

# Interface

A journal for and about social movements

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**Open issue**

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## **Cover art**

Protest against “public bailiffs” during their annual assembly in Belgrade in 2018. The major crackdown on housing rights in Serbia started with the introduction of a new debt enforcement system that has provided banks, loan sharks, utility companies, corporations and wealth tycoons with an additional tool for the disposition of poor and indebted members of the society. Individual acts of resistance led to a formation of a nationwide movement and an organization that stands at the forefront of the struggle for housing justice — the Roof.

Photo by Ana Toader, cover by Ana Vilenica.

## **About Interface**

*Interface: a journal for and about social movements* is a peer-reviewed journal of practitioner research produced by movement participants and engaged academics. *Interface* is globally organised in a series of different regional collectives, and is produced as a multilingual journal. Peer-reviewed articles have been subject to double-blind review by one researcher and one movement practitioner.

The views expressed in any contributions to *Interface: a journal for and about social movements* are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily represent those of *Interface*, the editors, the editorial collective, or the organizations to which the authors are affiliated. *Interface* is committed to the free exchange of ideas in the best tradition of intellectual and activist inquiry.

The *Interface* website is hosted by the Department of Sociology, National University of Ireland Maynooth.

## Open issue

Laurence Cox

Welcome to the twenty-first issue of *Interface: a journal for and about social movements*. As always, *Interface* seeks to share learning between different social movement struggles and movements in different places and to develop dialogue between activist and academic understandings and between different political and intellectual traditions of thinking in / around movements.

This issue has 9 pieces, covering movements in Catalunya, Chile, Egypt, the Inuit Nunangat, Japan, Russia, the UK, Ukraine and the US. It is uncharacteristically short – not for any specific reason we’re aware of: we have a lot of pieces in progress but for whatever reason only a small number have come to fruition in time for this issue. This might reflect the increasing productivity squeeze familiar from so many parts of the world, whether from precarious work, rising rents or neoliberal managerialism – or, more hopefully, the sheer scale of movements and protests in recent months in particular: our writers, editors and reviewers have a lot on their plate, almost everywhere in the world.

By now the French *gilets jaunes* have been fighting austerity for over a year, as have protestors in Haiti, while Hong Kong’s dramatic movements are nine months into their own battle with the Chinese state. Governments have fallen to movements in Chile and Lebanon, Algeria and Sudan, Iraq and Malta, while Ecuador’s indigenous movement defeated the state’s austerity package. Globally we have seen more than a year of climate strikes challenging an ecologically devastating system.

The Turkish invasion of revolutionary Rojava has provoked worldwide solidarity, while across the world the Zapatistas and other indigenous populations are resisting the new Mexican government’s attempt at a neo-extractivist “transformation”. The far-right takeovers in Brazil and Bolivia and the attempted coup in Venezuela are meeting bitter resistance, while state killings of protestors in Iraq and Iran are widespread.

As we go to press, India is up in flames over the government’s new anti-Muslim legislation; the jailing of independence leaders in Catalunya has led to massive protests; Italy is seeing a wave of “sardine” protests against the far right and the US’ long strike wave continues. And these are just a selection of the movements of recent months: indigenous and anti-deportation struggles, LGBTQ+ and feminist activism, anti-war and abolitionist movements, working-class community organising and housing protests, land and language conflicts continue around the world.

The present wave cannot easily be summarised beyond the most obvious: as Alf Nilsen and I noted in 2014, we are entering the “twilight of neoliberalism”, in which the hegemonic relationships that have broadly ensured some degree of popular consent to the current economic model are increasingly breaking down. Above and on the right, we are seeing a shift to increasingly aggressive forms of

authoritarianism in the attempt to govern against the active opposition of large swathes of the population, as well as an intensification of attempts at generating consent through racism and religious fundamentalism. “Below and to the left”, as the Zapatistas say, we are seeing a general decline in the ability of parliamentary institutions and political parties to represent or contain popular needs and struggles, and a faster and more dramatic move to the street or the barricade, a greater willingness to self-organise and to break laws.

