabelsi properties and raiding of government offices was excused based on their symbolic significance and for the understandable anger against the regime, while also having tactical and indeed strategic significance (*Nader, Nazir, Hamza, Ridha, Mariam, Noman*).

Leverage

Case (2018) expressed concern that 'protest organisations, especially in Western democracies, often deploy non-disruptive repertoires which

might have the appearance of contention but which nevertheless fail to exert meaningful pressure on authorities, creating a disruptive deficit [original emphasis]’ (p.27). This *disruptive deficit* ‘of conventional protest, in tandem with the neoliberal capacity to “manage the marginalised” (Katz 2008) and coopt dissent, produces a vacuum likely to be filled by political violence’ (p.27), something Case suggests is compounded when adherence to, ‘strictly nonviolent forms of protest’ is decreed by, ‘professional activists and social movement organisations’ (p.27).

Although the implications of the *interplay* of nonviolence and violence are difficult to extricate in terms of distinct effects on mobilisation and resilience, Case’s assessment of ‘leverage’ draws more of a divide between nonviolence and violence; where conventional protest fails, political violence becomes attractive, something that is exacerbated by calls to potentially ineffective nonviolence. It is here that the Tunisian case raises certain issues for Case’s analysis. One pertinent point simply concerns the need for tactical and strategic creativity under nonviolence, for example in the means of nonviolent escalation (Johansen & Martin, 2009; Dudouet, 2015; Sørensen & Johansen, 2016), and alongside meaningful pressure we may also speak of meaningful *change*, with regard to which the presence of nonviolent ‘constructive work’ has not been given consideration. This is a potentially serious form of disruption, a form of intervention in the status quo and alternative to the standard organisation and running of things. I will return to this in greater detail in the Tunisian context, although it suffices to say here that the establishment of the ‘Councils for the Protection of the Revolution’ during the 2010/11 events emerged as part of what I termed a specifically ‘nonviolent aspiration’, reflecting Vinthagen’s (2015) conception of ‘without violence’ and a manner of utopian enactment (p.222).

Political jiu-jitsu is given some emphasis by Case (2018), reflecting the focus it has received in the nonviolence literature as a prominent dynamic (Weber, 2003, p.258; Engler, 2013, p.61; Sutton, Butcher & Svensson, 2014, p.559). However, it is notable that Sharp (2005) emphasised that political jiu-jitsu ‘sometimes operates’, being a form of ‘persuasion’ that Sharp deemed the weakest form of action, a secondary dynamic to what he advocated as a ‘heavy reliance’ on ‘large scale, carefully focused noncooperation’ (p.10; Sharp, 1973, p.658). Although

my interview data showed political jiu-jitsu to be a prominent dynamic in the Tunisian context, alongside its associated 'backfire' dynamics, to draw a distinction from 'moral' jiu-jitsu seems contrived. Although the Tunisian military was perceived as having 'defected' or at least stayed neutral due to measured political rationality (Brooks, 2013; Pachon, 2014), the overlooked wider security force 'defections' (or 'indifference' regarding Ben Ali) and empathy with demonstrators was considered to reflect revulsion at the violence they were being asked to commit against fellow citizens, as well as wider emotional and psychological demoralisation (*Ridha, Nazir, Nader, Ayoub*; also Jebnoun, 2014; Pachon, 2014).

Relating to this, Case's (2018) assessment of the 'backfiring phenomenon' is still pertinent, where he suggested that although protester violence is believed to strengthen repression and diminish public support, this rests on 'the presumption that movement success requires each action to lead to increased public sympathy, the reliance on media to represent protest actions accurately, and the systemic bias that likely plays into mass-perception of protest' (p.28). Drawing on Meckfessel (2016, pp.190-3), Case (2018) suggests that backfire:

might have more to do with preexisting opposition to the forces of repression, or with the appearance of disproportionate or illegitimate repression, than it does with absolute nonviolence on the part of the protesters [...] A violent response from police can diffuse activists, harden their resolve, create disillusionment about the established order among onlookers, and set off 'microbmobilisation' processes that expand opposition to a regime (p.28).

