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Reviewed by Emma Dowling, Queen Mary University of London, UK.

‘Seattle’, ‘Porto Alegre’, ‘Genoa’, ‘Cancun’, ‘Florence’, ‘Mumbai’, ‘Gleneagles’, ‘Heiligendamm’; these are some of the names of places that became signifiers for the cycle of alter-globalisation struggles of the last decade, all of them moments where anti-summit protests or social forums took place, where a ‘movement of movements’ against capitalism and for global justice constituted itself.

Much has been written about these moments as events. However, activist and researcher Marianne Maeckelbergh side-steps the event to remind us of the centrality of process. Thwarting the revolutionary moment in favour of ‘prefigurative rebellion’ as a way of refusing power as domination and creating alternatives to the exploitations and oppressions of neoliberalism, she zooms in on “global networks as spaces of movement activity” (p. 61), unpacking the movement’s material practices of organisation and decision-making in order to demonstrate exactly how prefiguration works (and sometimes doesn’t work) in real life. Concentrating primarily on social forums, anti-summit mobilisations and the virtual spaces of movement communication, using excerpts from her notes from meetings and email-list postings, this book provides a meticulous, lively ethnography and astute political analysis of the alterglobalisation movement’s *modi operandae,* including the conflict between so-called ‘horizontals’ and ‘verticals’, ‘autonomous spaces’, the ‘mobile social forum administration’, ‘buzzword bingo’, the WSF Charter of Principles, ‘affinity groups’, ‘rules of engagement’ such as the ‘Tools for White Men and Other People Socialised in a Society Based on Domination’, not to forget the ‘hand signals’, ‘Black Bloc’ forms of protest and the concept of a ‘diversity of tactics’.

In a productive exchange with democratic theory from Jean-Jacques Rousseau to Iris Marion Young and more recent Complexity Theory of Graeme Chesters and Ian Walsh amongst others, Maeckelbergh explains how and why the agency – i.e. the transformative capacity – of the movement does not lie in a message, an effect on the state or multilateral institution, but in the way it is developing democratic forms of collectivity. Arguing that the alterglobalisation movement has shifted the question of democracy from ‘*who rules?’* to ‘*how do we rule?*’, she unpacks six processes of social change: prefiguration, consensus/conflict, horizontality, diversity, democracy and connectivity.
Following the process

In contrast to previous social movements, it is the alterglobalisation movement’s forms of organisation – as opposed to ideas or goals – that are its ideology. This is the reason why Maeckelbergh chooses to ‘follow the process’ (p. 21). Her reflexive research methodology entails a constant engagement with her own subject position, allowing her to take into account how, beyond hitherto notions of ‘participant observation’ or even ‘observant participation’, she is both interpreting the practices of the movement whilst – and this is crucial – being simultaneously involved in constituting these practices. She acknowledges the opportunities and the limits of participation for research, noting that access can be both enabled as well as restricted as a result of political alliances. Likewise, she draws on how different kinds of participation offer different insights for her research:

“When I went to open meetings and participated like everyone else, I gained access to what was said during the meeting and perhaps in the pub afterwards, but when I facilitated the meeting myself, I gained insight into how the agenda was constructed, how movement actors perceived the ideal meeting and what kinds of compromises were made in the negotiation between real and ideal.” (p. 25).

Maeckelbergh’s ‘political’ and ‘conflictive’ ethnography is one of the most successful treatments of the ‘researcher-activist’ problematic I have read to date. She tackles the political and epistemological dilemmas of researching social movements as a movement actor and as a researcher based in a university institution head on and thereby takes the existing debate forward. However, whilst Maeckelbergh’s political allegiances are unquestionably located with the autonomous-anarchist section of the movement, to whom she credits most of the movement’s innovation, she chooses not to write from this particular political vantage point but reverts to traditional ethnographic language and the individualised thought process of the researcher, thus reinscribing a distance between herself as a researcher and the ‘movement actors’ she is writing about. Whilst this jolts at times, what it communicates to the reader is the same kind of unease with representation on behalf of the author that is characteristic of the alterglobalisation movement. In other words, Maeckelbergh writes in a way that tries to resist – in form as well as in content – falling prey to undue claims to representation.

Consensus is oppressive – conflict is creative

Diversity lies at the heart of the movement and guards against oppressive and exclusionary impositions of unity. The basis of collective power is located in common practices, not singular utopias or a unity founded upon identity positions. Subjectivity becomes a site of transformation in and of itself and conflict becomes key in creating a common process. Maeckelbergh distinguishes adversarial conflict from productive conflict to argue that significantly, it is the space for conflict and the refusal of a necessary unified outcome that characterise these new forms of organisation, along with a
practical and pragmatic stance: “consensus is about the task at hand, not consensus about absolutely everything” (p. 103).

Maeckelbergh analyses the real conflicts she witnessed to show how movement actors hold very different idea(l)s about process and legitimate forms of power, designating this negotiation as the terrain of conflict. Importantly, her experience shows that consensus that is not based on diversity can be used to silence and exclude and thus is oppressive. Equality means allowing outcomes to be multiple and acknowledging the existence of inequality and difference.

This study is attentive to the shortcomings of these ideals. The preparatory process of the ESF 2004 in London, one of the case studies, was so marred by conflict that many groups are still unable to work together. Here, the limits of the movement’s organisational practices come to the fore and it is evident that they can also lead to dead-ends and fragmentation. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons that the Gleneagles Summit mobilisation in 2005, Maeckelbergh’s other case study, was so fraught, where different sections of the movement occupied parallel spaces. Yet here, the question arises as to why Maeckelbergh dismisses relations between the Make Poverty History Campaign and other movements during the G8 Summit protests in 2005 as out of bounds for her study. On the one hand Maeckelbergh argues that the criteria for delineating who is part of the movement involve a presence on the same space (she provides the example of the London-based anarchist collective ‘WOMBLES’ and the Socialist Workers Party who consider themselves to be part of very different movements yet occupy the same space and process, and so can be considered to be part of the same movement), yet she purposely excludes the Make Poverty History Campaign and Live 8 concerts from her analysis. She thus omits what are arguably important aspects of the Gleneagles mobilisation and new trends in the relationship between social movements, civil society and the state. This is also a significant ground upon which the production of new forms of democracy is taking place, one that requires critical attention as it has developed in opposition to and as a form of cooption of the more grassroots forms of democratic practice that Maeckelbergh describes.

The political economy of connectivity

What defines the constituency of the alterglobalisation movement are “networks across space and time” (p. 188). Precisely because the movement lacks a specific locality and determinable boundaries, its networked constituency changes the world link by link, connection by connection. Understanding connectivity as reciprocal contamination, as a form of communication, it is an anti-linear approach to social change that through horizontality – i.e. non-hierarchical forms of organisation – encompasses a challenge to the centralisation of power as domination. The movement lives through hubs, clusters and nodes; its power is the counter-power of diffuse
but connected alternative practices. How will the movement grow? Through practices that inspire people that another world is possible, through creating meaning together, not through preaching a meaningful message.

Nonetheless, Maeckelbergh identifies two tensions. Firstly, this form of organisation tends to privilege those with the time, energy and ability to connect. Consequently, the movement develops the ‘hyper-connected’: the more you connect, the more connected you become. This creates hierarchies and centres of power. Perhaps it is also the disembeddedness of these movement spaces from the social struggles of the every-day that fosters the development of a hyper-connected movement stratum? This is echoed in one of the stumbling blocks of the book: the Narmada Bachao Andolan in India. Their struggle is included as an example of more every-day locally rooted but globally interpellated social conflict that is considered part of the alterglobalisation movement. However, its inclusion in the book feels disjointed. This might not actually be the author’s problem, but a more endemic expression of the alterglobalisation movement’s tendential disconnect with social struggles located in the every-day, which may be one of the reasons that participation in the movement in many places remains limited.

The second tension is political economy. Decidedly anti-capitalist, Maeckelbergh draws attention to the persistence of access to resources and ‘money equals power’. She invokes the Zapatistas to reject “the cultural practice of throwing money at problems, buying solutions” (p. 159). Yet, how to resolve this supposed ‘reality of power’ (p. 127), the reality of the social relations of capital no movement space can ever exist outside of? Intriguingly, for Maeckelbergh, it is precisely the organising and decision-making practices of the movement that are anti-capitalist, for they run counter to the kinds of value practices of neoliberalism - competition and individualisation - wherein the means justify the ends. In other words, in prefiguring ways of being – of how to live – that are different to the kinds of subjectivation processes neoliberalism foists upon us through the expansion of the market as the mechanism of social organisation, the practices of the movement become in and of themselves the bulwark against capitalism (pp. 142-143). Maeckelbergh neatly links this back to the concept of the self-contained individual of liberal democratic theory to draw attention to how the movement transgresses such regressive forms of democracy.