Social movements, then, are breaking out all over.

### **The need for *Interface***

And yet, as we see again and again, action on its own is all too often not enough. As movements have known since the nineteenth century, agitation – convincing others that the situation is unjust, intolerable and that it can be changed – faces formidable barriers. These lie not only in the massive right-wing media machines now deployed almost everywhere, the paid or manipulated “troll armies” to be found across social media and an emboldened far right. They also include the zombie forms of once-progressive political forces that seek to put themselves at the head of social movements – and popular temptations to fall for clientelistic, charismatic or simply nationalist leader figures.

The hard-won movement knowledge once encapsulated as education – an understanding that the problem lies deeper than “corruption”, that it cannot be solved by a simple change of government within an unchanged economic and political system, the ability to see purely symbolic forms of representation for what they are, and so on – is now often unavailable to popular struggles, or at times colonised by organisations that are part of the problem. In particular, the ability to locate today’s struggles in a longer history and learn from the *actual* mistakes of the past in developing new practice is an endangered species, in the face of simple unawareness – or familiarity with mythical forms of the past as either perfect or irredeemably bad.

The practice of organising, then – bringing together the complex diversities of popular forces needed for the substantial systemic change implied not just by protestors’ rhetoric but also by their demands – is where *Interface*, and activist knowledge more generally, has tried to play its part over these past ten years. What can we learn from the struggles of the past, from other traditions of movement from below, from what is working in other countries? How can we shape this into forms that can easily be shared in movement education and training processes, worked into organisers’ tactics and strategies, and developed on the fly? And how can we think ourselves and our actions within a bigger picture of social change?

## In this issue

We start with Brian Domi's action note sharing impressions from the middle of the Chilean revolt.

Kathleen Rodgers and Darcy Ingram's article on the relationship between Greenpeace and Inuit communities discusses the complex challenge of decolonizing relationships between environmentalists and Indigenous groups.

Hesham Shafick discusses the 2013 massacre of over a thousand protestors in Cairo after the Egyptian military coup and deploys feminist epistemologies of ignorance to understand the reasons why activist groups remained silent around the event.

Hector Ríos-Jara looks at UK student protests from 2009-11 in terms of the relationships of alliance and competition between the various organisations involved, arguing that factionalism was damaging to the overall movement.

My practice note on learning in social movements asks how movements can develop effective forms of learning that support their long-term purposes and explores some examples.

Finally we have reviews: Lorax B. Horne on adrienne maree brown's *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*; Alexander James Brown on Azumi Tamura's *Post-Fukushima Activism: Politics and Knowledge in the Age of Precarity*; Patrick Sawyer and Alexander Finiarel on Olga Baysha's *Miscommunicating Social Change: Lessons from Russia and Ukraine* and Louise Knops on Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skærlund Risager and Laurence Cox's *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North*.

A call for papers for future issues of *Interface* follows: we publish pieces by activist thinkers as well as academic researchers (and many people who are both), and in many different formats.

## References

Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (2014), *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism*. London: Pluto

## **Call for papers volume 12 issue 2 (November - December 2020) Open issue**

The November - December 2020 issue of the open-access, online, copyleft academic/activist journal *Interface: a Journal for and about Social Movements* (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/>) will be an open issue with no themed section. We hope to receive submissions on any aspect of social movement research and practice that fits within the journal's mission statement (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/who-we-are/mission-statement/>). Submissions should contribute to the journal's purpose as a tool to help our movements learn from each other's struggles, by developing analyses from specific movement processes and experiences that can be translated into a form useful for other movements.

In this context, we welcome contributions by movement participants and academics who are developing movement-relevant theory and research. In addition to studies of contemporary experiences and practices, we encourage analysis of historical social movements as a means of learning from the past and better understanding contemporary struggles.

Our goal is to include material that can be used in a range of ways by movements — in terms of its content, its language, its purpose and its form. We thus seek work in a range of different formats, such as conventional (refereed) articles, review essays, facilitated discussions and interviews, action notes, teaching notes, key documents and analysis, book reviews — and beyond. Both activist and academic peers review research contributions, and other material is sympathetically edited by peers. The editorial process generally is geared towards assisting authors to find ways of expressing their understanding, so that we all can be heard across geographical, social and political distances.