Again, I am unconvinced that this necessarily creates an inevitable space for unarmed action, because as Case undoubtedly acknowledges the context and circumstances must be weighed by activists. However, Case's qualification of 'absolute nonviolence' holds in the Tunisian context and in relation to the severe backfire of regime violence. Nonviolent discipline was not necessary; it was only necessary for the state's violence to be more outrageous than that of protesters' violence, which recalls Gandhi's (1979) position before the 1942 Quit India Movement (p.160). But it is also apparent that the perception or narrative of a peaceful,

unarmed and defensive movement that shaped views during the protests may have provided a useful contrast with regime violence that could also have undermined security force confidence. Effective exposure of regime violence through various communication channels seemed imperative for producing a backfire effect, reflecting Martin’s (2012) analysis that backfire processes are neither always opportunistic or passive (also Martin, 2007; Sutton et al., 2014, p.5610). Further, disillusionment among elements of the security forces potentially reflected a longer-term accumulation of empathy and engagement with protesters (see Sharp, 2010, p.63), at least since the early 2000s, in addition to many security force members’ shared social and economic plight with ordinary Tunisians. Consideration of such dynamics is how nonviolent resistance can in fact seek and prove to be disruptive.

Assessing some of the specific aspects of the Tunisian protests further in the parlance of ‘undermining pillars of support’, Case (2018) considers the dilemma of security forces when faced with riots and peaceful protests, which is, ‘how much force they are willing to apply in an attempt to end the disruption, or risk spreading it’ (p.30). This concerns decisions over engagement occurring at, ‘all levels of the chain of command, including both rational and emotional considerations such as a fear of mobilisations escalating, fear of being physically hurt, desire to or fear of physically hurting others, commitment to following orders’ (p.30). I was intrigued by his statement that ‘emotions and consequences of decision-making are palpably higher during violent protests’ (p.30), as it seems apparent that responding to nonviolence and the potential of a backfire effect creates grave emotional implications and practical consequences. One example has just been given, with security forces’ decisions to fulfil orders to use lethal force against ordinary Tunisians that were potentially friends and even family (*Ayoub, Nader, Nazir, Ridha*).

Specifically assessing decisions over engagement, the extent of the backfire of regime violence and the rationale behind it should be given some focus. There were clear points during the Tunisian protests when regime violence severely backfired, for example after a massacre in Kasserine on 9th January that played into considerable protest escalation, including in Tunis’ poorer areas (*Noman, Ridha*). This led *Ridha* to exclaim, ‘Oh the ghetto is out, Ben Ali is fucked!’ (see also

Sghiri, 2013). Nevertheless, interviewees gave a sense of consistent, high-intensity regime violence throughout the demonstrations. *Noman* explained that the Regueb demonstrations began on 21st December, 2010 with immediate clashes with the police, and police entering houses to make arrests. Such transgressions, alongside stories of individuals and even a baby being shot in the security of their own home, indicating undue and lethal violence generally, made a significant impression on numerous interviewees. Such violations contributed to the ‘nothing to lose’ mentality.