What have we learned so far?

It is fair to say that the height of the alterglobalisation movement lies in the past. Therefore, the present tense of the book appears a little idiosyncratic. However, for Maeckelbergh, the alterglobalisation movement is not a discrete entity but is part of a much longer historical process of struggles for social justice. So, the question becomes not, what is or even what was the alterglobalisation movement, but, what have we learned in the era of alterglobalisation struggles? What is it that we take with us as our struggles
for justice continue? Maeckelbergh argues that social movements of the alterglobalisation era have been engaged with resisting neoliberalism through globalising horizontality, radically changing democratic practices in an open-ended, non-absolute and contingent process. This book is an excellent contribution to the ongoing collective knowledge production on how to both understand and develop more effective strategies for a better world. Marianne Maeckelbergh’s insightful Acompañamiento of ten years of alterglobalisation activism will both resonate with the experiences and concerns of social movement activists and researchers alike and serve as a valuable resource for current social movements and future ones to come.

About the reviewer

Emma Dowling has participated in anti-summit mobilisations and in the organisation of social forums (official and autonomous). She has been active with the No Border movement for freedom of movement, particularly around anti-detention and anti-deportation campaigns. She currently works as a Lecturer in Ethics, Governance and Accountability at Queen Mary University of London. Recent works include, ‘What is the world coming to? The World Social Forum beyond critique and deconstruction’ (2008) (with Rebecca Shah), in Jai Sen and Peter Waterman (eds.): The World Social Forum: Challenging Empires, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Black Rose Books), and ‘Whatever happened to the Counter-globalization Movement? Some reflections on antagonism, vanguardism, and professionalization’ (forthcoming, 2010) (with Kees Hudig), in Aziz Choudry and Dip Kapoor (eds.), Learning from the ground up: Global perspectives on social movements and knowledge production (NY: Palgrave Macmillan). She can be contacted at esd AT riseup.net.

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1 This is a term used by the Zapatistas to differentiate common struggle from forms of support, found particularly in neoliberal development practices, that “considers the poor and the different [...] as helpless victims that can’t solve their own problems” (Flores and Tanka, cited p. 175).

Reviewed by Adrianne Showalter Matlock, University of Kansas, USA.

In his book, Chains of Babylon, Maeda aims to flesh out the influence of the Asian American activist and identity movement of the 60s and 70s on the formation of Asian American identity, noting that it remains absent in several otherwise extensive accounts of the 60s and 70s. He focuses his work on the years between 1968-1975, prefacing it with an informative historical introduction in order to situate the development of the Asian American movement in historical context. Though shaped by this history, the leaders and organizations which thrived during these years were largely distinct from their activist predecessors; the end of the Viet Nam war similarly created an historical break in Asian American identity development. Maeda writes from a personal connection with the movement and the key players within his text.

While an increasing amount of research and writing is being produced about the formation of Asian American identity, Maeda asserts that little has explicated the importance of the left and radical groups. These groups brought about a new level of coherence of Asian American identity in the 60s and 70s by positioning Asian Americans in opposition to American racist and imperialist social and governmental structures which negatively impact Asians in America and Asia as well as other Third World peoples. Simultaneously, Asian American identity became more crystallized through alignment with these groups, by framing Asian Americans as a Third World people.

This radical influence, though often overlooked, has historical roots stretching back to initial waves of migration of people from Asia into the United States. Various laws prohibited Asian immigrants from rights to citizenship; legislation and denial of appeals for citizenship upheld this discrimination based on race, ethnicity and/or appearance. Asian American activists in the prewar era organized around labor rights. Maeda notes that this did not always unify Asian American workers – rather he notes several instances of labor-related conflicts in which workers were organized in opposition to other Asian ethnic groups. This dearth of a cohesive, unified Asian American identity was also perpetuated by discrimination which targeted descendants from a specific country, such as the forced placement of Japanese Americans in internment camps during the Second World War.

Tides changed slightly postwar, as Asian Americans – formerly portrayed as inassimilable – began to be considered the ‘model minority.’ Methods of cultural identity formation differed among Asian Americans: some valued liberal assimilation – that minority groups should conform to mainstream white culture and maintain their cultural distinctness only in private. In the 1960s, Dr. S. I. Hayakawa led this group, using his studies in semantics to argue that racism is inherently irrational, and people need only be made aware of the inconsistencies
in claiming to value freedom for all while discriminating based on race. Others viewed the model minority label as justification for the American capitalist imperialist regime, by giving grounds by which other minorities could be blamed for their own poor conditions. In response to this, Asian American activists aligned themselves with other ‘black and brown’ ‘Third World’ people; this stance began to define Asian American identity as separate from the whites, and argued against the need for assimilation. In 1968, students of the Asian American Political Alliance at San Francisco State College (where Hayakawa was serving as acting president) and other Asian American student groups, in alliance with other ethnic student groups, formed the Third World Liberation Front and conducted a strike which led to the establishment of a school of ethnic studies.

On the heels of the civil rights movement, black identity formation paved the way for other ethnic groups to organize for self-determined cultural formation, including Asian Americans. In addition to allegiance to non-white Third World peoples, Asian American identity was developed through various acts of performing blackness. The hegemonic racial dichotomy present in America influenced the construction of the Asian American identity: not wanting to be conceptualized as white – the race of the oppressor – Asian Americans utilized cultural productions to root identity in affiliation with blackness. Maeda looks toward the Red Guard political rallies – modeled largely after those of the Black Panthers – as illustrative of this affiliation as well as Chin’s play *Chickencoop Chinaman*, in which two Asian men seek to actualize masculinity as they connect with a black boxer and track down his father.

Asian American identity expanded beyond the national borders in part as a result of the Viet Nam war. Asian American activists critiqued the white-dominated anti-war movement for opposing the war on the basis of loss of lives of American soldiers while ignoring the plight of the Vietnamese people who suffered the most. Maeda recounts reflections from Asian American soldiers who fought in Viet Nam and came to identify themselves with the Vietnamese as sharing a common heritage or race. The influence of the Viet Nam war meant that to be Asian American was to also be connected to those who live in Asian countries, not only Asian immigrants and their descendents in the U.S.

Attentive to the cultural elements of Asian American identity, Maeda dedicates his final chapter to the examination of the ways in which folk musicians and writers – for example, the group *Grain of Sand* – represented and impacted the movement by sharing their musical creation with otherwise unconnected groups as they toured throughout the country. Here and throughout the book, Maeda employs powerful accounts of specific individuals and groups to illuminate the development of the nationwide rise of Asian American consciousness. This way of storytelling illustrates the importance of individuals within the larger movement and places value on the individuals’ life experiences.

As with any work on a convergence of diverse ethnic groups, it is difficult to give equal attention to the unique history of groups from each country of origin. Though Maeda strives to include information about a variety of groups who comprise Asian America, certain portions of his account emphasize Japanese-,
Chinese- and/or Vietnamese American experience. Additionally, mention is made of Asian Indians but further work might be done to better demonstrate and elucidate the extent to which they have or have not been included in Asian American identity formation.

An area to which this research could be expanded would be an historical continuation: what happened between 1975 and now? The book’s epilogue narrates a reference to the passing of the torch to the next generation. The stated purpose of the book was to focus on the 60s and 70s, but further account of what has happened since then would help to illustrate and legitimate the lasting significance these actors had in shaping Asian American identity. As Maeda mentions in the preface, divergent interests and political views have emerged between Asian Americans and those who have immigrated to the U.S. since the Viet Nam war. Maeda highlights the complexities of intergenerational differences within stated time frame of the book; it will be important, however, to analyze how these and the differences between established Asian Americans and new immigrants since the 1970s may challenge the cohesiveness of Asian American identity consciousness.

Maeda employs illustrations of individuals who he considers exemplars of the broader movement. This method adroitly provides a tangible manifestation of what occurred at a more widespread level. However, some connections to the nature and extent to which these individual illustrations represent the broader movement are lacking from the argument. Further details which specify more fully how indicative these individuals, groups, conflicts and cultural productions are of the broader movement would also strengthen the author’s argument.