We can accept material in Bengali, Bosnian / Croatian / Serbian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Finnish, German, Hindi, Italian, Mandarin Chinese, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Slovak, Spanish and Swedish. Please see our editorial contacts page (<http://www.interfacejournal.net/submissions/editorial-contact/>) for details of who to submit to.

### **Deadline and contact details**

The deadline for initial submissions to this issue, to be published November – December 2020, is 1 May 2020. For details of how to submit to *Interface*, please see the “Guidelines for contributors” on our website. All manuscripts should be sent to the appropriate regional editor, listed on our contacts page. Submission templates are available online via the guidelines page and should be used to ensure correct formatting.

## **Chile despertó: momentary impressions from the revolt**

**Brian Domi**

**Keywords:** Chile, Latin America, protests, Metro, 2019

### **Evadir, no pagar: otra forma de luchar**

18/10/2019 17:30

It's Friday afternoon, and Plaza de Armas metro station in the centre of Santiago has one remaining entrance open. Lines of people walk in and out of the long entrance passage, their faces expressing vague surprise at what has almost come to be the new norm over the past week. The concourse is packed with around a hundred protesters, who jubilantly chant "evade, don't pay: another way of fighting back" (original above). Some hold the turnstile gates open, as an endless line streams in through the exits without paying. Neither those passing nor the protesters can hold back a constant collective grin, as a line of dead-serious *carabineros* (police) stand in full riot gear to one side of the turnstiles. Occasionally, the chant switches to "*el que no salta es paco*" (whoever doesn't jump is a cop). I'm taken aback to see the occasional middle-aged businessman in a suit and a tie appear, and hop through just like the teenagers and the old ladies, chanting under their breath, and smirking. Occasionally someone will stop to look directly into the eyes of whomever is holding the exit open, and say "thank you". The whole scene feels like the antithesis to the government's discourse all week, which has repeatedly insisted that the mass evasions are a matter of unruly students, who represent an irrelevantly small section of the population. The police seem to be taking it easy today – no reports of tear gas inside the metro station, at least. A voice calls out over the intercom that the station is now being shut completely, along with the entire system. We walk out, not imagining how long it would be before we might set foot in the metro again.

### **Cacerolazo en el metro**

18/10/2019 20:30

In the streets of my neighbourhood, front doors are open. I go out, carrying a bag with a small saucepan and a wooden spoon, and head nervously towards the metro station. As I cut through a side lane, I'm confused to see so many people walking in the same direction. We glance at each other, perhaps the same question on everyone's mind. Suddenly, a door swings open and out bursts a middle-aged woman, banging a pot and spoon, and shouting "*vamos, vecinas, al metro!*" We all start taking out our respective utensils, laughing and cheering as suddenly the situation makes sense, thanks to the small spark of that



neighbour's enthusiasm. It feels as if no one will ever put their pots and pans away, now that they are out. Hopefully even when they've stopped sounding every evening, we won't go back to those nervous glances, or hesitating when it's time to shout.

Arriving at the metro stop, there's about a hundred people, chanting and banging their pots and pans. Some bang stones against lamp posts, or discarded bottles from the street. The two policemen present, on foot, decide to leave as the crowd grows. Passing vehicles beep their horns to the tune of the chant. We move towards the traffic, cheering at the support. No one speaks of the next step. After a few minutes, some older men decisively step out and stop the traffic, at the corner, letting no more cars pass. Others, behind them, start to pile up pallets, wooden posts, and other debris from a conveniently nearby construction site, and in what seems like a minute, the first big barricade is blazing. There is no observable disagreement as to the tactics employed. In fact, as in the afternoon, the overwhelming impression is of a sort of glee in popular revolt, evidenced in the unrestrainable grinning of those present, in laughter, chanting and singing.

