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Book review: Heather Ann Thompson, *Blood in the Water*

Review author: Elva Orozco

Heather Ann Thompson, 2016, *Blood in the Water: The Attica Prison Uprising of 1971 and its Legacy*. New York: Pantheon Books (752 pp., hardcover, \$35.00)

Despite deliberate efforts to conceal the truth about the prisoners' uprising at Attica in 1971, Heather Ann Thompson's *Blood in the Water* (2016) provides a comprehensive account of the events that took place before and after the bloody retaking of this maximum-security facility on September 13, 1971. Thompson's Pulitzer Prize winning study of the Attica prison and its legacy unfold in nearly six hundred pages. To narrate this story, the author makes use of a vast number of sources, including papers from the Attica Task Force Hearings, records from the Erie County Courthouse, White House tapes, newspapers reports, documents from the New York Special Commission on Attica, the Meyer Commission, and firsthand accounts of the actors involved. The result is a coruscating account of the bloody retaking of the prison by state forces, the brutal torture that Attica inmates suffered after the assault, the state's vast cover-up, and the prisoners' efforts to tell the truth. This set of topics makes *Blood in the Water* painfully relevant for our context. At its core, the book presents Attica as a historical moment whereby state violence was used against unarmed men to preserve its ideology of law and order.

The length of Thompson's book is warranted by the long and painful story of Attica's uprising. *Blood in the Water* consists of fifty-eight chapters organized in ten parts. Each part contains an average of five chapters plus a short bibliography of the main protagonists in the story, including Frank "Big Black" Smith, hostage Michael Smith, New York Times journalist Tom Wicker, whistleblower Malcolm Bell, renown lawyer Elizabeth Fink, slew CO William Quinn's daughter, Dee Quinn Miller, and others.

The book's title, *Blood in the Water*, conveys the horror that prisoners lived during the retaking. The words come from former prisoner James Lee Asbury whose testimony described how "merely ten minutes after the assault on the prison began, no matter where he looked, all he could see was blood in the water" (p. 187). Whose blood? Who ordered the violent assault on the prison? Was this terrible massacre inevitable?

Thompson's book responds to these questions with remarkable clarity. In doing so, she powerfully stages the dilemmas faced by a democratic prison movement that is almost immediately depicted as a riot by its detractors. The opening chapters deal with the harsh conditions prevailing in US prisons during the sixties and early seventies, including overcrowding, excessive use of violence,

and racial discrimination. Attica was a clear testament to all these problems. The prison was built in New York the 1930's, during the great depression. Two-thirds of the population at Attica was African-American and Puerto Rican. Conditions inside this facility were bad for all prisoners, but particularly so for black and brown inmates. As Thompson explains, few prisoners earned more than six cents a day, and the very lucky were paid \$2.90, significantly less than what they needed to survive inside the prison. This situation contrasted sharply with the profits that Attica generated from prisoners' labor, especially the metal shop and the laundry which "netted the state of New York almost \$1.2 million in sales [...] between 1969 and 1970" (p. 32). Despite these profits, Attica's inmates received few items gratis: two pairs of pants, shirts, a pair of shoes, underwear, and socks. Prisoners would receive a bar of soap and a roll of toilet paper for a whole month. The food was meager and unhealthy, and medical services were extremely deficient as most prisoners recalled.

Labor exploitation and inhuman living conditions at Attica triggered the uprising. In this sense, Thompson's book demonstrates how Attica's prisoners connected their struggle to the larger context of civil rights activism in the US. This is why they began to organize to demand significant reforms to the prison system. Initially, prison organizing inside Attica took the form of a peaceful and democratic movement. Inmates drafted a list of demands that they delivered to Superintendent Oswald with the hope that he implemented the desired changes. Above all, Attica inmates wanted to be considered and respected as human beings rather than "domesticated animals selected to do their [police authorities] bidding and slave labor and furnished as a personal whipping dog for their sadistic, psychopathic hate" (p. 32). Yet, high-ranking prison officials, including New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, didn't take these grievances seriously and insisted that Attica's rebellion was aligned with revolutionary forces seeking to destroy the "American way of life" (p. 266). Thus, instead of improving the prisoners' living conditions, state officials tried to assert more authority. In the end, the prisoners' call for reform turned into a full-fledged uprising. During the rebellion, which lasted only four days, prisoners fatally beat CO William Quinn and captured thirty-eight hostages to force the state to sit at the negotiations table. But while Attica administrators first showed some willingness to address the prisoners' concerns, in the end, governor Nelson Rockefeller decided to terminate the uprising by force.

The retaking of Attica by New York state troopers, local police, and prison corrections officers was extremely violent, with 39 people killed. One of the key contributions of *Blood on the Water* is to clearly demonstrate that the agents of violence were not the prisoners, as state officials had maintained for more than four decades. Rather, the violence that took place the day of the retaking was indeed perpetrated by the state. As a former prisoner put it in the days that preceded the retaking, "if a massacre takes place [...] in the final analysis, the world will know that the animals were not in here, but outside running the system and the government" (p. 158).

Through the use of deadly force, the state regained control of Attica. In the process, New York state troopers, local police, and prison COs killed thirty-nine men, including ten hostages. Although police officers did the killing, they accused the prisoners of murdering the hostages. Another 128 men were shot, and countless more were subjected to torture for weeks and months after the rebellion. This was all known to top officials, including former President Richard Nixon, who congratulated Rockefeller for regaining control of Attica. Then, the state launched a lifelong campaign to cover up the crimes committed that day. In turn, Attica's survivors initiated a lifelong battle to tell the truth.

Blood in the Water has numerous strengths. The book is well organized and carefully written. People from all backgrounds and trajectories can find it accessible despite its considerable length. Importantly, Thompson lets the main protagonists of Attica narrate their own stories, casting them as political actors in their own right. Contrary to Governor Rockefeller who thought of Attica's inmates as murderers, rapists or terrorists in need of domestication (Foucault and Simon 1974; Marshall and Christopher 2012), Thompson's study shows their human face, with lots of virtues as well as mistakes.

In a 1972 interview, Michel Foucault described Attica as a "machine" whose purpose is not the rehabilitation of men, but their punishment and subsequent elimination (Foucault and Simon 1974, 27). *Blood in the Water* shows with sharp clarity the truthfulness of this statement, as former prisoners recalled their frustration with the prison administration for ignoring their demands of being treated with respect and compassion. While the uprising was not devoid of violence, Thompson makes clear that the prisoners sought dialogue and consensus first. Violence was always their last recourse. Furthermore, violence could have been prevented had the authorities acknowledged that Attica's inmates had legitimate grievances instead of dismissing their demands as part of a revolutionary conspiracy against the state.

There are a few shortcomings in the book. Perhaps the most significant is Thompson's scant emphasis on the democratic character of the uprising, which pales in comparison to her lengthy focus on the legal battles that took place after the retaking. This move might be deliberate as it serves the twofold purpose of casting the justice system as an institution that perpetuates structural violence while also showing the victims' determination to resist the state efforts to get away with murder. However, Thompson misses a unique opportunity to redefine the meaning of justice from the perspective of the victims. Throughout the book, the reader is presented with the idea that justice comes from the courts, *a priori* assumed as independent and autonomous institutions. And yet, this is rarely the case, as justice system has a symbiotic relationship to the state, in itself an instrument of domination. To be fair, Thompson is not indifferent to this problem, this is why in a recent statement she admitted that the concept of justice is both "vexing and vitally important" (Thompson 2017). But what if justice is not the currency of the courtroom but something that is determined by the injured party? In a documentary aired in 2012, Traycee Barkley Timian, the

sister of Elliot D. Barkley spoke to this issue after narrating the murder of her brother, a leader, and spokesperson for the Attica prison movement. For her, truth telling is a kind of justice insofar as it exposes the lies of those in power. As she noted:

No it is not going to bring him back [LD Barkley], but you know what, I am satisfied with the truth being told. My brother was not a bad person. Let that truth be told. My brother went to Attica State prison and he had no business being there. Let that truth be told. Let the truth be told that people in higher positions, you know, killed my brother. I mean and they're gone [the murdered inmates] and there is no bringing them back so now the truth can be told.
(Marshall and Christopher 2012)

Traycee Barkley's alternative conception of justice means letting the world know that the criminal acts committed at Attica on the morning of September 13, 1971, were carried out by the state. Her conception of the state as a criminal "machine" contrasts sharply with the view that the state promotes of itself as protector of the people through the legitimate monopoly of the means of violence. Yet, as Traycee Barkley's words suggest, the morning of the retaking the state chose to murder in cold blood rather than allowing black liberation and black self-determination to spread inside and outside the walls of the prison. For Dee Quinn Miller, the daughter of slain CO William Quinn, this shows how far state officials are willing to go for the sake of maintaining power. "Attica is a powerful lesson, a cautionary tale about the lengths that people are willing to go to keep and gain power. Political power. Not in some third world nation, right here," said Miller (Marshall and Christopher 2012).

To understand the relevance of Attica to our present, it is crucial to search for alternative conceptions of justice that incorporate the perspective of those who are injured in order to avoid reinforcing the power of existing institutions that maintain the status quo. In this context, Thompson's *Blood in the Water* is a welcomed contribution to the larger effort of documenting and exposing the truth.

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**Book review: Andy Blunden,
*The Origins of Collective Decision Making***

Review author: Bonnie Nardi

Andy Blunden, 2016, *The Origins of Collective Decision Making*. Leiden: Brill (257 pp., hardback, \$142.00)

There are many ways to read *The Origins of Collective Decision Making*. It is a detailed history of the development of three modes of collective decision making: Counsel, Majority, and Consensus. It is an autobiography of the author's long participation in radical politics, delivered with so light a hand that Andy Blunden's presence is felt as delicately but definitely as a butterfly moving in a garden. It is a reflection on the nitty-gritty practices by which social movements ply their craft of getting things done outside formal bureaucratic structures. It is a paean to rigorous empirical methods; Blunden took nothing for granted, doggedly pursuing informants and sources to track down how real decisions were made by real people.