Overall, this book makes a valuable, needed contribution to the scholarship on both Asian American identity formation and the activism of the 60s and 70s. Maeda develops a strong argument which brings to the forefront the ways that opposition to imperialism, alignment with other oppressed racial and ethnic groups, and cultural production have played critical roles in the rise of Asian America.

About the reviewer
Adrianne Showalter Matlock is a master’s student at the University of Kansas and is currently focusing her research on the intentional Christian community movement in the U.S. She spent 14 months volunteering in South Africa before returning to begin her graduate studies.

Reviewed by Allison L. Hurst, Furman University, South Carolina, USA.

What explains the phenomenal rise in Ku Klux Klan membership from 1915 to 1928, especially in ethnically homogeneous and rural places like the American Midwest? According to McVeigh, the organization’s diagnoses of contemporary national problems was key. McVeigh pays close (if skeptical) attention to the ways the organization’s leaders framed societal problems in an attempt to explain the Klan’s phenomenal success in the early 20th century (and its rapid demise). In doing so, McVeigh also creates a new framework for understanding right-wing social movements, the “power-devaluation model.”

According to the power-devaluation model, the rapid rise in Klan membership in the early decades of the 20th century was a response to the devaluation of native-born White Protestants’ “purchasing” power in the arenas of politics, economics, and social status. As more immigrants, especially Catholic immigrants, settled in Northeastern cities, native-born White Protestants felt their power eroding—expansion of suffrage, for example, diluted their votes in national elections. The Klan capitalized on these feelings (almost haphazardly, according to McVeigh) by stressing the importance of creating a voting bloc of native-born White Protestants, by proposing the notion of “Klankraft” (a form of economic boycott in which members did business only with other members, and by supporting public education. Why support public education? During the early twentieth century, the value of a high school degree was being devalued as more people were able to graduate from high school, increasingly parochial ones. The Klan’s support for public education was an attempt to retain the status of those who participated in this form of education as “many middle-class Protestants” worried “whether the education provided by the public schools would be sufficient to allow their children to maintain their position within the class structure” (123).

As can be seen from the brief description so far, this is not an analysis that relies much on the irrationality (i.e., racism) of Klan members to describe the rapid growth of the organization. McVeigh’s focus on “macro-level changes” as the underlying cause for the growth of the Klan differs from more individualistic analyses. This may be the greatest strength of McVeigh’s approach (although a strength that can turn into a weakness—more below). McVeigh argues, persuasively, that current social movement theories—Resource Mobilization Theory (RMT) and Political Opportunity Theory (POT)—are inadequate to explain right-wing social movements, or social movements that originate with the (relatively) privileged. This is because both RMT and POT take as granted that the movement has legitimate collective grievances that need not be articulated. Right-wing social movements, on the contrary, are by definition
social movements whose grievances must be created, or framed. Native-born White Protestants may have felt their power being devalued in the early 20th century, but they were still relatively powerful people (and here McVeigh points us to the evidence of local Klansmen and women being part of the solid middle class, neither workers nor elites). McVeigh makes much of the fact that the Klan leaders stumbled around for years until they hit upon a way of talking about national politics that appealed to their would-be constituents, and in this I think he is correct. Right-wing social movements are constructed, and their appeal is based on finding ways of explaining social change that appeal to constituents. The first incarnation of the Klan (post-Civil War) fought Reconstruction. This second incarnation fought immigration (especially Catholic immigration) in the name of being “100% American.” Different times, different frames.

Although McVeigh rejects the applicability of RMT or POT to explain right-wing social movements, he does incorporate these theories’ elements into his own (along with the basic notion, taken from classical social movement theory, that grievances themselves matter). There are four steps in McVeigh’s power-devaluation model. The first step is the existence of a structural change. In the case at hand, the structural change includes rapid industrialization and urbanization coupled with a massive influx of (Catholic) immigrants. In turn, this produces a devaluation of power for some. McVeigh’s three “markets” (economics, politics, status) seem very similar to Weber’s “class-status-party” model of social power (and also Bourdieu’s notion of transferable capitals). A social movement is more likely to happen when “multiple” markets are affected, as was the case here for Klan constituents. The third step is a shift in interpretive process – i.e., how these devaluations are framed or understood. Here McVeigh draws on the work of Snow and other framing theorists. Finally, and here is where contemporary social movement theory becomes important, a social movement will be successful given activation of organizational resources and exploitation of political opportunities. Unlike members of left-wing social movements, members of right-wing social movements will already have organizational resources to draw from and political opportunities to exploit, but they will still have to do the work of activating these. In the case of the Klan, McVeigh demonstrates the importance of fraternal lodges, Protestant churches, and the splits between the political parties (more on this later).

This is a very stimulating book to read. For one, it is useful to see Ku Klux Klan members depicted as (basically) rational, as opposed to rabid racists. McVeigh manages to give the Klan a respectful hearing while still signifying his moral repugnance of their often-violent program. The content analysis of the Klan’s national paper is highly instructive, as is the quantitative analysis of membership by region. The focus on framing becomes very important for an understanding of the movement’s fairly rapid demise. According to McVeigh, this decline resulted from a tension between the general goals of mobilization (what needs to be said to people to draw them into the movement) and alliance formation (how to ignore what you said previously in order to gain allies). There are many interesting facts about this era of the Klan as well – its ties to
Progressive politics, for one. The Ku Klux Klan saw itself as strongly “liberal,” showing us, one again, the variability of political appellations.

If there is a weakness here, it is in McVeigh’s downplaying of race and racism. In an attempt to make the Klan more “rational,” I believe McVeigh goes too far in ignoring why blaming Catholic immigrants was appealing in the first place as opposed to, say, blaming capitalists (and isn’t this always the big question in explaining the appeal of right-wing social movements?). McVeigh tells us that “the Klan identified with progressive legislators in both the Republican and Democratic parties” (185), and that they strongly supported the progressive La Follette, that is, until he publicly condemned the Klan. Up until the election of 1924, the Ku Klux Klan leadership had played off the Republican and Democratic Parties, operating as a strong voting bloc to coerce support of such things as public education, the creation of a federal Department of Education, prohibition, and the restriction of child labor.

But after Coolidge’s victory, Klan leaders announced their “mission accomplished,” even though Coolidge supported none of their progressive legislation. In 1928, when the Klan threw all of its weight behind the pro-business Hoover rather than a Catholic (Al Smith), the die had been fatally cast – the Klan was now a firm ally of the Republican Party. The bankruptcy of the Republican Party during the Great Depression was also the downfall of the Klan’s appeal. There is something here that is not being explained by McVeigh’s model, and it is why this (anti-Catholic, pro-business) course of action was taken to (unsuccessfully) remedy the devaluation of native-born White Protestants’ power rather than, say, keeping the fight against child labor or a strong minimum wage (which would have successfully maintained constituents’ power, simply not at the expense of low-wage immigrant workers). McVeigh’s focus on national politics and the public discourse of Klan leaders is a useful corrective to more individualist-focused explanations for Klan activity, but I wish he had incorporated more of the insights of these researchers. An analysis of this particular organization that doesn’t discuss racism as a motivating factor in membership is both refreshing and a little disturbing. If native-born White Protestants were so concerned with public education and ending child labor, why didn’t they join the Socialists instead? And is the answer to this something McVeigh only hints at – the connection between “class” language itself and immigrants (especially Jewish immigrants) in the minds of those who saw themselves as “100% American”?

Despite these unanswered questions, or perhaps because of them, McVeigh’s work is a refreshing addition to both the literature on the Ku Klux Klan and social movement theory. Anyone who teaches a course on social movements would find the chapter in which McVeigh draws upon the insights of social movement theory while differentiating his own very useful and readable for students. Even though one may not agree with every point he makes, or some of his interpretations of the Klan’s appeal, there’s much here to discuss. Furthermore, the importance of understanding right-wing movements, especially those that construct racist and nationalist frames to explain massive
social changes, has perhaps never been more urgent than it is today. McVeigh tells us that, in the minds of its members, “those who opposed the Klan were by definition opposed to America” (197). How different is this from countless other right-wing movements operative today in both the US and Europe? McVeigh has shown us that we need new models and new questions when it comes to understanding right-wing social movements. This is a good place to start.

About the reviewer

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In *Zones of Proletarian Development*, Mastaneh Shah-Shuja – a London-based writer of Afghani-Iraqi extraction – attempts to draw out a number of ambitious theses on the new forms of proletarian consciousness she sees emerging in the struggle against capitalism.