At ten the crowd has grown, and the barricades likewise. We mutter our surprise, as not a single *paco* (cop) nor police vehicle has passed. A friend arrives and tells me that he came by bike from some five stations away, and that the situation is the same in all. We find it hard to believe that this could happen. The call-out has been for a *cacerolazo* in all the metro stations in Santiago, and the resulting protests are therefore local and decentralized, spread throughout the city and outskirts. The word spreads of a general chaos, with some stations, buses and even part of the Enel (electricity tycoon) building in flames. The overwhelmingly spontaneous nature of the uprising, and the sheer scale of the convening power it has had, leaves us in a state of amazement and excitement. We try to come to terms with it, reflecting that nothing like this has happened since the dictatorship, or since we don't know when. The ecstasy of the moment is accompanied by a sort of eerie nervousness. We're two blocks from a massive barracks, so where are the cops? A state of emergency is declared just after midnight, and there's talk of the army being on the streets, but it's difficult to believe, just as all that has happened.

## **La cagada en el centro**

19/10/2019 14:00

In Avenida Independencia, an open-sided army truck passes by on patrol every couple of minutes, packed with soldiers holding huge guns, almost convincingly. It's a moment of realisation of what has come to pass. Walking towards the city centre, seemingly every car that passes beeps, as they did last night. In many of the buses, passengers are jumping around, singing, cheering out the windows, holding homemade placards. Everyone seems to be walking in the same direction, and many of them are banging pots and pans. Along the Río Mapocho, which marks the entrance to the city centre, groups have blocked all

the main intersections, toppling lamp posts, signs, burning street furniture and rubbish. In Bellavista, there is a sort of game on, hitting a massive television-billboard with stones. Half the pixels are out, and a cheer rings out in the crowd each time the target is hit. At one point, a couple of men appear with boxes of beer and bags of crisps, handing them out. They exclaim that a large supermarket has been opened around the corner. Scores run to loot and share the food. Neighbours hang from their balconies, mostly cheering on those below, and some throwing empty shopping bags down to help. In a tower block, a single man shouts something about communist scum, before being shouted down by adjacent neighbours, and retreating, shutting his blind. A couple of blocks away, a bus has been burned out, and riots have already moved on, leaving the carcass to be crawled through by amateur photographers.

The protests and riots are dispersed throughout massive expanse of the city centre, and appear to occur with almost total impunity. Occasionally, the shout rings out: “*pacos!*” or “*milicos!*”, announcing the arrival of the police or the army, but they mainly drive past, without engaging. Shots ring out in the distance, and there is talk of people having been hit by bullets, but also of the forces allowing the riots to continue intentionally, in order to justify a brutal response at a later point. Near the centres of power and wealth, it’s a different story, as the carabineros shoot tear gas canisters in massive quantities into the middle of fleeing protesters. This turns into a sort of game of cat and mouse, seemingly endlessly, which runs throughout the city streets. As we catch our breaths at one point near San Borja, a girl jogs past with her phone in her hand, shouting “*toque de queda a las diez*” (military curfew at 10pm) to sceptical responses from those present. The news is soon confirmed, to relative disbelief. It’s the first time there’ll be a curfew of this nature since the dictatorship, specifically since 1987, so it does not simply mean an hourly restriction on freedom of movement and assembly, nor will it be perceived as a mere tool of governance. It carries a massive symbolic weight, and functions as a key to the collective memory of dreaded times past, and so it’s more than expected that there’ll be some resistance.

## **Estamos en guerra**

19/10/2019 21:30

Walking along Avenida Independencia, there are bonfires and barricades at every junction. They glow lineally into the dark distance. The rooftops of the few recently constructed apartment blocks, which house the much more affluent part of the local population, are lined with scores of more cautious onlookers. The street is packed with neighbours. By the firelight, the chants are unceasing, taunting the arrival of the curfew hour, and the passing overhead of a police helicopter. As 10pm comes and passes, some neighbours tire and go home. Word goes around that the supermarkets nearby are being looted. Those that pass with goods are middle-aged in their majority, and most carry diapers, toilet roll, and other basic supplies. Occasionally, someone passes, handing out cans

of beer. The police arrive in massive numbers in one section of the street, but seemingly begin to supervise the looting. We are relieved for the neighbours, but there's something eerie about the scene, because no one is foolish enough to imagine that it's out of any form of solidarity. After a few minutes, they begin to point searchlights at us and other onlookers. We move towards home.