For those of a certain age, the book is a meditation on the roots of contemporary historical events that touched us deeply. For younger readers, it is a beautiful illustration of the importance of history and a reminder that it didn't all happen yesterday on Twitter. I implore young scholars to spend time with "Realist Historical Investigation" (chapters are not numbered, a bit of an inconvenience in my view) for understanding the rewards of digging deeply into a topic in both theory and method. I found this book a page turner, and that's saying something for a book whose title probably does not shout, "Must Read!"

All reviewers have to pick at least one nit, so I will get that out of the way now. I would have preferred a more standard procedure of academic citation. I do understand that the author did not want to interrupt the flow, and there's a good set of references, but I would have liked more, on some of the more obscure, but still very interesting points.

Blunden motivates *The Origins of Collective Decision Making* by observing that collective decision making is an ethical activity at the heart of all governance, justice, and good conduct. That we have not had a book on the history of collective decision making until now is surprising, and makes this volume all the more important. The book begins with a frank admission that the author was piqued into his research strategy by the slack in David Graeber's (2013) approach to the same questions about decision making. Blunden says:

[Graeber based his answers to these questions on] hearsay reports that Consensus had originated either with the Indigenous nations of North America, who had passed the practice on to settlers before being exterminated by those

same settlers, or with pirates operating off the North Atlantic Coast of America, before they were exterminated by the Royal Navy and American pirate hunters. Based on these unlikely propositions, neither of which have been verified by historical investigation, Graeber proposed that a body of people all of whom were *armed* could not impose majority decisions on a minority but rather would make decisions by consensus[.] (p. 11, emphasis in original)

Unpersuaded by Graeber's romantic (pirates! Indians!), but faltering narrative, Blunden established a meticulous program of historical research to get to the bottom of things regarding the important questions surrounding collective decision making. He calls his methods "realist" and that's just what they are—accessing reality as closely as we can by asking hard questions and not settling for simple stories.

Blunden undertook this work to move beyond Graeber's historically vacant narrative which could not explain how collective decision making processes would have been "*transmitted down the centuries* from colonial America to the small American anarchist movement of the late 1960s or Wall Street protesters of 2011" (ibid., emphasis added). In order to transcend "Just So Stories," as Blunden calls them, he rolled up his sleeves and began to probe the origins of collective decision making, setting a high bar for himself in not taking the easy way out which would have been: "[If] a certain practice bears some resemblance to a practice which existed somewhere else at an earlier date [...] [then it] originated from the earlier [source] (p. 12.). No! We are instead going directly to 15th century guild meetings, and we are going to read the rules in their Minutes! We will examine how things were laid out in the documents of the East India company in 1621, and what John Wesley thought about fashioning decision making in the Methodist church, and the ways the Black Panthers did what they did. All of this so we can establish a "concrete *line of transmission* from there to here" (ibid., emphasis in original) in determining historical roots of collective decision making processes within their actual historical linkages. I marveled at how determinedly Blunden scrutinized the historical record to inform the whole book, and chased after still-living sources for the latter part of the book that discusses the women's movement, anarchism, the civil rights movement, and other contemporary social movements. We have a good deal of incredibly rich material straight from various horses' mouths, carefully cross-checked and contextualized.

Although *The Origins of Collective Decision Making* is not heavily inflected with cultural historical activity theory, the methods and approach are clearly rooted in this tradition to which Andy Blunden has made outstanding contributions throughout his career. The "germ cell" of collective decision making is "*a group of people in the same room, deciding what to do together*" (p. 2, emphasis in original). Grasping this germ cell, or irreducible unit of analysis, allows us to grasp the contradictions of collective decision making and the complexities and complications that arise from the contradictions inherent in the germ cell. This

tack is classic Marx carried forward into modern cultural historical activity theory. Blunden's reflections on political economy, woven into his accounts of specific instances of collective decision making, also bespeak this theoretical lineage.

Blunden ends the book with a rather sobering thought: it does not matter whether we choose Majority or Consensus (or even Counsel). All can produce ethical outcomes, but it does not matter because

all the decisions which really matter are excluded from collective decision by the application of the laws of private property in the public domain. The food industry poisons us, the media spreads lies and misinformation and so on, because these activities are deemed to be "private property". (p. 245)

Yet at the same time, the larger message of the book inspires. An appreciation of the staggering and courageous effort it took to pull humanity out of the position of powerlessness inherent in having "no place and no rights in a feudal system based on the land" (p. 243), which *The Origins of Collective Decision Making* amply documents, can perhaps be aspirational for today's social movements facing overwhelming issues (the environment, income inequality, political corruption, rampant corporatism, and so on). It is astonishing that the voluntary associations of landless merchants and artisans of feudal times produced sound structures of governance as well as the equality and solidarity Blunden details, laying the foundation for Parliament, universities, trade unions, and much beyond. While it is easy to get discouraged at what is happening today in many realms of life, we must take inspiration from the tenacity and intelligence with which people with far fewer resources than we have transformed governance. Blunden's book, despite a bit of an ominous shadow flitting across the landscape at the end, provides plentiful inspiration in affording a clear view of exactly how people of good will came together and managed to make some pretty good collective decisions! Our heritage has much to offer, and we must not allow ourselves to become alienated from its good parts (by forces on either the right or the left). I believe there is real wisdom in connecting to the forebears Blunden discusses, both emotionally and intellectually, as we face the strenuous tasks that lie ahead. Reading Andy Blunden's book is Step One for recharging.

I can honestly say that I am happy to have read *The Origins of Collective Decision Making*. My review might seem a bit incomplete, focusing on the meta issues as it does, but I hope there is method in my madness. I have not told you how collective decisions are made and how the forms of such decision making came into being. You will find out within the pages of Andy Blunden's lucidly written, thoughtful, scrupulously researched, and fascinating book on the topic. God (that wonderful lady) is in the details here, and the details should be savored, and not crassly summarized by the reviewer.

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About the review author

Bonnie Nardi is a professor in the School of Information and Computer Sciences at the University of California, Irvine. An anthropologist, she is interested in computing and political economy, as well as social life on the internet, especially video gaming. Her most recent book, *Heteromation and Other Stories of Computing and Capitalism* (co-authored with Hamid Ekbia), was published in May 2017 by MIT Press. She co-edits the MIT Press *Acting with Technology* Series (with Kirsten Foot and Victor Kaptelinin). She is interested in radical approaches to sustainability and is a founding member of the Computing within LIMITS Workshops. Contact: nardi AT uci.edu

Book review: Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson and Peter N. Funke (Eds), *The Great Refusal*

Review author: Raphael Schlembach

Andrew T. Lamas, Todd Wolfson, and Peter N. Funke (Eds), 2017, *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press (440 pp., paperback, \$44.95)

The Great Refusal is a fascinating collection of essays on different aspects of Herbert Marcuse's thought and its usefulness in interpreting and informing the struggles of contemporary social movements. To be clear, this book is not so much an intervention into social movement theory or any other established academic sub-discipline. Rather, it straddles the line between activist writings, the politics of resistance and radical philosophy and should therefore be of specific interest to readers of this journal.

Edited by Andrew Lamas, Todd Wolfson and Peter Funke and coming out of the "Critical Refusals" conference in Philadelphia in 2011, the book's contributions all very much speak to a wave of protest around 2011, the year that *Time* magazine dubbed the Year of the Protester (Anderson 2011). There are twenty-one chapters covering topics such as the Arab Spring, the Wisconsin labour movement and of course Occupy Wall Street and its various offshoots. But there are also pieces that cast the net a little bit wider, such as considering the struggles of migrant workers in China and the uprisings of East Asia.

As always, any work that tries to find ways of understanding contemporary events risks a loss of relevance. And we can certainly say about a number of the essays here that they have been written at a time of optimism for the Left, an optimism that today appears strangely misplaced. As I write this review, Donald Trump is giving his presidential inauguration speech in Washington DC, in which he invokes a very different kind of social movement than the one that the authors in this collected volume have addressed. The fortunes of social movements can turn so quickly, even though their long-term impact may not manifest itself until years or decades from now.

With this in mind, the question poses itself: can Herbert Marcuse's studies into rebellion in an affluent society be a source of inspiration to those who are seeking to combat the visions of neoliberals and extreme nationalists in the era of Trump, Putin, Modi and Erdoğan?

In recent discussions on Marcuse's work in the United States, from his stay at Columbia University to his time in California, there has been some doubt cast over the level of influence he really had as a radical thinker on the protest movements of the 1960s and 70s (Wheatland 2014). But although few activists

may have engaged with the finer points of his writings on Hegel, Freud and Marx, for some his version of Frankfurt School theory and negative dialectics formed an essential part of the “Marx-Mao-Marcuse” revolutionary trinity.

To their credit, for the authors in this volume, what appears more important is what anyone could learn from reading Marcuse today. This includes those whose academic research considers contemporary protest, disobedience and resistance. In the field of social movement theory, however, Marcuse remains curiously absent. This is an unfortunate omission. As I have tried to show elsewhere, his work, and indeed that of the wider circle around Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School, can open up new perspectives on social movements and has also underpinned many of the best-known accounts of protests represented in the literature (Schlembach 2015).