The book is clear its aim to help point the way forward in this struggle, enlisting in the process the theories of Soviet writers Bakhtin, Vigotsky and Volosinov, a number of social protest case studies, and – most centrally – the concept of the 'Zone of Proletarian Development' (ZPD) that gives the book its title.

This is a novel approach to such subject matter. Also novel – and useful – is the book's final chapter, ambitiously entitled “Towards a new kind of revolutionary organising”. Setting aside the main arguments surrounding the book's case studies, this presents an interesting literature review of a wide range of writings by activists and “revolutionaries” on organisation and its perils. Of course, the kind of critique and self-critique gathered together here is not entirely new – and some of the targets are not the most difficult, such as the bad behaviour and dogmatism of political 'gangs', Leninist, anarchist or what have you – but since these problems are still ones that social movement actors struggle with on the ground, keeping them on the table – and not just the table of activist 'grey literature' – seems like a worthwhile pursuit.

As for the main body of the book, its questions and claims are interesting and ambitious – and also not without their faults.

Shah-Shuja leads her investigation with some reflections on what she sees as the current inter-related changes in the make-up both of capitalism, and of the proletariat, drawing upon recent dialogues concerning contemporary forms of 'primitive' (or not so primitive) accumulation in activist journals such as *Midnight Notes* and *The Commoner* (but not David Harvey's recent work on the same topic).

Shah-Shuja's contentions regarding the unfolding of a “roll-out neoliberal fascism” on the back of these developments are accompanied by an excursus on some of the intellectual progenitors, in her estimation, of this ideological departure, namely Leo Strauss and H.G. Wells. However, the relation between this and Shah-Shuja's larger arguments could be clearer, and unfortunately no evidence is presented linking these figures with the ideological trends that Shah-Shuja describes – other than what is already widely known about Strauss's influential role within neoconservative Republicanism in the United States.

Getting closer to her main argument, Shah-Shuja suggests that because of the political-economic changes she has identified in contemporary capitalism,
“demonstrations and riots will increase during the 21st century” (p. 15). In particular, “the post-real method of exploitation will be resisted by a highly skilled but discontented section of the proletariat that is not shackled by reactionary institutions of mediation such as trade unions...” (p. 16). In her study of proletarian gatherings as laboratories for revolution, Shah-Shuja draws on Guattari and Negri:

Since no ‘permanent’ autonomous organisation has been devised to articulate their protests, it is safe to assume that the more rapid translation of ‘molar antagonisms’ into ‘molecular proliferations’ will be carried out during and around the arena of demonstrations, strikes, riots and carnivals for the foreseeable future. (p. 16)

Also in this vein, we are told that the “fight-back that has already begun will manifest itself increasingly in factories, workplaces, neighbourhoods and on the streets” (p. 25). These are bold claims, and Shah-Shuja goes even further, with references to the “balance... gradually tilting in favour of the proletariat” (p. 107; original emphasis) and to the “position of strength” from which “we are restating the relationship with our bosses” (p. 60).

The substance accompanying Shah-Shuja’s rather large claims is contained in three social protest case study chapters. The London Mayday events of 1999 through 2003 are considered in relation to Vygotskian theory, a 2001 spate of football rioting in Iran in relation to Bakhtinian carnivalesque, and a comparison of the 1990 UK poll tax riots and February 15th 2003 London anti-war march in relation to Activity Theory, again of Vygotskian derivation.

The key concept at the heart of this narrative is that of the Zone of Proletarian Development (ZPD) of the book’s title. The term, coined by Newman and Holzman (1993) (p. 196), updates Vygotsky’s ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (zoped), a concept he originally used to denote “the distance between what a child can do on his/her own and what he/she can do with the aid of a teacher or able peer” (p. 73).

This central conceptual plank suggests the general orientation of Shah-Shuja’s theoretically-minded case studies: zoped and ZPD, activity theory and carnivalesque are utilised to bridge the gap between these empirical studies and Shah-Shuja’s propositions regarding the new forms of consciousness incubating in proletarian gatherings, and of the changing balance of class forces.

This is an interesting theoretical approach to such material – however, a disadvantage is that, for a reader uninitiated in these theories, such as this reviewer, the significance of Shah-Shuja’s findings are not always clear.

The Vygotsky-influenced analysis of the London Maydays focuses on the “proletarian development” and “social and collective learning” (see e.g. p. 79) Shah-Shuja suggests was unfolding around these events. Shah-Shuja considers how “proletarians” co-operate with and learn from one another through such events – and through such Vygotskian processes as “horizontal”, “spiral” and “expansive” learning, “scaffolding” and “knotworking” (see e.g. p. 81-91). Again, I am not entirely clear as to the import of the findings presented here – such as
that “less knowledgeable revolutionaries” learn from “more knowledgeable ones” through their activities together – for example “training sessions” – and that chants and placards are illustrative of Vygotsky’s “private speech”.

On a more basic level, I do not always fully follow the logic of Shah-Shuja’s theoretically-oriented analyses of empirical reality – such as the (in)famous “desecration” of the Churchill cenotaph in Parliament Square on the 2000 London Mayday. Here, after a brief discussion of Marx’s concept of alienation, Shah-Shuja writes that

The demonstrators feeling alienated from their environment (with its colossal and awe-inspiring buildings, over-sanitised boulevards, the presence of police, cctv and intrusive journalists), resolved some of the tension by ascribing new meaning and sense to cultural icons, such as Churchill’s statue. The environment became, during the act of carnivalisation, a genuine product of their labour. The bourgeoisie rejected this humanisation of Churchill since the stable meaning of Churchill as leader and ideologue was subverted.

Put simply, it is not clear to me how any of the theory applied here adds to our understanding of what happened in this instance, how or why. Also in terms of the match between empirical fact and theoretical interpretation, I might point out that – as far as I am aware – a cadre of Kurdish Communists (as well an ex-British military officer) were among the main protagonists of the cenotaph “desecration”. Some of these people had probably read Marx’s writings on alienation, and the usefulness of understanding their actions in terms of some kind of (presumably) spontaneous reaction against alienation seems questionable to me. This is not to mention the fact that, according to her statements elsewhere in the book (Shah-Shuja’s invective against “leftists”, “activists”, “middle class” people, and so forth, is extremely biting), such individuals ought presumably to be considered “bourgeois counter-revolutionaries” (see e.g. p. 83). Likewise, I do not follow how these events lead Shah-Shuja to conclude that

... in the near future, the proletariat should be able to win struggle after struggle in the arena of social memory interpretation. The balance is gradually tilting in favour of the proletariat.

Perhaps it is the 'subconscious' realisation of this subtle shifting of power that explains the venom with which the media attacked the protesters. (p. 107; original emphasis.)

Shah-Shuja compares the post-cenotaph public slanging match between protesters and establishment figures with Bernstein’s well known sociolinguistic study contrasting the “restricted” code of ‘working class’ forms of speech with the “elaborated” code of ‘middle class’ ones. We are told that this model is turned on its head in the case at hand:

The contrast with both proletarian and bourgeois discursive practice after the May Day 2000 could not be starker. Proletarian discourse... was an exemplary manifestation of the dialectics of the concrete and abstract...
In contrast, the bourgeois propaganda was a restrictive code, which maintained the duality between concrete and abstract (pp. 108-109).

Apart from the fact that these claims are made without evidence, I am unable, on a conceptual level, to see the fit between Bernstein’s and Shah-Shuja’s applications of categories like 'working class' and 'proletarian', 'middle class' and 'bourgeois': it would seem to me that they are talking about very different things. This is not to mention the suggestion that the May Day protesters actually represented the proletariat in the first place, or the vagueness of Shah-Shuja’s definition of that term (p. 14).

These might seem like arbitrary selections from a book of wide scope, and of many arguments. I hope they do not seem like nitpicking. But I think they are not unrepresentative of Shah-Shuja’s approach.

Ultimately, such exercises do not leave this reviewer with a clear understanding of how Shah-Shuja's central idea – the Zone of Proletarian Development of the book's title – can bring forward our understanding of popular contention (or its prospects) against the contemporary capitalist order. At times the ZPD seems like a metaphor for everything the author likes, and its antithesis – the Zone of Bourgeois Development – a sin-bin for whatever Shah-Shuja does not like, subsuming everything from Lenin and liberalism to People’s Global Action and Indymedia.