As we pass along the side streets, every doorway is bursting with families, who seem excited to witness the scene. From the comfort of the (ivory) towers above, angry voices call out those below as thieving scum in a constant roaring cacophony. However, every time a police vehicle passes, there is a brief unity of jeers of "*pacos culiaos*", and the volume echoes that of a football stadium. Occasionally a single voice will call out "*arriba los carabineros*", or something to that effect, praising the same cops, to a chorus of laughter and then "go to bed neighbour!" or more intense scorn from the rest of the balconies and the streets below. The scene quiets when President Piñera comes out to make a speech on television. "We are at war with a powerful, relentless enemy that respects nothing and no one". It's just violent delinquents, violent delinquents – same old, same old. Still, strategic questions come to mind as we hear him declare war on his own population. I wonder if that will backfire.

### **Las balas que nos tiraron van a volver**

An exceptional week follows, right up to the second Friday of protests. It is marked by a list of deaths that grows seemingly incessantly. As each day of protest fades into an early night of curfew, social networks disseminate an endless stream of reports of injuries, disappearances, torture, and rape. The atmosphere in the Alameda and Plaza Italia (later renamed to Plaza de la Dignidad) is overwhelmingly one of poignant indignance and fierce resistance. Lines of militancy are taking shape, their visible manifestation exemplified in the demarcation of the "*primera línea*" (front line) which creates a protective layer around protests, and bears the brunt of the police brutality. The chant of the week (heading above) translates to "the bullets they've shot at us will find their way back", and the protest feels confident, strong in rebellion. On the other hand, the police repression is becoming more intense and organised. New, stronger types of pepper and tear gas are being added to their inventory, stronger corrosive chemicals to the water sprayed by the *guanaco* (water cannon), and various types of pellets and supposed rubber bullets are being shot at anyone who should, intentionally or inopportunely, get too close to the *pacos*.

### **Chile despertó**

25/10/2019 16:00

The magnitude of the crowds crossing Parque Forestal towards the focal point of the protests is cause for surprise, despite the prediction of a large turnout. The call has been for the biggest march in Chile's history, a daring proposition. There are virtually no cars, and seemingly infinite lines of people walk, heads

raised, most of them with flags, banners and placards, filling the reclaimed traffic lanes. In Lastarria there are countless *comparsas*, marching bands, performing their own elaborate versions of this week's chants (such as "Chile has awoken") and the classics from Parra, Jara and Quilapayún, among others. The actual route of the protest proves almost impossible to cover, due to the sheer number of people marching. At one point it is said to have reached a million, and broken all records. The general impression is of a momentary feeling of invincibility among this great majority that has avoided the protests of the previous days, and has arrived here feeling part of a battle won. On social networks, worry is expressed on the sites that have hosted communication for the solid core of the protests. The messages remind us that nothing has been won yet, in the face of a perceived naivety in the massive protest. One notes a slight air of deception, but trusts in the momentum gained. The natural cycle of protest occurs, eventually, culminating in the brutal running of protesters out of the city centre with *zorrillos* and *guanacos*. As this occurs, and so many are left behind, injured or arrested, the rhetorical question rings out, "where are the television crews now?"