What holds the chapters of *The Great Refusal* together is that they loosely examine the notion of the great refusal – however ill-defined this concept remains – and its contemporary relevance. Marcuse is credited with developing a non-orthodox Marxism that embraced all kinds of anti-oppression struggles. The introductory piece by the editors makes this argument very clearly. As they put it: “Analysis of the wave of protest in the 1960s and 1970s reveals critical similarities to today’s movement politics” and a re-engagement with Marcuse’s frameworks to understand those could “help scholars and activists identify the strengths and shortcomings of contemporary theory and practice of resistance” (p. 4). This is then not simply an application of Marcuse’s theory to contemporary mobilisations. Rather the book is an intellectual rendezvous of activist insights into particular sites of struggle and Marcuse scholarship.

This sometimes makes for a rocky encounter. While Marcuse’s arguments in works such as *One-Dimensional Man* or *Counterrevolution and Revolt* are eclectic, for many on the traditional Left the brand of Marxism offered here is alien and hampered by its pessimistic outlook on the revolutionary agency of the working class. *The Great Refusal* cannot alleviate these concerns. But for those willing to engage, the book offers a wealth of resources, inspirations and tools with which to think about oppositional politics in the present age.

For example, the prospects for class struggle are rarely far away from the contributions presented in this volume. Michael Forman’s chapter sets the tone by rehearsing the argument that Marcuse’s critique of affluent society can help us understand the crisis of neoliberal capitalism. Similar in parts to the better known analysis by Nancy Fraser (2013) and others, he argues that the co-optation of the cultural revolution of the 1960s “may have contributed to the victory of the neoliberal project” (pp. 36-7). Marcuse’s critiques of misplaced radicalism and repressive desublimation are ever present here.

Overall, then, the editors are quite clear that they hope that this book will address some shortcomings in much of the critical movement scholarship that has analysed the contemporary wave of protest; firstly, “an inattention to history” and secondly, “a celebratory embrace of current movement practice” (p.

5). While we could of course think of examples that defy these tendencies there is something perceptive about these criticisms; although not all the contributors to this volume have taken them on board. With hindsight, and with our current understanding of the nationalist and right-wing turn that the populist wave has taken most recently, it is possible to say that the book could have benefitted from more engagement with Marcuse's views on repression, recuperation and counter-revolution. This should alert us to the realities for many who are trying to organise in increasingly repressive societies from Egypt to Russia to Turkey.

And while *The Great Refusal* does not stand uncritical towards the politics of Occupy Wall Street and similar moments of rupture in the West, the perspectives offered by reading Marcuse would alert us to the limits of left-populist movement strategies that foreground issues such as big lobbies and wealthy interest groups in politics. Instead, we need to take seriously the strengthening of authoritarian and nationalist reactions to capitalist crises and guard against their appropriation of anti-establishment politics.

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Book review: Nicholas Hildyard, *Licensed Larceny*

Review author: Alexander Dunlap

Nicholas Hildyard, 2016, *Licensed Larceny: Infrastructure, Financial extraction and the Global South*. London: Manchester University Press (144 pp., paperback, £11.99)

Industrial infrastructure surrounds us and is slowly engulfing the planet. Roads, power lines, pipelines, water mains, electrical grids, telecommunication systems and so on, are not only an emblem of modernity, but the foundation of urban and suburban life. People have come to depend on industrial infrastructure, while governments, corporations and international banks constantly strive to build and maintain these systems. Yet the general public knows little about infrastructural development, which is the central topic examined in *Licensed Larceny: Infrastructure, Financial Extraction and the Global South* by Nicholas Hildyard of The Corner House, UK.

This book unravels the evolution of infrastructure systems and the institutions responsible for them, with a focus on the complicated financial dimensions emerging around infrastructural investment, construction and operation. Chapter 1 outlines the global inequality or “organised social misery” created by capital accumulation and the Bretton Woods Institutions’ economic policies—structural adjustment or austerity measures. These policies strip away labour rights, environmental regulations and make market-mechanisms the compass of the future. This economic path enforced gives the private sector greater involvement in infrastructure development, which is articulated through Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs), not only as a popular mode of infrastructural development, but also as a means for corporations to legally drain extraordinary profits from the public sector and population at large.

Hildyard discusses financial extraction from PPP infrastructural development using the example of Lesotho’s Queen “Mamohato Memorial Hospital” in South Africa. He contends that Lesotho, one of the materially poorest countries in the world, is being looted through PPP infrastructural development. The total cost of the hospital is estimated at US\$153.1 million, which was, in fact, 95 per cent publically funded, placing all the risk on the government, while creating an annual cash income stream of US\$1.1 million for eighteen years to the consortium Tespong. *Licensed Larceny* highlights how, PPP contracts legally prevent competitive public works projects—in this case other hospitals—from challenging contracted profit streams.

Hildyard then transitions to detail how infrastructure under various PPP contracts are akin to a backdoor privatization scheme that transforms infrastructure development into a continuous and legally mandated profit making machine. PPP contracts are equated with a scheme where investors

“ensure that for every penny they put into the public plate, several public pennies are taken out” (p. 32), which is a process that, Hildyard argues, helps to sanitize against guilt and displace the blame for further country-wide impoverishment. The outcome is that infrastructure, such as roads, hospitals and so on, are transformed from a public good (paid for and belonging to taxpayers) to an infrastructure designed to externalize and extract increasing profit from public funds. In short, infrastructure becomes a legally mandated apparatus of financial extraction—a money generating machine with high externalized social and ecological costs.

The author continues further with his analysis, discussing “infrastructure-as-asset-class” (p. 41). This means infrastructure itself becomes a tradable financial asset that allows finance to access new income streams directly and indirectly through various types of PPP contracts. These contracts are in the utility sector (utilities, ports, airports, etc), the resource/commodity sector (mining, oil, gas, timber and their facilities), the information sector (cloud-based computing and big data centers) and various natural capital infrastructures (carbon and biodiversity credit schemes). Guaranteed profit margins (minimums from 8-26 per cent) are coded into these infrastructural development schemes. *Licensed Larceny* looks at continent wide infrastructural corridors and transportation logistics in Africa, Latin America and Asia. These are the coordinated plans of countries to create mega-scale logistic networks so as to transport goods and natural resources at increasing speeds. Hildyard outlines the special importance of logistical hubs and transport, noting that the efforts of extractive and commodity industries are rendered pointless if these industries cannot transport their raw materials and goods to processing facilities and store shelves.

Licensed Larceny ends with a discussion of how the book’s findings can be mobilized in relation to taking action to stop or create more socially just infrastructures. Straying away from giving prescriptive answers, there is a discussion of the problems associated with the limited and recuperative approaches of NGOs, policy and institutional acceptance in general. Hildyard stresses the necessity of strategic and tactical thinking with and against these actors, while advocating, after Ivan Illich, friendship as “the political tool of the moment” that is built on mutuality and collective survival that leads into a brief discussion about “working-class culture” (pp. 93, 97). *Licensed Larceny* provides an important and engaging glimpse into a complicated, convoluted and under acknowledged phenomenon: the evolving infrastructural usurpation of financial resources.

Despite the justified concern surrounding the destruction of the private sector and “working-class life”—even if the latter is a bit romanticized—Hildyard recognizes government as the propulsive force behind infrastructure development and its “injustice-generating trajectory” (p. 25). This trajectory is a reminder that industrial infrastructure is a part of colonization that attempts to dominate nature, create controlled environments and imbue these

environments with capitalist ideologies and prescribed forms of life. This is to say, following Foucault, infrastructure is “environmentality”—the manufacturing of environments to condition and shape peoples’ mentalities (see Gabrys 2014). Leslie Sklair (2010, 152) has used the term “mall,” where the mall, in all its loaded symbolism, becomes a verb, an action and an exportable weapon of population control, while creating a material apparatus designed to affirm and normalize capitalist values, consumerist lifestyles and private property regimes.

Licensed Larceny tackles the neglected financial aspects of infrastructure, but between the lines we something else that should be emphasized. Infrastructure, in all its variety and difference (and perhaps, less obvious than a mall), is a special type of weapon that absorbs and transforms the natural environment, while constructing spaces that inculcate people with capitalist values and relationships—the material and psycho-social “accumulation-through-infrastructure” (p. 49). Infrastructure creates environments that encourage particular behaviours, actions and thoughts, which directly or indirectly attempt to stifle and/or direct imaginations, alternatives and protect predatory financial operations. Infrastructure becomes a technology of conquest that constantly works to affirm the existence of governance, economic growth and particular mind-sets by socially engineering environments and desires as a means to systematically extract and process natural resources— both human and non-human. Undeniably infrastructure has benefits, important uses and luxuries that can be made “more just,” but the negative structural impact of these infrastructural systems remain sidelined as they continue to proliferate—a concern that is compounded by the immense financial costs detailed by Hildyard. Thinking of infrastructure as a technology of colonization is useful as it directs human activity, reinforces particular value systems and in a sense weaponizes space for the extraction of natural resources. Meanwhile, people are increasingly dependent on infrastructure that clouds critical faculties, while inculcating acceptance and apathy in the face of immense social, ecological and financial cost incur by infrastructural development.

The enchantment with and complications of resisting infrastructural development is outside the scope of this book, which remains a personal interest. However, Hildyard provides an impressive first step into the neglected area of infrastructural finance. *Licensed Larceny* is highly recommended for anyone, inside or outside universities, with an interest in mega-projects, infrastructure and industrial corridors.