Shah-Shuja deserves most credit for the novel initiative to bring the work of interesting writers such as Bakhtin to bear on contemporary social movements. A disadvantage of this approach, however, is the difficulty in making the fruits of this labour clear to readers (such as myself) who take an interest in social movements and contemporary capitalism, but who lack the familiarity with Shah-Shuja’s chosen theoretical reference points necessary to fully appreciate all the contours of the author’s analysis.

Another unfortunate disadvantage has to do with the book's timing: published just before the full outbreak of the global financial crisis, Shah-Shuja's conclusions would have very quickly looked out of date to anyone who was paying attention to what was happening in the world, in terms of the response to the vicissitudes of the crisis on the level of social movements and popular contention. That response might be described as: not that much – and certainly a lot less than the rising tide of proletarian insurgency sketched by Shah-Shuja.

Of course, none of this means that 'history is over', or that the forms of contention suggested by Shah-Shuja have no future – but it would seem that understanding such issues will call for some serious research, and for the putting of many heads together. Actually, a lot of pertinent work on these themes is being done not just by activists, but also by scholars closer to the 'mainstream' in the study of social movements and contentious politics.

No doubt Shah-Shuja would be vituperative of this work – but speaking as a junior bit player within the field – surely deep within the Zone of Bourgeois Development in Shah-Shuja’s estimation – I can tell her that she might be surprised at what she finds here, if she looked.
Reference

About the reviewer
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Reviewed by Deric Shannon, University of Connecticut, USA.

At the outset, after reading Black Flame, it's impossible not to reflect on the massive amount of research that such a work must have entailed. The book is a narrative about anarchism and, with interest in anarchism on the rise worldwide, it could not have come at a better time. There are a couple of reasons for this. One, we need new narratives of the anarchist tradition to understand where we've been. Secondly, Black Flame contains critiques of the ways that "radical" circles contemporarily have too often turned away from the radical class politics that have always defined the socialist movement.

Ironically enough, this is both a major strength of the book, but also, in my opinion, one of its weaknesses. As Schmidt and van der Walt state their case early in the book, "(c)lass struggle' anarchism, sometimes called revolutionary or communist anarchism, is not a type of anarchism; in our view, it is the only anarchism" (p. 19, emphasis theirs). This essentially leads to the authors deciding throughout the beginning of the book who the "real" anarchists are and who gets defined out. This is one of the major strengths of the book, first and foremost, because some contemporary anarchists do seem to have lost their commitment to radical class politics. Indeed, demands to end capitalism and class society are often drowned out in some anarchist spaces, replaced instead by a politics of identity and guilt that mirrors a sort of "Oppression Olympics", where identity becomes fetishized and separated from a radical class analysis and commitment to ending class society. Black Flame offers a reminder to us that anarchism is a part of the socialist movement and that a concern with social oppression without a commitment to ending class society is just liberalism that is sometimes dressed up in anarchist colors—albeit with some noble goals.

Secondly, Schmidt and van der Walt take this approach in order to demonstrate that anarchist histories have often been muddled due to past academic accounts of the anarchist tradition. Indeed, scholars often argued "that anyone who held an antistatist position must be an anarchist, even if they disagreed over fundamental issues like the nature of society, law, property, or the means of changing society" (p. 17). Given this loose definition of anarchism, it provides a space for anti-state liberals like Murray Rothbard, a supporter of a stateless free market dystopia, within the anarchist tradition. However, focusing on

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2 Please note, I am not arguing that we should reject the politics of identity in favor of class politics, nor that class politics are any more "central" than struggles against other hierarchies. Rather, I would argue for an intersectional approach to politics that takes into account struggles around specific identities and the ways that they overlap and intersect with the struggle against capital and the state. That is, these fights against white supremacy, heteronormativity, patriarchy, capitalism, the state, etc. are not separate fights—they are one in the same and it is a mistake for anarchists to ignore any of them or to privilege some struggles over others.
anarchism as an ideology based in historical social movements easily demonstrates that anarchism is, and has always been, a socialist philosophy with no room for "free" market ideas.

One can see echoes of this problem in contemporary liberals who refer to themselves as "anarcho"-capitalists. Nevermind that capitalism requires the state to manage class antagonisms and, thus, the idea is preposterous to begin with. It is an insult to the history of anarchism and working class struggles to suggest that anarchism could somehow be compatible with a capitalist, "free" market worldview. To compound matters, there are likewise racists who have co-opted the label. Referring to themselves as "national anarchists" (as the Nazis famously appropriated the term "socialist" in "national socialist"), these racial separatists deserve as little space in the anarchist tradition as supporters of a stateless "free" market (which is to say, none at all). Schmidt and van der Walt outline a socialist anarchism, based in working class movements, that would provide no space within anarchism for the apostles of a hierarchical society--be they capitalists or racists.

The major strength of this approach is that it locates anarchism within its history which is embedded in working class social movements.

However, this approach leads the authors to define anarchist thinkers like Proudhon out of the tradition. Proudhon had a major impact on the development of anarchism as a political philosophy and influenced such well-known revolutionary anarchists as Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. Likewise, they exclude the individualist strain of anarchism, removing the likes of William Godwin, Benjamin Tucker, and Max Stirner--all of whom, it might be added, opposed capitalism and the state. However, with different focuses and, importantly, without revolutionary, commitments, Schmidt and van der Walt exclude them from their "broad anarchist tradition" due to strategic differences3.

In my opinion, this is one of the weaknesses of this approach. Imagine, for example, a world in which Marxists were expected to agree on strategy or otherwise be defined out of the tradition. We would effectively lose a chunk of past Marxisms (e.g. those that arose in response to the rise of fascism in Europe like the Frankfurt School), we’d lose contemporary Marxists such as Hardt and Negri – indeed, much of contemporary Marxist thinking would no longer be Marxism.

For contemporary anarchism, this would remove all of the anarchists who argue for an "exodus" strategy out of capitalism from the tradition. That is, some anarchists (alongside many Marxists) have eschewed traditional revolutionary strategy in favor of attempting to create an exodus out of capitalism. This is an old tradition within anarchism, typically arguing for the creation of alternative institutions that, when nurtured, will some day replace capitalism and the state.

3 It also leads to them defining Marxists like Daniel De Leon and James Connolly into anarchism.

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I have some objections to defining them out of anarchism. For example, many of these anarchists are able theorists and doubt the ability for a traditional capital "R" revolution to be successful in the modern era. Indeed, as history has moved forward, the state has become better and better armed with new weapons capable of massive destruction on a scale that was unimaginable in the days of anarchism's early formation. Questioning whether or not an armed revolutionary struggle is possible in the modern era makes sense—and anarchists should be having these kinds of strategic debates among ourselves. Defining them out of the anarchist tradition removes a critical strategic voice from the tradition that has raised rational objections to traditional strategy.

As well, it might even be a mistake to think of these different strategies as somehow separate and necessarily at odds with each other. If we are to overthrow capitalism, we do need replacements. Much of this infrastructure could come from mass movements, neighborhood assemblies, and worker's councils developed in the process of a revolutionary struggle. This has always been a part of anarchist revolutionary strategy.

But, being anarchists, we will settle for nothing less than the demolition of all social hierarchies. Thus, things like rigid gender roles and norms, normative expectations around sexual practices, internalized racism, lack of social viability for the disabled, etc. must be swept into the dustbin of history with capitalism and the state as well. Some of these processes are going to require cultural and conceptual change, in addition to the institutional changes we seek in a revolutionary struggle. Anarchist free schools, spaces like infoshops, indymedia centers, and the like provide spaces for experimenting with new social and cultural forms. Through collective projects like these we get to experience non-hierarchical organization and culture in our bodies—demonstrating that other worlds are possible and introducing new ideas into our stifling, sick, and hierarchical culture. So, while mass organizing might be necessary for overturning the existing social order, our everyday lives must be transformed as well. Many counter-institutions that anarchists are currently building can serve as spaces for doing just that.

These are, however, in many ways rather minor points. After all, I agree with the authors that a line needs to be drawn between those who can rightfully be called "anarchists" and those who have no business using the label. As I mentioned before, I would exclude capitalists and racists, for example. Anyone who espouses a classing of society, private ownership of productive property, or support for social hierarchies like sexism or racism has no place in the anarchist tradition. I would, however, personally argue for a broader "broad anarchist tradition" than the authors.