From the 10th January Sidi Bouzid, Regueb, Kasserine and Gafsa all appeared to have established a space absent of domestic security force control. How violent clashes contributed to this cannot realistically be dismissed, however, additional mechanisms may have been central, for instance, the general strike from 10th January in the Sidi Bouzid region (*Noman*). Additionally, the military’s deployment from the 9th January should be considered, because it was suggested by Ehsan that the security force’s violence diminished at this time—perhaps tempered by the military, which created a space for large-scale demonstrations over the following days. However, I believe the military’s deployment seemed to be a further case of the regime being out of touch with events and seeking to *escalate* not limit violence, regardless of the effect; Pachon (2014) revealed that Ben Ali had ordered the military to collaborate with the Ministry of the Interior to ‘suppress the uprising’ (pp.515-516). It was on 10th January when Chief of Staff General Ammar supposedly refused the order to fire on protesters, although this was a misrepresentation of his reiteration of a clear chain of command for authorisation of lethal force (Pachon, 2014, p.516). The actual role of the military was ambiguous; Nader suggested the military intervened against the police in Gafsa, whereas *Noman* explained that the police’s continued use of live ammunition culminated in a civil strike in Sidi Bouzid and Regueb. This could be considered an appropriate nonviolent escalation that avoided inviting potential suppression from the military.

Finally for this section, Case (2018) proposed that ‘protester violence and subsequent repression can have impacts in both demobilising and mobilising directions’ (p.28), ultimately summarising that:

Any tactics, riots and unarmed violence are likely to have both potential benefits and potential costs for movements, depending on the context and on a variety of factors. In order to effectively analyse the impact that these have in specific civil resistance movements, violent actions must be incorporated into the overarching analytical framework (p.31).

This I believe is imperative, and Sørensen’s (2017) article in *JRS* has stressed the potentially severe practical implications for activists if cases of resistance that may be learnt from are uncritically stripped down to their nonviolent elements. Although various features of the 2010/11 Tunisian revolution have been noted above as just some of the instances where violence and nonviolence overlapped, the following section notes some prominent aspects of nonviolence that I believe must be considered for future resistance.

Nonviolence in Tunisia

Two prominent aspects will be concentrated on here, which are the significance of a ‘narrative’ of nonviolence in Tunisia, as well as the nonviolent ‘aspiration’. Neither ‘narrative’ nor ‘aspiration’ are intended to imply that nonviolence was not something tangible or practiced during the Tunisian revolution, as both rested on some degree of applied nonviolent methods. Concerning the narrative of nonviolence, Tunisia shows that perceptions remained important to the growing discord and divergence between the regime and society; the practical argument that acts of violence can be exploited by the state to justify counter-violence is a powerful one, indeed well acknowledged by interviewees such as *Dalia*, *Ridha* and others who directly intervened to limit acts of violence (*Nazir*, *Ayoub*). The regime was excessively violent, and the protesters were widely perceived as nonviolent, at least ‘comparatively’ so. A commitment to nonviolence, even if not strict discipline, seemed to be beneficial in Tunisia; it is difficult to determine what the implications of greater protester violence would have been in terms of backfire, but nonviolence contributed to the effectiveness of the backfire of regime violence. The need to be able to effectively create and disseminate such a narrative is important to resistance movements, particularly in this apparent ‘post-truth’ era wherein an opponent’s negative framing may be difficult to counter, as with the Tunisian regime’s accusations of protesters being

terrorists and criminals. Yet in Tunisia the regime appeared to largely lose control of the narrative, undermining their capacity to use demonstrators' violence to negatively frame them.

Concerning aspirational nonviolence in Tunisia, this is best reflected in Vinthagen's (2015) sense of nonviolence as being 'without violence' and 'against violence', a form of, 'utopian enactment—a confrontation where violence is pitted against an attractive possibility of something else' (p.222). *Emna*, a young university student at the time, explained her reasons for participating in the demonstrations:

Mainly the thing which pushed me actually, was seeing, we didn't really used to seeing people who are bleeding. *We're not used to that, we grew up feeling safe, relatively safe in this country* [emphasis added]. We know we are in a dictatorship, but we are not used to seeing blood, we are not used to seeing people shot in the head, their brain just coming out.