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About the review author

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Book review: Javier Sicilia, *El Deshabitado*

Review author: Andrew Smolski

Javier Sicilia, 2016, *El Deshabitado*. Mexico City: Grijalbo (525 pp., paperback, MXN\$299.00)

The Poet, an important figure in Mexico, begins *El Deshabitado*, the autobiography of his sorrow and struggle, not at the moment of shock, but with togetherness. “It is good to have y’all here,” words spoken by his daughter, Estefanía (p. 17). These words, which console Javier Sicilia, are directed at the reader who has chosen to join the poet in an intense journey. The tragedy of the human search for justice. In this, we are participating in Gandhi’s proverb, oft-cited by Sicilia, “It doesn’t matter that we arrive at the fruit. What matters is to have been walking towards it.” Or, as Sicilia says in a moment of despair, “even with my exhaustion, I keep trusting in that poor and miserable needle fixed on a river to be found beyond the future’s north” (p. 203).

On March 28, 2011, Juan Francisco Sicilia Ortega, son of the Poet, together with six others, was murdered and thrown into the trunk of a car by brutal criminals. The savage massacre, like so many horrendous events that had preceded it, shook Cuernavaca, a major city in Morelos, México to its core. A nation wept alongside a father who let out a cry, “*Estamos hasta la madre*,” which translates as “we’ve had enough.” Sicilia takes us along with him, through smoking one too many cigarettes and angry bouts with the absurdity of a world of flesh. His autobiography is the byproduct of a cruel society and a lethal War on Drugs, one that should not have to be written. It only exists because we as a species have failed, because our elites so corrupted by Mammon and worship of power lead us to Armageddon.

Yet, just as it is tragedy, *El Deshabitado* is a narrative of resistance, a discourse on Christian anarchism, the roots of our political being, and the utopian possibilities persisting in the mystic unknown. It is a conversation between Sicilia and the many, wise people he knows, meets, and fights alongside. The reader operates as a voyeur-participant, thinking out how to make multiple better worlds. Those utopian worlds are for Sicilia places that follow Adorno’s categorical imperative, to never allow Auschwitz to happen again. We are constantly caught between hope and horror, constantly called to end the banal machinations of formal power.

The confrontation with formal power, its symbolic dethroning as citizen confronts the main representative of the State, the Mexican President. Sicilia meets Calderón as the flawed human he is, not as President, by stipulating that if they meet, Calderón must meet Sicilia as Felipe, not as President. As if in a warp, a moment at which Sicilia, like Sarah, yells at the Goblin King, “You have

no power over me.” But, this is not the movies, and the warp closes back in, Sicilia trapped once more with his candle, carrying the small flame against the oppressors who blow mercilessly.

That candle burned bright with the 2011 march from Cuernavaca to Mexico City’s historic *Zócalo*, arm-in-arm with the victims of state and cartel barbarity. Walking by his side, Nepomuceno Moreno, a valiant father whose clamoring for justice and his son’s return was met with his assassination at the hands of the narco-State. Sicilia shares these stories throughout *El Deshabitado*, an indictment of a series of egregious policies that has transformed the country into a mass grave. Sicilia himself, and his family, faced death threats, part of why Estefanía fled with her son, Diego, to Europe. Sicilia brings this reality of activism to the fore.

Sicilia manages to make us feel caught there with him in real life, floating above family fights, as theory itself becomes flesh. Struggle not as heroic myths, but as daily grinds. There is no folklore of invincibility, but vulnerabilities, emotions, and failings amongst success. Throughout *El Deshabitado*, Sicilia returns to memories of visiting Estefanía and Diego, at Saint-Antoine-l’Abbaye, in France. Estefanía repetitively chides him for participating in *El Movimiento por la Paz con Justicia y Dignidad*, for putting their family in danger to the point that she and her son fled to France, creating familial insecurity while challenging national insecurity. These tensions are debated, laid bare, and we, the readers, come to understand how beyond the image of the social activist at a march is the practice of everyday life.

The exile of his family members also represents a crucial point about Sicilia’s social position in Mexican society, as does the power of the people who inhabit his life. This power elevates his victim status. For Sicilia does maintain important connections, such as to Ambassador Tomás Calvillo with whom Sicilia was staying in the Philippines when they found out that Juan was murdered. Sicilia is deeply embedded in Mexico’s literary community and a longstanding participant in non-violent movements against modern society’s propensity for violence. Sicilia is a cosmopolitan actor, utilizing privilege as a weapon against the system. Sicilia critically reflects on the privilege he is afforded for his class and status in society, although perhaps not enough.

The understanding of his social position and the goals that he does display comes from an anarchism that he says is based in the Gospels and traditional mysticism. Drawing inspiration from liberation theology, with particular emphasis on The Beatitudes and on the command to make the last first. From there, Sicilia arrives at a profound understanding of *agape*, of a love that extends brotherhood even to his son’s murderer. The Antonine commune, Saint-Antoine-l’Abbaye, where his family is exiled, is based on this attempt to create the kernel of the kingdom of God. Work together, eat together, share, build a community. It echoes Sicilia’s poem, entitled Lucas 1, 30-33:

[the gods and angels] went away from Earth and left us with a fine and delicate pearl / free at last / owners of our senses and the fall / beyond our history's way / closer to the sense of it all / inside, very inside, in the deepest part / there where the ministry was made flesh and lives with us. (Sicilia 2004, review author's translation)

It is this politico-theological register with which Sicilia relays current events, both as what really happened and as Sicilia's re-creation of what happened. It is the discourse he occupies when he talks about organizing, goals, and utopia. In this register, he maintains a fidelity to documentation, with an annex containing 84 pages of declarations, letters, correspondence, and end notes. In this sense, it is what it claims to be, a literary autobiography, one steeped in philosophy, theology, politics, journalism and ethics.

Reading *El Deshabitado* is a profound experience, and quite unnerving. For, what does it mean to read another's pain? What does it mean to read another's pain to learn? How do you describe a book predicated on silence, no words, on a suffocation of life? How do you describe said work to implore others to read it and to think out how a social movement comes and goes as struggle ebbs and flows?

In *El Deshabitado*, the confrontation with the eternal return of brutality and the counterattack of righteous indignation raises these powerful, unsettling questions for a reader, or for reviewer. My answer, to best represent Sicilia's maxim describing the little candle we each hold, that we each protect against the oppressor's wind. As Sicilia ends his book, so shall we think of life, "towards hell" on our way to do combat injustice with our tiny candles.

To demonstrate my gratitude to Javier Sicilia, whose writings have inspired me over the years, I would like to repeat his demands:

the San Andres Accords must be respected, stop the war, free José Manuel Mireles, his self-defense forces, and all political prisoners, bring justice for the victims of violence, judge the criminal politicians and functionaries, and open the mass graves of Jojutla. (Sicilia 2017, review author's translation)

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Book Review: William K. Carroll, *Expose, Oppose, Propose*

Review author: Andrew Kettler

William K. Carroll, 2016, *Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice*. London: Zed Books; Halifax: Fernwood Publishing (236 pp., paperback, CAN\$25.00; £22.99)

William K. Carroll's *Expose, Oppose, Propose: Alternative Policy Groups and the Struggle for Global Justice* (2016) offers network and qualitative analysis of the counter-hegemonic tactics applied by transnational alternative policy groups (TAPGs), as these organizations attempt to resist the fatalism of the leftist project after the reassertion of neoliberalism in the wake of the recent global economic crisis. Carroll's work places much narrative weight on a general understanding of the financial hegemony that supports alliances between international banking and Western governments, which perpetuates neoliberalism through both rhetoric within the superstructure and economic control at the base. Carroll's work is essentially a critique of marketization and privatization that focuses on how counter-hegemonic groups work to resist NGOization, or the embedding of their motives within hegemonic ideologies. The contemporary left, for Carroll, has failed to advance productive alternatives to the hegemonic narratives of finance capital, either through command economies or direct revolutionary action. TAPGs provide an alternative means of critique. Carroll's fully contoured analysis of these TAPGs critiques neoliberal finance capital as the dominant market force in world politics. However, with recent political changes throughout the West, time will define whether Carroll's work remains as biting as it would have before recent reactionary sweeps altered the political landscape.

Carroll, of the University of Victoria, advocates for a rejection of liberal pluralism because it is an ideology that is exceedingly well suited for the crisis capitalism of the contemporary age. In the vein of Fredric Jameson's work in *Postmodernism* (1991), Carroll understands postmodern liberal pluralism as offering an increasing fragmentation of cultures and identities. For Carroll, what is needed for leftist progress is not identity politics, but rather an understanding of the shared fate of the environment and humanity if finance capitalism is left to continue unabated. Consequently, what is provided in *Expose, Oppose, Propose* is a form of "people power" that unites significant numbers of subalterns of the left through bridging the distances created between disparate groups within liberal pluralist societies.

Carroll is joined by co-authors for many of his chapters, but his solo-authored analyses are the driving critical force in *Expose, Oppose, Propose*. He

specifically critiques neoliberalism through the goals of “justice globalism” that he deems proper for honest and aggressive evaluation of possible decision making that can avoid hegemonic ideologies. These forms of critique become more authentic to the global masses through increasing links between the West and the Global South by networking TAPG movements. To complete his analysis of the means that TAPGs are applying to create justice globalism through these networks, Carroll and his colleagues interviewed 91 leaders within some of the world’s most prominent TAPGs. Examples of these leading TAPGs include: Third World Institute/Social Watch, Participatory Research in Africa, International Forum on Globalization, People’s Plan Study Group, Centre de Recherche et d’Information pour le Développement, Centre for Civil Society, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Transnational Institute, Focus on the Global South, and Developing Alternatives with Women for a New Era. Most of these interviews were performed during 2012-2013, in the wake of the global economic crisis, which possibly dates many of Carroll’s conclusions to a critical era that may have already passed. This temporal concern has only been heightened with the failure of neoliberal hegemony to resist populist and proto-fascist border protection movements throughout the Western world.