So, with the good and bad that comes from defining the broad anarchist tradition this way, Schmidt and van der Walt set about the rather large task of

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4 This is not to suggest that I agree that revolution, in the traditional sense, is not possible. It seems to me that if we had popular support, there might not be a military to point those new weapons at us!
writing a history of what they see as the two traditions within anarchism: mass and insurrectionist anarchisms. According to the authors, mass anarchism and insurrectionist anarchism can be differentiated thusly:

Mass anarchism stresses that only mass movements can create a revolutionary change in society, that such movements are typically built through struggles around immediate issues and reforms (whether concerning wages, police brutality, high prices, and so on), and that anarchists must participate in such movements to radicalise and transform them into levers of revolutionary change. What is critical is that reforms are won from below; these victories must be distinguished from reforms applied from above, which undermine popular movements.

The insurrectionist approach, in contrast, claims that reforms are illusory, that movements like unions are willing or unwitting bulwarks of the existing order, and that formal organizations are authoritarian. Consequently, insurrectionist anarchism emphasises armed action—"propaganda by the deed"—as the most important means of evoking a spontaneous revolutionary upsurge. (p. 20)

Schmidt and van der Walt argue for the consistency of the mass anarchist approach. Indeed, the authors outline how "the insurrectional act was increasingly seen as elitist; rather than inspiring the working class and peasantry to action, at best it reinforced the passive reliance of the masses on leaders and saviors from above, substituting a self-elected vanguard for the popular classes" (p. 133). Thus, the preferred strategy in *Black Flame* is one of patient organization, fighting for immediate demands while continuing to push for a future world without rulers, bosses, workers and slaves—that is, mass anarchism.

Schmidt and van der Walt also outline what they see as the best way for a militant minority in social movements, as anarchists are, to fight for this future world. It is through organizational dualism that anarchists can have the most impact in social movements. This means that anarchists would belong to anarchist specific organizations based on some common agreements and principles, as well as to social movement organizations. It is from mass social movements that revolution might come, and it is the revolutionary anarchist organization that argues within those mass movements for such a revolutionary rupture. In addition anarchists would argue for organizing those social movements in ways that prefigure the kind of world that anarchists want to create (e.g. democratic, egalitarian, non-hierarchical).

The question, then, that the authors pose is how much level of agreement and unity in tactics and theory should exist within the anarchist organization? Schmidt and van der Walt make a case for platformism, or organizing the specific organization around theoretical and tactical unity in a very tight and disciplined sense (although allowing for different "tendencies" within the organization). One can see the contemporary forebears of dual organizationalism in non-platformist groups like the Workers Solidarity Alliance (in the US and Canada) and the groups affiliated with the neo-
platformist anarkismo project like NEFAC (Northeast Federation of Anarchist Communists – USA), the WSM (Workers Solidarity Movement – Ireland), and the ZACF (Zabalaza Anarchist Communist Front – South Africa, of which the authors are members).

Throughout this well-researched history, Schmidt and van der Walt touch on many other important issues within the anarchist milieu. They argue against the notion that syndicalism is somehow separate from anarchist communism, defining syndicalism as "the view that unions--built through daily struggles, a radically democratic practice, and popular education--are crucial levers of revolution, and can even serve as the nucleus of a free socialist order" (7). Indeed, this has been an accepted, if controversial, anarchist idea from its inception--though not all anarchists regarded unions as having that revolutionary potential (in fact, many anarchists argue that unions, being mediators between workers and capital, can ONLY serve a reformist role--an argument which the authors reject).

Likewise, they research and write about anarchist positions on national liberation struggles, race, gender, internationalism, armed action--this list could go on--all with painstaking research and detail. Indeed, there is too much content to comment on in a single review. And, importantly, Schmidt and van der Walt do so paying critical attention to anarchism as an international movement, citing anarchists from as disparate places as Germany, Britain, China, Japan, Uruguay, and so on. Indeed, the authors have done a great service to the anarchist community by drawing out these international ties and decentering the West within anarchism's historical tradition showing that we are, indeed, an international movement and that the demands for socialism combined with freedom within anarchism are not limited to the West.

As a reviewer, it is common practice to recommend a book one finds valuable and interesting. If you have a passing interest in radical politics, get this book. If you have an interest in anarchism, get this book. If you are an anarchist already, whether you agree with the authors' perspective or not, get this book. This is a thoroughly researched narrative of a political movement that promises freedom, equality, and social viability for us all.

**About the reviewer**

Deric Shannon is a long time anarchist living in Connecticut where he teaches sociology at the University of Connecticut. He is a co-editor of Contemporary Anarchist Studies: An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy (Routledge 2009) and co-author of Political Sociology: Oppression, Resistance, and the State (Pine Forge Press forthcoming). He is a member of the Workers Solidarity Alliance and a believer in radically different futures.

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5 http://www.anarkismo.net
Proponents of social protest know that the success of a campaign often depends not on what you do, but how you do it. This how, in terms of modern social movements, includes many aspects, such as who you are targeting, what you say, what emotion/s you merge with this and what broad ideas you link with your message. This excellent analysis considers all these in relation to North American peace movement organisations (PMOs). The authors specifically analyse the discourse of fifteen PMOs throughout five conflict periods: the Gulf War; the 1998 bombing of Iraq; the 1999 NATO bombing of Kosova/o; the four months post-9/11 and the first two years of the Iraq War. The study not only analyses the messages created and disseminated during each time period, but also presents a longitudinal analysis, where possible. This allows for a great deal of the data to be compared throughout the 1990 – 2005 conflict time period covered. Prominent PMOs analysed include American Friends Service Committee, Fellowship of Reconciliation, Pax Christi, Peace Action, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, War Resisters League and MoveOn.

The study is well-structured and progresses logically. The theoretical framework lays a solid foundation for the actual data analysis. The authors spend much time highlighting the position PMOs take when producing societal knowledge, including the various types of oppositional knowledge they aim to present to the public, as well as whether or not they counter or harness hegemony through their statements. These positions are tracked throughout the analysis. Surprising conclusions are often reached, especially when considering whether or not PMOs counter or harness hegemony. For example, when analysing the use of nationalism in messages, the authors found that “PMOs challenged nationalism more than they harnessed it in three of the conflict periods (Gulf War, Iraq 1998, and Kosova/o), and harnessed nationalism more than they challenged it in the two most recent periods (9/11 and Iraq War)” (p. 58). While many mass media representations of social activism post-9/11 and during the Iraq War depicted participants in this sphere as unpatriotic and anti-American, attempting to ‘other’ them, the findings of this study show otherwise.

In order to substantiate these early findings, the study goes on to look at emotions, the role religion plays in the discourse of PMOs and their mobilisation of supporters. Emotion is a new inclusion in the field of social movement research, and one wonders, while reading through the respective chapter, how it could ever have been excluded. Throughout these chapters, it is noted that despite the different conditions inherent to each conflict period,
PMOs remained true to their core beliefs. When this finding is observed across all five conflict periods, and with the five organisations tracked longitudinally, it demonstrates both a solidity and longevity inherent in social movements, which many members of the public often choose to ignore. The authors point out that “most anyone who has ever announced to their family or to their surprised coworkers that they are going to take part in a protest demonstration has likely experienced reactions ranging from mild concern to disdain to active disapproval” (p. 27). It is precisely this stereotypical idea of social movements that this study shatters – throughout the book, one is made aware of the strength of social movements and their necessity in political landscapes today.

The authors coded and analysed 510 formal statements from their selected fifteen PMOs. The integration of this data could make the text of the book stilted and cumbersome, but the study reads easily. However, long pauses are sure to occur once tables are encountered – these are not always easy to interpret and often require much extra reading before effective understanding takes place. The authors also state that a particular goal of this study is for it to be understandable to those outside of academia. While a noble goal, this will not be easily met. It is not very well supported visually and the findings; the so-called ‘meat’ of the argument, take a few chapters to solidify. Early undergraduate students will struggle. That said, it should appeal to final year undergraduates.

As an academic in the field of Media Studies, I found this book an engrossing example of an often bland research method. It is an ideal book for postgraduate students, especially as it demonstrates discourse analysis so well. This research method allows for insightful conclusions to be drawn, which will benefit PMOs worldwide in the construction of messages aimed at the public. Activists can target their campaigns more effectively and, by looking at the longitudinal findings, can ensure their messages have effective sustainability. This book also opens up a new avenue of research for academics researching Latin American or African social movements; the commonly ignored regions in research of this nature. Social movements are a topical, evolving field of research, one which falls not only under Sociology, History and Political Science, as the book’s publishers have categorised it, but also under various academic fields that are more common in Europe and Africa, such as Media Studies and Communication Science. While centred on North American PMOs, the findings of this study can be compared alongside the rhetoric of PMOs of other regions and in local, regional or international conflict periods.