This loss of security strengthened the compulsion to respond in unity and solidarity with other Tunisians facing regime brutality. The regime's violence was akin to a foreign occupier (*Emna, Ridha*; also Sghiri, 2013), an exclusionary force that detached individuals from their sense of belonging or identity in society, creating an unsettling contingency that compounded their will to act as a means of re-securing oneself in society. Various interviewees identified myriad aspects of what they believed to be nonviolence's rootedness and presence in Tunisian culture (*Ehsan, Bassem, Eya, Kenza, Taher, Hamza, Achraf, Ines, Nabil, Dalia*). While this may be no more or less true for Tunisian culture than others, it appeared to have a strong influence as a cultural object and aspiration during the revolution; where nonviolence was aspirational was in its characterising of the reformulation of society, with 'Tunisians' unity and unified action characterised as predominantly nonviolent (see Chabot & Vinthagen, 2007).

While much of this may seem intangible, the recognition of the self in the other, shared malaise, threats and indignity that manifested variedly for individuals, was acted on. Alongside demonstrations, parallel political structures emerged in the form of the 'Councils for the Protection of the Revolution' (CPRs), grassroots organisations across Tunisia which sought to pursue deeper political, economic and social

change during the events. Although varied perspectives were offered on their role, the cynicism expressed by certain interviewees (*Ayoub, Nader*) only seemed to play into the efforts to undermine the CPRs and co-opt and institutionalise the push for change, undertaken by organised political parties and institutions, as well as the regime remnants. They clearly offered a platform for ordinary individuals, unemployed, youths and those seeking radical change to organise, feeding into efforts such as the Kasbah demonstrations to ensure the Ben Ali regime’s remnants were uprooted, strengthening strikes and occupations of workplaces for economic objectives (*Noman, Yosri*), and even organising the provision of municipal services for a time (*Ayoub*). Only a brief survey and evaluation can be offered here, however, such activities in Tunisia were within the realm of ‘nonviolent revolution’ and ‘constructive’ work, irrespective of their ad hoc or transient nature, which themselves are issues that need further research and work. At a minimum, the CPRs point to an area where nonviolent activists and resisters should study and work to improve.

Implications for Resistance

The 2010/11 Tunisian events fundamentally support Case’s (2018) conclusion that violence such as riots and property destruction should be acknowledged as part of civil resistance movements and, moving forward, further engagement with the effects and implications of that is required (pp.34-35), both theoretically and practically. However, in pointing to some of the prominent aspects of nonviolence in Tunisia, I feel the real ‘disruptive’ capacity of nonviolence may lie beyond some of the traditionally ‘pragmatic’ or strategic elements, and with constructive elements that have commonly been overlooked during the 2010/11 WANA events. Thus, by means of conclusion I will to some degree pick up where Case himself concluded.

Case (2018) seems ambivalent over the distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence (p.34), however, he expresses approval of ‘drawing a distinction between the belief in moral nonviolence and an analysis of the processes that enable unarmed civilian social movements to achieve their political goals’, as ‘something powerful and necessary’ (p.34). By leaving aside the ‘moral argument against the use of violent action’, this requires a willingness to ‘critically assess the efficacy of

various approaches and combinations of available tactics' (p.35) within the specific context, including, 'Adding riots and other violent protest activities into the legible repertoire of civil resistance strategies and tactics' (p.35). However, mindfulness is necessary of the warnings of the 'critical peace' literature in relation to the 'principled-strategic' literature, which concerns very broadly questions of power, emancipation and nonviolent revolutionary change (Jackson, 2015, pp.18,20; Sørensen & Johansen, 2016, p.84; Baaz, Lilja & Vinthagen., 2018, pp.191-192).