In general, Carroll hopes to discover forms of praxis that link critical theories against the neoliberal state with practical forms of engagement that mobilize into political action. In the first chapter, Carroll summarizes resistance to neoliberalism that focuses on both aggressive critique and nuanced dialogue. Carroll searches subaltern counter-publics, to borrow Nancy Fraser’s terminology, as less spectacular than visible movements like Occupy and the Battle in Seattle, but still as important for creating change against neoliberalism. These forms of neoliberal dominance are exemplified, for Carroll, through organizations like the Atlas Economic Research Foundation Network and the many market-oriented organizations that emerged from the Mont Pèlerin Society, founded by market theorist F.A. Hayek in 1947. Carroll often ponders: how can TAPGs, which need capital’s funds and public engagement, avoid becoming embedded in elite networks of hegemony that distribute NGO funding and control media apparatuses? This constant questioning leads to many nuanced analysis, but often fails to define conclusive answers for how TAPGs should work to avoid such pitfalls.

Chapter two, written with Elaine Coburn, explores KPM, the knowledge production and mobilization that leading TAPGs use throughout the world. The authors analyze these patterns through interviews with TAPG leaders. Chapter three, written with J.P. Sapinski, explores how well these TAPGs are able to use KPM to embed new knowledge within the global civil sphere through linking the West and the Global South. Carroll specifically highlights the spatial dynamics at play in the structuring of links between numerous leading TAPGs. In Chapter four, Carroll defines ways in which TAPGs have altered neoliberal hegemony, even against what can appear to be a fully adaptable and successful global

capitalist class. Despite these gains, Carroll discovers an essentially uphill battle faced by TAPGs for funding, especially after the recent economic crisis.

Much of Carroll's analysis explores how TAPGs can enter alternative knowledge into the public sphere, thereby offering new forms of understanding as part of the mainstream, rather than as merely a critique of the mainstream. In attempting to enter alternative knowledge into conventional forms of thought an inherent conceptual problem often occurs, whereby alternative knowledge must frame itself through mainstream knowledge patterns, and the ideological purity of alternative knowledge may be partially altered and polluted to be understood by those who are under the false consciousness of hegemonic common sense. Carroll thus explores how TAPGs navigate these minefields where messages must be made attractive, but in becoming eye-catching are possibly embedded into hegemonic language and common sense.

Chapter five, also written with J.P. Sapinski, explores the many fears of NGOization amongst proponents and members of the TAPG movement. NGOization involves how TAPGs are often forced to de-radicalize their critiques to reach new funding opportunities. In this analysis, Carroll and Sapinski find TAPGs functioning much like NGOs through the inherent links to global state apparatuses and private finance capitalism, but also offer that resistance is not futile as ideological purity can remain for goals of justice globalism within TAPGs. Carroll follows with a chapter outlining different forms of cognitive praxis that he finds common and productive among the most successful of TAPGs within the civil sphere. These essentially focus on how TAPGs work to enter alternative knowledge forms into public discourse. Chapter seven explores how these forms of knowledge can become practice through four modes of the actual doing of work by TAPGs: networking, research and analysis, training and learning, and outreach. Chapter eight then summarizes how utopian transformation can start from the nuanced practices of TAPGs against neoliberal state apparatuses through the creation of alternative knowledge about the environment and global justice in the spirit of *Ubuntu*, a South African concept that focuses on solidarity, mutual care, and community. *Ubuntu* emerges from protecting the rights and powers of the individual to create community and retain the commons.

Carroll hopes for continuing critiques of neoliberalism to occupy a discursive space that now exists due to the crisis of economy and ecology that was constitutive of the recent economic crisis. However, much has changed within the last political years that offers concerns with whether Carroll's work continues to be applicable to the present state of the West, or is simply an interesting and productive theoretical enterprise that conceptualizes a moment rather than a structure. Specifically, what happens to the TAPG industry when the enemy is no longer neoliberal hegemony? Must the TAPG counter-hegemonic project shift tactics to resist the more pressing concerns of neo-fascism and border control in the United States and Western Europe? How should the Marxist models of TAPGs change their tactics in the face of a new

enemy when the political doctrines of TAPGs were reformed in the last three years against neoliberal free trade? Specifically, TAPGs must soon discover their opponent, whether that adversary remains neoliberalism and globalization or has taken on a new and darker appearance based upon national isolation, border control, ethnic pride, and economic sovereignty as hegemonic touchstones for the falsely conscious and consenting masses.

Of more direct concern with Carroll's specific work, rather than his publication dates, is how the author uses bureaucratic language to style his analyses. Often using the bureaucratic language of acronyms and excessive clarity as a means of critiquing the neoliberal bureaucracy, Carroll's analysis seems to lack the emotional force and libidinal abstraction necessary for changing the meanings of labor resistance within the public sphere. Should the language of resistance be so devoid of emotion? This reviewer often wondered whether a bureaucracy, especially the neoliberal bureaucracy that has grown carcinomatous through the capacities of finance capital, can create a language so hegemonic that any attempt to deconstruct that structure has only that language to use for critical analysis. This reviewer appeals, in the wake of David Graeber's recent *Utopia of Rules* (2015): whether it is possible to find a form of critical language that does not need to use bureaucratic semantics? Will revolutionary catharsis emerge more often from libidinal and poetic language, rather than model a boilerplate language off of the very bureaucracy that revolutionary liberation must critique? Can a direct assault on neoliberal hegemony and NGOs come from organizations that act, talk, and function like NGOs?

Expose, Oppose, Propose generally applies Marxist ideology to critique neoliberal hegemony. Analyzing the role of TAPGs, or private policy organizations that resist neoliberal hegemony through expanding alternative knowledge, the edition provides numerous small examples of how TAPGs avoid becoming neoliberal NGOs, even after the intense funding crises that followed the global economic meltdown. Carroll's work is essentially a direct assault on neoliberalism that portrays minor variations that can chip away at the cloudy world of finance capital through direct actions by TAPGs. Carroll thus continues work to bind the fragmentation of ideologies that are deemed essential for the perpetuation of the forms of liberal pluralism he critiques as obstructive to revolutionary change. Carroll displays this critique visually, through showing the continuing links between organizations of the left, qualitatively, through interviews with TAPG leaders about how they expand alternative knowledge, and quantitatively, through categorizing the numerous TAPGs and their neoliberal NGO foils. His work is to remain important if neoliberal hegemony remains the force that the left must challenge in the coming decades. However, TAPGs must quickly understand if recent right-wing movements throughout the world have shattered dreams of neoliberalism, or are simply enforcing a new neoliberal false consciousness upon the populist masses who preach the Prosperity Gospel, find in narratives of climate change the absurdist debaucheries of profiting journalists, and perceive most forms of rigorous academic knowledge as inherently dubious. Only time will tell if Carroll's

superior analysis of TAPGs can continue as productive as world forces shift to more regressive rhetorics of oppression.

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Book Review: Gladys Tzul Tzul, *Sistemas de Gobierno Comunal Indígena*

Review Author: Meztli Yoalli Rodríguez Aguilera

Gladys Tzul Tzul, 2016, *Sistemas de Gobierno Comunal Indígena: Mujeres Y Tramas de Parentesco En Chuimeq'ena'*. Guatemala: Sociedad Comunitaria de Estudios Estratégicos, Tzi' Kin Centro de Investigación y Pluralismo Jurídico, Maya' Wuj Editorial (220 pp., paperback, MXN\$150)

En el contexto actual, de extractivismo y violencia capitalista, *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena* el primero libro de Gladys Tzul, es una lectura necesaria. Tzul nos presenta las luchas comunitarias de mujeres y hombres en Guatemala por la reproducción de la vida y la defensa del territorio en su comunidad natal Chuimeq'ena' (también llamado Totonicapán), la cual, es una lucha no sólo anticolonial sino también anticapitalista.

A partir de una mirada crítica a los Acuerdos de Paz, Tzul explora cómo el Mayanismo así como proyectos integracionistas a la nación, son intentos fallidos en la búsqueda de una política distinta para la transformación de los pueblos en Guatemala. Para la autora, una de las estrategias centrales para la defensa del territorio así como de la vida comunal son las tramas de parentesco en las comunidades.

Tzul nos describe el dolor después masacre del 4 de octubre de 2012 tras la movilización de varias comunidades en Chuimeq'ena'. La respuesta de 48 cantones frente al dolor colectivo fue una movilización para frenar a un poder violento. Los levantamientos son parte de una genealogía histórica de otras revueltas de las comunidades. Tzul hace un recuento histórico sobre algunas de las insurgencias comunales en la historia de Guatemala para la reproducción de la vida y la producción de lo común.

Como punto central en *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena*, Tzul explora la complejidad así como las estrategias que tejen las mujeres indígenas en tramas comunitarias defendiendo la tierra y la vida. Frente a una noción liberal, es decir, de propiedad individual, las luchas comunales que Tzul describe proponen desestabilizar las jerarquías genéricas en el acceso a la tierra.

Gladys Tzul, contrario a posicionamientos que aspiran a la universalidad de la igualdad, propone entender la lucha de las mujeres indígenas dentro de sus comunidades, en lo que ella nombra como una “inclusión diferenciada” (p. 170). Tzul retoma el concepto de “la política del deseo” de la feminista italiana Lia Cigarini, para reinterpretarlo desde las mujeres indígenas como una forma emancipadora, aquella que, parafraseando a la autora, trasciende la política de los derechos. Gladys Tzul entiende el deseo comunal como “la capacidad de

plantearse un asunto a resolver y de producirse colectivamente los medios materiales y simbólicos para superarlo” (p. 177).