Despite its minor flaws, this book is of significant importance. Social movements are no longer minor players in global politics – one needs only look at the number of recent publications delving into the history of certain PMOs, or other organisations, as well as their presence online and on various social media platforms to note this. Research in this area is long overdue, and the authors can be sure that they have produced a piece of work that sets the standard for future research very high. A highly recommended book.
About the reviewer

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En este libro el antropólogo y activista Jeff Juris explora de un modo ejemplar las prácticas políticas y culturales implicadas en la construcción de redes transnacionales por parte de activistas contrarios a la globalización neoliberal. Basándose en un estudio etnográfico centrado en las redes activistas surgidas en Barcelona, recordemos que éste fue uno de los nodos más importantes y activos del movimiento, el libro desentraña y analiza con brillantez las innovaciones tácticas y organizativas más destacadas de este “movimiento de movimientos” que, desde noviembre de 1999, reclama con fuerza que otro mundo es posible.

El principal argumento del libro sostiene que los movimientos contra la globalización neoliberal se caracterizarían por aprovechar de forma innovadora las posibilidades que nos brinda la confluencia entre tecnologías, formas de organización y normas políticas basadas en la metáfora, o la lógica –por utilizar conceptos del propio autor- de la red. Esto es, más allá de una cuestión de morfología social, para estos grupos la red se convierte en un potente ideal cultural, en una lógica organizativa primordial, que modela e inspira nuevas formas de democracia directa radical tanto a escala local, como a escala regional y global. Así, mientras se conectan, mientras tejen redes, estos activistas no sólo actúan contra la pobreza, la desigualdad, o la devastación ambiental creciente, sino que también contribuyen a generar, a accionar, laboratorios sociales para la producción de valores, discursos y prácticas alternativas.

En este sentido, cabe destacar el término “lógica cultural de la red”, un término que Juris acuña para dar cuenta del sustrato histórico, social, tecnológico y económico que inspira esta permanente construcción de redes. Para el autor, éstas no son sino el reflejo, el efecto, de interiorizar la estructura y la práctica que caracterizan el denominado capitalismo informacional. Así, dicha lógica se traduce en una disposición por parte de estos actores a: 1) crear nexos horizontales e interconectados entre diversos elementos autónomos, 2) fomentar la libre circulación de la información, 3) colaborar por medio de una coordinación descentralizada y de una toma de decisiones consensuada y, 4) fomentar prácticas de construcción de redes auto-dirigidas. Claro está, también, que dicha lógica funciona más como un “tipo ideal” que como una cuestión de hecho. En la práctica, como nos detalla esta excelente etnografía, esta lógica “enredada” se encuentra distribuida de forma desigual y en permanente tensión con otras lógicas alternativas. Y esto es justamente lo más interesante e innovador de su análisis, pues abre la posibilidad de explorar de forma práctica y situada esta compleja y poblada “política cultural de la red”.

Mas en esta “nueva forma de hacer política” no podemos soslayar el importante papel que juegan Internet y las nuevas tecnologías informacionales. Además de
constituir un medio de comunicación de largo alcance, barato, rápido y flexible, estas tecnologías constituyen también la infraestructura material –digital deberíamos decir, sin incurrir con ello en un falso dualismo- que permite estructurar y coordinar de forma distinta estas nuevas formas organizativas. Si bien éste es un tema estudiado y apuntado desde hace tiempo por los teóricos de los Nuevos Movimientos Sociales, el interés de este trabajo reside justamente en el hecho de ilustrar etnográficamente, y de paso ampliar aún más, este argumento. Así, Juris nos muestra cómo dichas tecnologías son apropiadas por los activistas para fomentar un modo de organización “alternativo”, es decir, reticular y radicalmente descentralizado. Esto es, un modo de organización sin apenas estructuras jerárquicas, y dónde predomina la coordinación horizontal, la participación directa, el acceso libre y la toma consensuada de decisiones. De este modo, se pretende romper la lógica vertical de los partidos políticos, de los sindicatos, y en general, de la política en su acepción más convencional.

En efecto, lejos de perseguir la hegemonía, o la representación por medio de estructuras verticales, estos emisarios de la política en red se definen por la creación de espacios amplios, donde las organizaciones, los colectivos, y las redes de diverso signo convergen en relación a unos principios básicos comunes a la vez que preservan su autonomía y su identidad específica. Su último objetivo, más que la adhesión, es la expansión horizontal de estas redes y el aumento de su “conectividad” por medio de la articulación de distintos movimientos dentro de las estructuras flexibles y descentralizadas de comunicación de las que se proveen, facilitando así una organización y una coordinación más eficaz de la acción colectiva.

Sin embargo, no sólo encontramos ventajas en esta aplicación de la lógica cultural de la red a la producción de actores de cambio social. Por un lado, porque ésta alumbra también una serie de exclusiones, muy importantes, y muy vinculadas con la denominada brecha digital y, que como nos recuerda Juris, no deberíamos soslayar. En ese sentido, la articulación de redes requiere, como decía anteriormente, de una infraestructura tecnológica que se distribuye de forma desigual entre grupos, geografías y niveles educativos dispares. Pero además, la exploración de esa utopía informacional, trae consigo también una buena dosis de tensiones y de encendidas polémicas dentro del propio movimiento (antiglobalización/anticapitalismo; saltar de protesta en protesta/organización sostenida; violencia/no violencia; consenso/votación...). Si bien es cierto que esto no es algo negativo, en todo movimiento encontramos diferencias y luchas internas, también es cierto que dicha lógica “enredada” contribuye a hacer si cabe más visible esta tensión constitutiva que acompaña la articulación y desarrollo de un movimiento social. En ese sentido, lejos de sugerir una apropiación uniforme, la lógica cultural de las redes nos invita a explorar un escenario mucho más antagónico, interesante y variado. Un escenario tan complejo como densamente poblado, en el que encontramos actores, sensibilidades y interpretaciones muy distintas del paradigma de las redes y en el que cada apropiación es decisiva para comprender cómo estas redes se producen, desarrollan y relacionan formando un marco u otro de acción.
Mas la metáfora de la red también proyecta algunas sombras de orden teórico que quisiera comentar antes de terminar. Si bien es cierto que los tropos y modismos que nos invitan a pensar en una política en red o en una cultura de la red son decisivos para aprehender la lógica y las características primordiales de este momento-bisagra que vivimos, por acuñar la expresión de Melucci (1996), también es cierto que su uso prolongado detenta riesgos. El primero, convertir la idea de la red en nuestra principal y casi única guía teórica (Castells 1997). En efecto, a pesar del evidente éxito que ha cosechado la noción en los últimos años, o quizás por eso mismo, su omnipresente y omniabarcente utilización no hace sino fomentar un progresivo ahuecamiento conceptual de la propia noción. Prueba de ello es que lo “enredado” ha pasado a ser el epíteto preferido de toda una época. El concepto que lo dice y lo conecta todo. Una tesis sin prácticamente antítesis. No faltan las pruebas en ese sentido que ilustran hasta qué punto la red ha pasado de ser una simple metáfora, un tropo más en el acero conceptual de las ciencias sociales, a ser una precondición causal, una unidad casi-fáctica que nos viene dada y que es supuesta de antemano. Si bien ésta no es una crítica aplicable al sólido trabajo de Juris, no está de más recordar hubiera sido interesante incluir una reflexión crítica más decidida sobre justamente los riesgos y problemas que entraña el uso sociológico, y a veces el abuso, de una noción como la de la red.

En una línea parecida, quisiera recordar que una de las formas de conjurar el peligro de sobreexplotar este epígrafe pasa por fomentar abordajes prácticos, situados y específicos, es decir, por abordar fenómenos concretos, atendiendo siempre a sus componentes singulares y a las prácticas específicas que le dan sentido (Woolgar 2005). Si bien es importante apuntar que éste es un objetivo que persigue el libro que nos ocupa, también es justo destacar que dicho análisis carece de un estudio pormenorizado del papel de algunos componentes importantes en la conformación y articulación de estas complejas redes. Me refiero particularmente a la ausencia de una pregunta por el papel de los no humanos -por utilizar un término propio de enfoques muy próximos al estudio de las redes como es el caso de la Actor-Network Theory (Latour 2005) - en la conformación de estas redes activistas. Como el propio Juris reivindica, son muchos y variados los componentes que contribuyen a articular estas complejas redes, entre ellos los propios dispositivos tecnológicos. Y de hecho son los lazos y vínculos entre estos variados componentes lo que nos permite hablar de redes que actúan. Mas a posteriori, en el plano analítico, dicha precaución se va desvaneciendo en favor de un enfoque más antropocéntrico de la agencia y de la acción social. Con ello, se hace más difícil también el poder desentrañar cómo este actor-red establece de un modo práctico y efectivo conexiones, continuidades e interdependencias entre tecnologías contextos, momentos, ideas, afectos, actores e intereses muy variados. Es decir, cómo esta red que enlaza entidades y actores distinto actúa a la vez como un actor que incorpora actividad y agencia y, por tanto, moviliza, ejecuta y reordena identidades y formas particular de ver el mundo que nos rodea.