I would actually point to Case's brief allusion to the criticisms of those such as Chabot and Sharifi (2013) and Vinthagen (2015) of Sharp's 'attempt to separate Gandhian strategy from Gandhian moralism' as being 'faulty to begin with' (p.34); but not only that, Sharp's belief that 'a movement could not truly have one without the other' (p.34; Sharp, 1979, p.269). My engagement with Sharp's (1979) research in relation to Tunisia indicated to me that Sharp's conflation of principled and pragmatic action requires more engagement, particularly given the impression in some quarters of the influence of his 'pragmatic' position over the 2010/11 WANA events. Indeed, Chabot and Sharifi's (2013) scepticism over the efforts for deep democratic change during the 'Arab Spring' partially rested on this misplaced impression (Chabot & Sharifi, 2013, p.279; Schock, 2013, p.279), although Chabot (2015) later revised his position on Sharp's influence (pp.277,244). This is a significant issue, because I believe the Tunisian-based efforts in this regard such as the CPRs are crucial to consider; furthermore, Sharp's (1980) analysis of the requirement for parallel and alternative structures on an Arendtian basis as a means of pursuing deep democratic change and decentralised political systems (pp.157-159; Arendt, 1969, p.124), inherently and unavoidably concerns moral questions, such as how political systems ought to be arranged and others treated.

While Sharp suggested such structures can emerge out of violent processes, spaces where nonviolent means of organisation and communication can endure, with avoidance of 'power over' (Vinthagen, 2015, p.184) and pursuit of shared dignity (as in the Tunisian context) hold potential for progress. Moreover, Sharp (1980, pp.32-33,58,153) and others (Martin, 1993, pp.125-126) have emphasised the need for investigating effective nonviolent defence of these spaces, as resilient

alternative democratic structures have proven problematic. Mindful of Johansen’s (2007) call for nonviolent social revolutions to be pursued, with previous ‘pragmatic-strategic’ revolutions failing to achieve meaningful change and seeing the entrenchment of neoliberal systems (Johansen, 2007, pp.157-158; Johansen, 2012, p.313), this requires rigorous planning for what happens the day after a revolution ‘succeeds’. In the Tunisian and Egyptian context this was the overthrow of the dictator. Yet the narrative of a nonviolent, ‘successful’ and democratic transition in Tunisia is part of the country’s problem, disregarding the severe challenges that remain. Research that is nonviolent by academics concerned with emancipation through nonviolent resistance has to challenge these narratives.

Such considerations do not exclude room for assessing violence and nonviolence’s interplay, which is sorely needed. However, acknowledging the conflation of principled-pragmatic nonviolence in practice should also lead to more research drawing on nonviolence’s emancipatory legacy and potential for change (Sørensen & Johansen, 2016, p.84), and cognisant of Jackson’s (2015) warning that the allure of violent resistance is strengthened without ‘rigorous critique of violence as a political instrument’ and ‘sophisticated understanding of violence in all its forms’ (pp.38-39). With ethical arguments for violence’s emancipatory potential continuing to be made (Boyle, 2015, p.137), moral arguments for the need for social revolution should not be overlooked while seeking alternatives. Moving forward, Tunisia’s ‘nonviolent aspiration’ and elements of constructive work marks one alternative, however nascent and transient.

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CLASSIC BOOK REVIEW

Judith Butler: Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly

Harvard University Press, 2015

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Materiality and resistance

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Assemblies - acting in concert and alliances

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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The UMass Amherst Resistance Studies Initiative

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

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

The Initiative hopes to do all of this by:

- Working closely with the other members of the international Resistance Studies Network to encourage worldwide scholarly, pro-liberation collaboration
- Energetically encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration with academics at UMass Amherst and elsewhere
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BOOK REVIEWS

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

AK Press 2017

Reviewed by *Sarah Freeman-Woolpert, JRS*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

University of Minnesota Press 2017

Reviewed by *Ryan Rybka, UMass*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*The paradox of repression and
nonviolent movements*

Syracuse University Press 2018

Reviewed by *Majken Jul Sorensen, Karlstad University*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Arlie Russell Hochschild: *Strangers in Their Own Land*

The New Press 2018

Reviewed by *Matthew W. Johnson, freelancer.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dawson Barrett:

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

NYU Press 2018

Reviewed by *Matthew W. Johnson, freelancer.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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