En el primer capítulo, la autora responde a la pregunta ¿Por qué pensar lo indígena en clave comunal? Para Tzul, la categoría “indígena” es una creación colonial y estatal para seguir controlando a las comunidades, enmarcándolas dentro de leyes, usos, costumbres y tradición. De igual forma, la autora hace una crítica al movimiento Maya, pues, de acuerdo a ella, no estaba construido por comunidades de base, sino más bien por organizaciones que tenían proyectos desarrollistas, además de que la decisión en asambleas no era parte de su mecánica. Por el contrario, Tzul propone pensar la lucha comunal en términos estratégicos; es decir, a partir de las alianzas de parentesco pero también a partir de Asambleas comunitarias, en las que se produce la decisión para la conservación de los medios concretos para la reproducción de la vida o el territorio: “el agua, los caminos, los bosques, los cementerios, las escuelas, los lugares sagrados, los rituales, las fiestas, en suma, la riqueza concreta y simbólica que las comunidades producen [...]” (p. 39).

No obstante, la autora en varias ocasiones recalca que no existe una esencia homogeneizante de lo comunal indígena, sino, por el contrario, está lleno de contradicciones y complejidades. Tzul enuncia que lo comunal no es exclusivo ni algo que existe inherentemente en las comunidades indígenas. Para la autora, lo comunal es entendido como “una relación social atravesada por una serie de complejidades constituidas a partir de la estructuración de tácticas políticas para resistir, responder y fracturar la dominación” (p. 54). Es decir, es lo comunal, a través de una estrategia política de alianzas de parentesco, una potencia emancipadora, para el uso común de la tierra y, con ello, para la vida. Tzul describe como parte de la contradicción en lo comunal la existencia de una estructura patriarcal. Dicho parentesco está dictado por la patrilinealidad, es decir, se hereda la tierra por la línea paterna y masculina, pero que no logra desaparecer la participación política de las mujeres para la reproducción de la vida y en la producción de decisión.

En el segundo capítulo, la autora hace una recapitulación histórica de algunos momentos importantes de resistencia por luchas comunales en Guatemala. Nos deja claro que el k’ax k’ol, o trabajo comunitario, es parte central de la producción de lo común desde sus orígenes y hasta el día de hoy. Tzul retoma las rebeliones indígenas anticoloniales desde el siglo XVI hasta el siglo XVII. Asimismo, Tzul describe un momento clave en la historia, a finales del siglo XIX (en 1870), cuando comunidades compraron colectivamente tierras para uso comunal, ampliando así su territorio. Tzul termina este recuento con el análisis en el siglo XX y los Acuerdos de Paz. En este capítulo, la autora introduce el concepto de soberanía. No obstante, no es una soberanía entendida desde el punto de vista estatal e institucional, sino, por el contrario, es definida como “la capacidad histórica de decidir y organizar colectivamente la vida en un determinado territorio” (p. 90). Es una recuperación del concepto para repensar

las formas de autogobierno y organización colectiva subversiva frente a un poder que busca imponer sus decisiones.

En los distintos momentos históricos, las luchas comunales se enfrentaron a la herida colonial de distintas formas y que permanece en la memoria colectiva de las comunidades; es decir, no son rebeliones que aparecen de la nada. Durante el siglo XX, de acuerdo a *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena*, hubieron principalmente tres fuerzas que peleaban la soberanía sobre territorios: la izquierda, principalmente materializada en la Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG), los sistemas de gobierno indígena y, por último, las fuerzas armadas. La autora afirma que los Acuerdos de Paz para terminar la guerra en Guatemala fueron únicamente negociados entre la izquierda y las fuerzas armadas, lo que dejó fuera la voz de las comunidades indígenas. Una de las críticas que la autora hace a los Acuerdos de Paz es la creación de políticas desarrollistas para el campo basadas en proyectos crediticios, es decir, de mercantilización y privatización de las tierras. Es por esto que la potencia emancipadora de las luchas comunales por la tierra, son evidentemente luchas anticapitalistas y anticoloniales.

El capítulo 3 y 4, profundiza sobre la estrategia política para producir los medios concretos para la reproducción de la vida, por medio del parentesco, pero también sus contradicciones, sobretodo respecto al patrilinealidad. Tzul nos recuerda que la fiesta es una de los momentos más potentes donde se produce lo común, en donde las mujeres tienen un papel central en la organización. En el último capítulo, la autora se centra en la idea de inclusión diferenciada, refiriéndose a las mujeres y su existencia en la vida comunal. Tzul decide llamarle inclusión diferenciada, para evitar el dicotómico inclusión/exclusión que simplifica toda la complejidad de la vida comunal. Asimismo, Tzul recupera la noción de trans-formación de Gutiérrez y Salazar para abordar las formas en que se producen y reproducen “las formas colectivas de habitar el mundo desde otro lugar que no sea la dominación, la explotación y el despojo” (p. 172). Dicha trans-formación, se realiza simultáneamente con la conservación. Esta tensión entre transformación y conservación se producen dentro de la misma lucha comunal, sobre todo, respecto al equilibrio entre géneros. Tzul afirma que, por ejemplo, las mujeres indígenas “queremos simultáneamente seguir habitando y conservando nuestra tierra comunal, al tiempo que deseamos alterar parte de las estructuras políticas internas -el parentesco- que la han hecho posible” (p. 173).

Es en este capítulo donde Tzul despliega la idea de política del deseo, como una política que escapa de los derechos individualistas de las luchas feministas liberales. Una política del deseo que es profundamente anticapitalista puesto que para la autora, las mujeres indígenas desean que la tierra sea heredada no sólo por medio del parentesco y también desean que no sea usada como propiedad privada. El matrimonio, limita las posibilidades de las mujeres indígenas para, retomando a Raquel Gutiérrez, “poder disponer de sí mismas” (p. 177). Al mismo tiempo, como Tzul advierte, los deseos de las mujeres no

caben en el texto, pues son plurales y diversos. Lo importante aquí también es la lectura que se le da al rol de las mujeres en la vida comunal. No se trata, como bien señala la autora, en describir a las mujeres en opresión o exclusión, como se leería desde una narrativa feminista liberal. Se trata más bien, de complejizar el papel de las mujeres como protagonistas en su lucha por la reproducción de la vida, al mismo tiempo que desean transformar ciertos aspectos de la vida comunal.

En conclusión, *Sistemas de gobierno comunal indígena* nos da luz, frente a las diversas caras del neo-extractivismo voraz, sobre cómo pensar las luchas comunales para la trans-formación de nuestra vida cotidiana, al mismo tiempo que nos muestra un ejemplo de producción de lo común, más allá del capital y como una lucha anti-colonial.

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**Book review: William K. Carroll and Kanchan Sarker
(eds), *A World to Win***

Review author: Laurence Cox

William K. Carroll and Kanchan Sarker (Eds), 2016, *A World to Win: Contemporary Social Movements and Counter-Hegemony*. Arbeiter Ring: Winnipeg (413 pp., paperback, CAN\$24.95)

William K. Carroll and Kanchan Sarker's *A World to Win* is a collection of writing by Canadian activists and activist-scholars on contemporary social movements which they see as constituting "agencies of *counter-hegemony*." The book packs a lot into a small space: Part I's seven chapters broadly discuss the situation of contemporary movements at a fairly general theoretical level; Part II's seven chapters cover different specific movements in Canada; while Part III's four explore the challenges of solidarity and alliance-building. Together these 18 chapters are very diverse in scope and style, but the tone is much more consistent, a tribute to good editing.

Beyond this broad arrangement, the structure of the book is largely given in Carroll's opening chapter. This presents the book as a whole as seeking to develop a praxis-oriented approach to social movements, one which avoids either a purely theoretical analysis or a purely pragmatic "what is happening and what we should do". To this end Carroll also produces an overview and attempted synthesis of three different perspectives on social movements and to draw out lessons from each for activists. These are the pragmatic-reformist (essentially canonical US social movement studies), the epochal-interpretive (starting from the North American interpretation of European debates on new social movements, to which are added authors like Laclau and Mouffe, Foucault and Chris Dixon), and a neo-Gramscian form of historical materialism, which Carroll bases on Marx and Gramsci, Michael Lebowitz and David Harvey, and a lengthy discussion of Habermas. Carroll is kind enough to include my own work with Alf Nilsen in this latter perspective.

Carroll draws five lessons from each of these three approaches. From the pragmatic-reformist approach, he distills some practical organising advice around interest mobilisation: what movements need to do in order to win at the most basic level. The epochal-interpretive approach is presented in an optative mode: movements "are" prefigurative, opposed to state-centrism, reflexive etc. – but also, implicitly, they should be all these things if they are to respond effectively to the nature of contemporary society. Gramscian historical materialism, finally, appears to tell us what movements from below have to do if they are to transform social relations: challenge movements from above, construct counter-hegemonic projects, develop solidarity and alliances, resist alienation and decolonise lifeworlds.

The “lessons” Carroll draws in *A World to Win* are very useful for activist thinking, and this core section of the chapter could readily be used in more activist classroom settings or as a background paper for movement discussions. I was left wondering, though, about what has happened to movements’ own theorising since Gramsci. Except for Chris Dixon, almost every post-Gramsci author engaged with is primarily academic in their work. I did wonder whether more could not be done with more closely movement-linked authors like Hilary Wainwright and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, with the implicit theories contained in the organising practice of the Zapatistas and People’s Global Action – not to mention some of Latin America’s new governments and the Rojava revolution, all surely key test cases for the wider systemic transformations invoked in the introduction. There is, I think, something in the book’s reliance on university-based theories which is not ideal when movements are trying to develop their own counter-hegemonic capacity.

The various chapter authors, however, are as much activist as they are academic. Space prevents an in-depth account of all 17 chapters, but the overall standard is excellent, with robust political arguments, solid empirical analyses and good writing: only a handful fall below the standards implied by attempting to develop a counter-hegemonic perspective and sink into intra-movement or intra-academic polemic of a more sectarian kind.