Pero al margen de estos debates teóricos, Networking Futures es un libro absolutamente imprescindible y que a buen seguro se convertirá en una
referencia insoslayable tanto para activistas como para académicos y docentes interesados en la antropología, la sociología, las ciencias políticas, la comunicación o la geografía de los movimientos sociales y los procesos de globalización política, cultural y económica contemporáneos.

Bibliografía


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In this book, the anthropologist and activist Jeff Juris explores, in an exemplary way, the political and cultural practices involved in the construction of transnational networks by activists who oppose neoliberal globalisation. Based on an ethnographic study that focuses on the activist networks that have surfaced in Barcelona, the book unravels and brilliantly analyses the most prominent tactical and organisational innovations of this “movement of movements” which, since November 1999, forcefully has claimed that another world is possible.

The book’s main argument is that the movements against neoliberal globalisation are characterised by their taking advantage in an innovative way of the possibilities offered by the junction between technologies, forms of organisation and political norms based on the logic of the network. That is for these groups the network turns into a powerful cultural ideal, into a primary organisational logic that models and inspires new forms of radical direct democracy, on a local scale and on a regional and global scale alike. Thus, while they connect, while they weave their webs, these activists do not just act against poverty, inequality or the growing environmental destruction, but rather, they also contribute to generating, enacting, social laboratories for the production of alternative values, discourses and practices.

In this sense, it is worth highlighting the expression “cultural logic of the network”, an expression coined by Juris to account for the historical, social, technological and economic sub-stratum that inspires this permanent construction of networks. According to the author, these are merely the reflection, the effect, of interiorising the structure and practice that characterises so-called informational capitalism. In this way, the “networking logics” translates into a willingness by these actors to: 1) create horizontal, interrelated bonds between different autonomous elements; 2) promote the free movement of information; 3) cooperate through a de-centralised coordination and consensus-based decision-making and; 4) promote practices for the construction of self-managed networks. It is also obvious that this works more as an “ideal type” than as a matter of fact. In practice, as this excellent ethnography details, this “entangled” logic is unevenly distributed and it is in permanent tension with other alternative logics. And this is precisely what is most interesting and innovative about his analysis, as it opens up the possibility of exploring the complex and well-populated “cultural politics of the network” in a situated way.

But in this “new way of doing politics” we cannot overlook the important role played by Internet and the new information technologies. Apart from constituting a means of communication that has a wide reach and is cheap,
quick and flexible, these technologies also constitute the material infrastructure that enables the structuring and coordination of these new organisational forms in a different way. Although this is a theme that has been studied and noted for some time by the theorists of the New Social Movements, the interest of this work lies precisely in the fact that it illustrates this issue ethnographically and in doing so, it widens it further. In this way, Juris shows us how these technologies are appropriated by activists to promote an “alternative” mode of organisation, that is, one that is web-like and radically de-centralised. This means a mode of organisation that hardly has any hierarchical structures and in which horizontal coordination, direct participation, free access and consensus-based decision-making are predominant. Through it, these groups seek to break the vertical logic of political parties, trade unions and, in general, of politics in its most conventional sense.

In effect, far from pursuing hegemony, or representation through vertical structures, these transmitters of networked politics are defined by the creation of ample spaces in which organisations, collectives and networks of different persuasions converge in relation to some shared common principles, at the same time as they preserve their autonomy and specific identity. Their final goal, beyond adhesion, is the horizontal expansion of these networks and an increase in their “connectivity” through the articulation of different movements within the flexible and de-centralised communication structures that they equip themselves with, thus enabling a more effective organisation and coordination of collective action.

However, we do not just find advantages in this application of the cultural logic of the network to the production of actors for social change. It also gives rise to a series of exclusions that are very important and are very closely linked to the so-called digital divide, which, as Juris reminds us, we should not overlook. That is the structuring of networks requires a technological infrastructure that is unevenly distributed between groups, geographies and educational levels that are not equal. But furthermore, exploring this information utopia also entails a good deal of tensions and of heated discussion within the movement itself (anti-globalisation/anti-capitalism; jumping from one protest to another/sustained organisation; violence/non-violence; consensus/voting...). Although it is true that this is not something negative, as there are difference and internal struggles in every movement, it is also true that this “networked” logic helps make visible, the constitutive tension that accompanies the structuring and development of a social movement. In this sense, far from suggesting that there is a uniform appropriation, the cultural logic of networks invites us to explore a scenario that is far more conflicitive, interesting and varied. This is a scenario that is as complex as it is densely populated, in which we find actors, sensitivities and interpretations that are very different from the paradigm of networks and within which each appropriation is decisive to understand how these networks are produced, developed and relate to each other by forming one or a different framework for action.
But the metaphor of the network also projects some shadows of a theoretical kind that I would like to comment on before ending. While it is true that the figures of speech and idioms that lead us to think of a networked politics or a culture of networks are decisive to grasp the logic and primary characteristics of this hinge moment (Melucci’s expression, 1996), it is also true that its prolonged use carries risks. The first is that of turning the idea of the network into our main and almost sole theoretical guide (Castells 1997). In fact, in spite of the obvious success that the notion has harvested over the last few years, or perhaps for this very reason, its omnipresent and all-encompassing use only promotes an increasing conceptual emptying of the notion itself. The evidence of this is that what is “networked” has become the preferred epithet of an age. It is the concept that says and connects everything. A thesis for which there is practically no antithesis. The network has changed from being a simple metaphor, one more figure of speech in the conceptual inventory of the social sciences, to becoming a causal precondition, an almost factual unit that we are given and is taken for granted a priori. Although this is not a criticism that can be levelled at Juris’ solid work, it is not superfluous to recall that it could have been interesting to include a more determined critical reflection, precisely about the risks and problems that the sociological use, and at times misuse, of a notion such as that about networks entails.

Along the same lines, I would like to point out that one of the ways to avoid the danger of over extending the concept of network lies with grounding analysis in specific, situated practices, that is, concrete phenomena, paying careful attention to their singularities and the specific practices that give them meaning. (Woolgar 2005).

While it is important to note that this is a goal that the book that we are dealing with pursues, it is also fair to stress that this analysis lacks a detailed study of the role played by some important components in the formation and structuring of these complex networks. I am referring in particular to the absence of a question about the role of non-humans (Latour 2005) in the creation of these activist networks. As Juris himself claims, the components that contribute to structuring these complex networks are many and they are varied, among them are the technological devices themselves. And in fact, it is the bonds and links between these different components that allows us to talk of networks that act. But on an analytical plane, this caution progressively disappears, with a more anthropocentric focus on agency and social action taking its place. Consequently, it also becomes harder to disentangle how, in a practical and effective way, this actor-network establishes connections, continuities and interdependencies between very varied technologies, contexts, moments, ideas, affections, actors and interests. In other words, how this network that intertwines different actors and entities, at the same time acts as an actor that incorporates activity and agency and therefore mobilizes and reorders identities and the way we view the world around us.

Beyond these theoretical debates, Networking Futures is a book that is absolutely indispensable and that will certainly become a reference that cannot
be overlooked for activists, academics and teachers interested in anthropology, sociology, political sciences, communication or the geography of social movements and contemporary processes of political, cultural and economic globalisation.

**References**


**About the reviewer**

**Israel Rodríguez-Giralt** is a professor of social psychology in the Open University of Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain. As an STS researcher he has experience in Social research and particularly in Science, Technology and Democracy Studies. His PhD thesis (2008) concerned the implications that an STS approach has for the analysis of contemporary collective action. His current research interests are the role of the Internet in how expert and non-expert knowledge is combined by social movements in strategies developed to participate in public debates and to create mechanisms for more participatory and creative models of democracy. He has been visiting researcher at the Center for the Study of Innovation and Social Process, Sociology Department, Goldsmiths College, University of London (2009).

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