Far more chapters deserve to be highlighted. Steve D’Arcy’s chapter, subtitled “how activists articulate their politics and why it matters” reads the shift from New Left to contemporary political vocabularies in a constructive key. Lesley Wood and Craig Fortier trace the shifting construction of political coercion in Canada in ways that combine recognition of the harsh realities with an attention to the scope for effective resistance and delegitimation. Elaine Coburn and Cliff Atleo’s chapter attempts to theorise Indigenous resistance from an Indigenous perspective, highlighting a wider and alternative sense of how the world could and should be. Matthew Corbeil and Jordan House explore both the practical limits and the wider possibilities indicated by labour solidarity networks using direct action. Finally, Jacinthe Michaud explores historical moments of synergy between feminist activism and other political movements to discuss what is needed for the real transformation of movement coalitions.

As a non-Canadian reader, I found the empirical range of the chapters gave a lively insight into the many dimensions of popular struggle in Canada. The level of the debate was also inspiring, and left me wondering about the context of Canadian ways of thinking social movements. Along with the three modes of theorising identified in the introduction, we also have Coburn and Atleo’s Nuu-chah-nulth perspective as well as others framed within more conventional Marxist approaches that are strong on the critique of issues and structure, and weak on movements and struggle (what we can actually do). Overall, there is no doubt from this collection about the quality of thinking within Canadian writing on movements; but I would have liked some more of a sense of a conversation between these different modes.

If it is unfair to hope for explicit reflection on the forces shaping theorising within Canadian movements and in Canadian academia, surely part of a Gramscian perspective is to attempt to construct more of a relationship between these different elements. As it is, the chapters are not “potatoes in a sack”; but the conversation is not, yet, counter-hegemonic in the sense used in the book. Or, perhaps, in the wider world? What we know from the outside about the strength of First Nations resistance to the petroleum industry in particular, the strength of movements at the level of individual provinces or the organisation of summit protests suggests that there is a wider, and more effective, way of working together and that the rest of the global North at least can learn something useful from Canadian experiences – but it was not obvious to me on closing the book how this capacity for solidarity is supported, developed and theorised.

One important question for activists lies in the book’s subtitle. To the best of my knowledge Gramsci never used the phrase counter-hegemony. It is certainly consistent with his thought, but in practice is used in two rather different ways. In one form, counter-hegemony would be the development of an incipient *new* hegemony: this was, after all, Gramsci’s own perspective. This form of counter-hegemony then involves different movements finding common perspectives and shared interests in the formation of a strategic alliance for a new kind of society; and Carroll’s introduction firmly situates the book within this perspective.

Conversely, there are usages of “counter-hegemony” which are (implicitly) Foucauldian and highlight simply any resistance, from a given location, to existing forms of hegemony. An optimistic reading treats this situation as itself radical, in a way which neither Gramsci nor Foucault gives us much warrant for: historically, most forms of localised resistance or resentment do not get beyond that, and we are left with the gap between their actors who remain “trapped in their own lives”, as EP Thompson puts it, and the might-have-beens glimpsed in their resistance. More sharply, Gary Kinsman’s chapter highlights how queer organising went from being a counter-hegemonic movement to part of a new, neoliberal hegemony: single-issue politics at the expense of other movements is no victory.

Reading *A World to Win*, I felt that its chapters veered from one to another perspective on counter-hegemony, along with a third kind, exemplified by the title of Coburn and Atleo’s chapter, “Not just another social movement”, highlighting the extent to which some First Nations populations remain in a position to resist not just neoliberalism but capitalism (if not always class society) from outside. Similarly, Michaud highlight the very real challenges involved in transforming movement alliances in ways that really take feminism (and, she notes, anti-racism, indigenous politics and LGBTQ activism) on board. The irreducibility, in this sense, of the different ways of life and subjectivities from which movements grow makes the challenge of constructing counter-hegemony a very substantial one indeed; or, from a Gramscian perspective, it is

one which grows out of wider and deeper levels of popular participation in the war of position to construct a different world.

If the introductory chapter does address some of these difficulties (and can usefully be reread after finishing the book), the chapter sequence leaves us *in media res*, with these problems still open and unresolved; and this is, I think, a more honest way of thinking the challenge of counter-hegemony. Fully-blown counter-hegemonic alliances and projects tend to develop at the height of global social movement waves, which tip over into revolutions: the current wave, within which this book has been produced, has had its revolutionary moments (in Latin America and MENA) but Canada, like most of western Europe, has suffered the curse of being sufficiently involved in the wider global wave, and sufficiently mobilised, to grasp the possibility of going further without actually reaching that point. This is, obviously enough, a point where radical theory can be a particularly useful intervention, in trying to develop a shared analysis both of the current situation and of what the next step might be; it is also frustrating, in that the limits of what actually-existing movements can do is continually contrasted with what their most articulate and conscious elements need them to become. Along with struggling for better (broader-based *and* more transformative) alliances in practice, movements also struggle at this point to express an understanding of their own action in terms of its own “zone of proximal development”, the highest potential for “what comes next” that can credibly be articulated to an activist audience. *A World to Win* is a valuable contribution to that process.

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Book review: Robert M. Press, *Ripples of Hope*

Review author: Richa Biswas

Robert M. Press, 2015, *Ripples of Hope: How ordinary People Resist Repression without Violence*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press (327 pp., hardcover, €99.00).

The book *Ripples of Hope* by Robert M. Press enunciates a new version of *satyagraha* (a form of non-violent resistance coined and practiced by Mahatma Gandhi) in the contemporary world where ordinary individuals stepping out of the relative safe enclosure of anonymity to participate in the non-violent tradition of Gandhi or Martin Luther King to challenge the repressive regimes in Sub-Saharan Africa. The book focuses on forms of dissidence practised by ordinary individuals or small group activists that do not replicate the familiar and traditional grammar of movement studies. This dynamics of ordinary public mobilization brings forth a new focus on “individual activism” in the genesis of social movement which again anticipates new formations that has led to the actualization of novel political uprisings or imaginaries. *Ripples of Hope* focuses on micro and macro level forms of social mobilizations in three African countries, namely Sierra Leone, Liberia and Kenya, from each study we get new theoretical perspectives that allow rich understanding of social movements, democratization, and mechanisms of how non-violent movements operate in repressive settings.

The book is based on extensive archival and empirical research (it contains 170 interviews). It includes case studies of the three African countries which experienced long repressive rules. In these countries, individuals and small groups of activists led non-violent resistance which resulted in the ouster of autocratic leaders. This has established a new trend in the domain of popular mobilization in these African contexts.

Ripples of Hope argues that non-violent social movements in repressive settings are sometimes likely to generate “individual activism”, a much understudied part of social movement studies. This kind of activism appears when repression is at a high level and resistance is likely to decline into abeyance and become fragmented because it has to wait for safer times to emerge more openly and formally. Hence there will have to be “organization without organization” of ordinary individuals in such coercive contexts, who can only resort to non-violent modes of mobilisation as they do not have the means to organize large scale and externally resourced tropes of militancy (p. 25). Non-violent resistance, the book shows, can take place even under severe repression without favourable conditions or “political opportunities” and non-violent social mobilization in repressive settings also involves a broader and more complex array of participants in more fluid modes of actions than is generally recognized.

Gradually, such forms of activism grow into a culture of resistance unless blocked by extreme repression.

After introducing the theoretical framework, *Ripples of Hope* subsequently deals empirically with various forms of non-violent activism as practiced in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Kenya. The first section outlines the resistance history of Sierra Leone. In 1977, a group of students of Fourah Bay College staged a major protest against the repressive regime of President Siaka Stevens. Resistance continued in abeyance in the form of the regular publication of the dissident, independent newspaper, *The Tablet*. By the time the brutal rebel group AFRC seized power in the late 1990s, a culture of resistance had been developed but resistance efforts were forced to operate from the underground because it was too dangerous to mount any open resistance. During this period of high repression some independent journalists like Paul Kamara, owner of the *For di People* newspaper, continued publishing clandestinely, spreading the “ripples of hope” that it was possible to resist the military junta. Their goal was to support “humanity, freedom and justice” (p. 83) which would emancipate the people from violent incidents of rape, beating and bloody executions, things that used to happen frequently. The Women’s Forum that emerged in 1994 included political, religious and groups, among others. There was mass, informal noncooperation that closed schools and businesses. This made many flee the war-torn country and slowed government bureaucracy to a crawl. A clandestine radio station (Radio Democracy) encouraged noncooperation that continued until the junta was ousted by international military intervention enabling the elected government to return from exile on March 1998.

The second part of *Ripples of Hope* shows how social movements were nurtured and functioned in Liberia. The violent Samuel Doe regime (1980-90) repressed the anti-government social mobilization which had developed in the 1970s and forced it to function in a clandestine manner. The subsequent non-violent resistance ranged from legal challenges by individual lawyers (Tiawan Gongloe, Aloysius Toe, and others) reporting by independent journalists’ statements by outspoken clergy and coalition building with international human rights groups. These methods subsequently succeeded in forcing the brutal regime to succumb to public resistance and international pressure.

The next section portrays Kenya in the late 1980s when the ruling regime was torturing political dissidents. As a result, individual attorneys and other activists informally mounted a social movement. In 1982 Kenya was declared “a one party state” (p. 212). The growth of the culture of resistance in Kenya involved three overlapping elements—individual activism (1987-91), small-group organizational activism (1991-1992) and mass public support (1991-1993). Human Rights attorneys took up cases of political detainees to wage legal battles against the repressive regime of Daniel Arap Moi. Mbugua, the editor of *Beyond* magazine exposed governmental fraud in voting. Sometimes, ordinary citizens, such as taxi-drivers and sympathetic guards, helped rescuing political actors from detention and torture. These individual activists were an example of

social movement brewing in micro-domains, operating in a limited scale, waiting for safer conditions in which to emerge more openly and in a more organized fashion. From 1990-1997 mass uprisings with domestic initiatives and increased international awareness pushed multi-party elections and an improvement in human rights.

This model of micro-level and everyday forms of social mobilisations does not correspond to traditional studies of social movements which generally focus on massive and systematized formation of “sustained, organized” groups with organisational leadership (p. 23). *Ripples of Hope*, offers hopes of different forms of political and resisting imaginaries which are actualised by citizen-individuals, and their ordinary organizational activisms. The three different case studies demonstrate contingent trajectories of public mobilizations in the contexts of developing countries and from these contingencies normative frames of mobilization theories are substantiated and at the same time challenged. New vistas also open up. *Ripples of Hope* is replete with archival and empirical documentations of different movements in these three countries and provides fresh findings, making an important contribution in movement studies research.

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**Book review: Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar
(eds), *Marxism in the 21st Century***

Review author: Lika Rodin

Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar (Eds), 2015, *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press (289 pp., paperback, \$34.95)

Marxism has apparently lost in its influence both within and outside the academy, but it still serves as a point of reference for contemporary theorizing and social practices. *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*, an anthology edited by Michelle Williams and Vishwas Satgar, represents an outstanding attempt to engage with innovative interpretations of Marxist tradition.

As the contemporary world becomes increasingly encapsulated within the logic of competitive accumulation and consumption, the book succeeds in challenging the dominant public agenda by turning attention to the underlying social contradictions and the related struggle, both theoretical and political. Furthermore, it expands public knowledge about experiences with socialism in African countries currently seeking new positioning in the global arena. The anthology can be recommended for a reflexive reading to students and scholars in sociology, political science and history, as well as to social activists all around the globe.

Marxist theory and revolutionary practice

In *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*, ten chapters are grouped into three interrelated parts, two of which address contemporary developments in Marxism-oriented theorizing and the related conceptualization of liberatory social movements. This discussion prepares the reader to the following analysis of empirical cases. The articles in the third part explore African experiences with Marxism and its variations, a topic that has frequently been marginalized in academic discussion (p. 9). The editors have written the introductory and summarizing chapters.

The first part of *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle* highlights fundamental challenges to Marxism that have emerged from the processes of globalization and rethinking of the role of civil society. Michelle Williams discusses Marxist approaches and the issue of democratic development in the globalized world. The author explores both rightist and leftist appraisals of the Soviet model of political participation, highlighting an alternative—direct democracy—carefully separated from the Soviet-days mono-

party political rule. Direct democracy provides hope for non-exploitive mass-society globally and in the African context.

Michael Burawoy contributes a discussion on prospective challenges to Marxist tradition associated with globalization and the rise of ecological agendas. Employing Polanyi's view on historical dynamics of market-driven societies, Burawoy develops a specific periodization of capitalism, demonstrating that through what he calls three waves of marketization—"commodification of labor, money and nature" (p. 49)—the focus, scale and content of both social conflict and the related political struggle have gradually shifted. At the current stage characterized by subsumption of the natural environment under the logic of capitalist accumulation, the role of civil society in addressing market-generated contradictions becomes crucial. In this context, traditional Marxism should account for (and eventually give way to) grassroots experimenting—"real utopias" (p. 47)—and develop sensitivity to global and national-specific non-capitalist responses.

Civil society and globalization are at the epicenter of Vishwas Satgar's theoretical reflections as well. Grounding in Gramsci's insights taken in transnational perspective, the author argues for an enhanced understanding of social political trajectories observed at the national level. As an illustration, a case of post-apartheid South Africa is scrutinized to demonstrate ways in which, by means of "passive revolution," global neoliberalism had succeeded labor's emancipation project. As an outcome of the analysis, Satgar argues for updating the Gramscian theorizing to account for the transformations in contemporary political economy, ideology, social organization and collective resistance.

The second part of *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle* is devoted to the issue of relationships between Marxism and anti-capitalist activism. It opens with an article by Ahmed Veriava seeking to establish parallels between Marx's ideas about social struggle and Foucault's propositions on the problem of resistance. The author claims that taken collectively, an emancipatory attitude borrowed from the classics of critical tradition and poststructuralist interest in relationality and performativity of power can equip social activists, including the African left, with efficient theoretical constructs.

Jacklyn Cock and Meg Luxton continue the discussion by uplifting the role and position of feminism in Marxism-informed academic debates. Based on an extensive literature review on socialist feminism and specifically debates around conceptualization of social reproduction, the scholars argue for the importance of intersectional analysis, uplifted and developed by feminist intellectuals, for more nuanced and inclusive understanding of various forms of oppression and subjugation. Devan Pillay closes the book section with an attempt to adapt Marxism to analysis of contemporary ecological problems. Challenging a wide perception of Marx's elaborations as "anti-ecological" (p. 150) due to his deep subscription to modernist imperatives, Pillay quotes from classical texts expressing Marx's concern with ecological issues.

The last part of the anthology considers practical applications of Marxism in African regions. Daryl Glaser analyses “Africa’s Marxist regimes” (p. 169) as being profoundly shaped by the legacy of a Soviet-style “authoritarian socialism” (p. 168). Seven propositions are suggested which, among other things, contrast the imported “militarized” model of non-market society with locally emerged peasant socialism, claimed to be “authentically democratic” (p. 173). The author concludes by decentering Marxism as a theoretical basis of social political practice at the arena of ideological struggle.

Next, John Saul takes up the causes of abandonment of a socialist track in Africa. He employs a case study design to demonstrate that in assessing the failure of pro-socialist African projects, apart from unfavorable conditions and the external pressures of global capitalism faced by self-liberated countries such as Tanzania, Mozambique and South Africa, political motivation and will need to be taken into consideration. In this context, countries’ trajectories vary. Even if Tanzania and Mozambique did not manage to maintain long-term socialism, their efforts to build a social society and the related experiences are valuable for anti-capitalist theory and social mobilization. In contrast, South Africa’s political leadership had intentionally moved away from Marxism and adopted global-standard politics, a development that eventually resulted in neoliberal “recolonization” (p. 214).

Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai and Trevor Ngwane examine mass protests in neoliberal South Africa, pointing out their fragmented ideologies, narrow scope and leadership issues as conditions that collectively limited outcomes of the struggle. Moreover, the dominant political coalition, which popular protests unavoidably referred to—the Tripartite Alliance—turned to supporting the capitalist track. The scholars draw linkage between class-based and racial oppression and reflect upon theoretical constructs that might facilitate a vision of the future for social movements in South Africa. Bond adds, as an illustration, a detailed description of the Marikana massacre, the related political unrest and disillusion in the country’s political leadership. In the closing chapter, Mazibuko Jara extends the discussion of the South African case and perspectives on Marxist theorizing. Misused and weakened by nationalistic politics of the African National Congress, Marxism still appears to be viable in addressing the central problem of entanglement between class and race subjugation.

Discussion

Three observations have emerged from my reading of *Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle*. First, theoretically oriented scholarship seems to be relatively optimistic about the possibility of adjusting Marxism to contemporary intellectual discussion by means of its alteration, combination with other theories, reinterpretation or simply selective reading. Ultimately, Marxism remains a *weapon* that can be employed, directly or indirectly, in theorizing Leftist politics (part 2). In contrast, analysts of the application of

Marxism in political practice express rather a deep frustration over the limitations of the theoretical constructs in addressing contradictions of mass struggle in Africa and globally (part 3). This discrepancy raises a question of relationships between “sociological Marxism” (chapter 2) and Marxism as a theoretical ideology.

Second, in several accounts in the book, the hope is expressed in the potential of (rural) civil society to develop a non-capitalist formation. Marxism, however, traditionally has been skeptical toward the capacity of civil society to bring about and sustain radical social change (Alexander 2006), a proposition empirically supported by recent examinations of grassroots activism in western countries (e.g., Dauvergne and Lebaron 2014).

Finally, at some point, the reader gets an impression that as previously with the apartheid regime, African activists and intellectuals had to struggle for liberation from a “cage” of Marxism-Leninism (p. 284). More productive, however, may be an effort to analyze the reasons for which African revolutionary parties had become influenced by Soviet theoretical ideology and not by western Marxism almost simultaneously imported to the region via the educational system (chapter 7). The engaged reader might further wonder if members of the leadership of African movements (or movement associated intellectuals) attempted to critically explore Russian experience with socialism, since starting conditions in the respective regions were quite similar (chapters 7, 8). Considering Soviet-style ideas and methods as outcomes of grappling with specific challenges might help prevent an installation of Marxism in Africa as a narrow and rigid doctrine. Such a critical reflection could further expand public knowledge in terms of lessons learned from previous communist projects, beyond their popular accusations of cruelty and oppressiveness. Alternatively, a curious reader could be left longing for a more detailed analysis of the adoption of Marxism-Leninism in distinctive contexts of the African region. This, in turn, would allow deeper understanding of perspectives for non-orthodox Marxist alternatives.

Marxism in the 21st Century: Crisis, Critique & Struggle brings together scholars and activists to explore the history of liberation struggle in the region, the related ideologies and theoretical innovations. The book is published by the University of Witwatersrand, one of the largest institutions of higher education in South Africa known for its important contributions to the promotion of educational and technological development of the country (University of the Witwatersrand n.d.), as well as for its involvement in the anti-apartheid movement (Shear 1996). Naturally, themes of racial and class contradictions interweave in the materials, giving the volume an overall ambition to create an understanding of a possibility for a democratic type of Marxism.

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