### **Esto no ha terminado**

The government likes to talk about a return to normality. The following week, the state of emergency is called off and international human rights observers arrive. The daily protests continue, occasionally intensifying, and there are weekly national strikes. The transport system is barely working. In the university, classes don't resume. Many never return to their jobs. As we reach the beginning of December, a meme spreads on social networks that poses the question, "since when isn't it October?", and it strikes a chord. At times it feels like that weekend never ended. Protest banners repeat consistently that this has not ended. Networks of territorial assemblies have been woven throughout Santiago and other regions, to channel the will to change. It's taken the government some time to understand that the issue is not the 30 pesos of the metro fare hike, but the last 30 years. Thinking back to that first Friday in October, I remember a single woman who insisted on paying the metro fare, despite the access having been opened, and I remember the defiance in her face as she defended the status quo. The political class seems to cling to this sort of caricature, and its symbolic power. Protests come to focus largely on the traumatic costs of the rebellion in deaths and injuries, especially the eyes lost. Those who still go to the protests, week after week, seem to know that the feeling of potential nervousness that all this might end can only be overcome through sheer defiance. As evening falls in Plaza de la Dignidad, one always hears the shout to stick it out: "*aguanten cabrxs*".

***Hasta que la dignidad se haga costumbre.***



### **About the author**

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## **Decolonizing environmentalism in the Arctic? Greenpeace, complicity and negotiating the contradictions of solidarity in the Inuit Nunangat<sup>1</sup>**

**Kathleen Rodgers and Darcy Ingram**

### **Abstract**

*Greenpeace has been evaluating and addressing its historic relationships with Indigenous peoples, especially as it attempts to re-establish relationships with Inuit communities and a presence in the Arctic. Because the organization has a troubled history in that region due to the impact of its anti-sealing campaigns on the Inuit, decolonization poses considerable challenges for this organization. Attempts to square Greenpeace's environmental agenda with the desire among many Inuit to enter the global economy through the development of large-scale resource extraction projects will demand that Greenpeace reflect on some of its most basic objectives on issues such as climate change and resource extraction. As one of the most prominent environmental NGOs aiming to shape its policies around those rights, Greenpeace will stand as a model for environmental organizations looking to take similar steps.*

**Keywords:** Greenpeace; decolonization; environmentalism; solidarity

When the Community of Clyde River launched a Supreme Court challenge in November, 2016, many observers were surprised. The community did have a compelling case; despite years of community consultations rejecting a proposal by TGS-NOPEC to conduct Seismic testing for oil and gas off the coast of the community, the National Energy Board had nonetheless approved the application. What was surprising, however, was Clyde River's partner in the case: Greenpeace. Until Clyde River, Greenpeace had had little presence in the Arctic regions of Canada and was considered unwelcome in Inuit communities. The rebuff was owing to Greenpeace's role in the controversial anti-sealing campaigns of the 1970s and 80s. This had resulted in animosity that ran deep throughout Inuit communities, who commonly referred to Greenpeace as "Greenshit" and who saw it as responsible for the collapse of the sealing industry (Specia 2014). So, when Greenpeace released a slick YouTube video featuring Clyde River community members declaring "We do Not Consent" (to Seismic testing), it was clear that an important truce had been reached. That truce signals an historic shift in Greenpeace, from a past in which it held a

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to acknowledge that the Inuit do not refer to the Canadian Arctic as the "Arctic" but rather as part of the Inuit Nunangat (Inuit homelands of Canada). See <https://www.itk.ca/maps-of-inuit-nunangat/>

reputation for prioritizing environmental concerns above the needs of Indigenous peoples to a present in which the organization has declared itself to be undergoing a process of *decolonization*.

We explore the history of this controversy and the ways in which the trajectory of Greenpeace's presence in the North has shaped its current approach to the intersection of environmental politics and Indigenous resurgence.<sup>2</sup> Examining Greenpeace's explicit project of decolonization, we examine their interpretation of the decolonization framework and highlight the "contradictions of solidarity" (Curnow and Helferty, 2018) and the tensions in relationships (Davis, 2010) that the organization will face as it attempts to negotiate the evolving (and sometimes conflicting) views of decolonization while maintaining the environmental vision that has come to define it during the past five decades. Drawing on the insights of Indigenous scholarship we shed light not only on Greenpeace, but also on the much broader context that is taking shape in the wake of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission as social movements (and others) grapple with the processes and debates surrounding allyship, solidarity, and decolonization. In the case of Greenpeace, we find space between its explicit discussion of decolonization and the more difficult realization of that agenda through changes to its environmental ideology or its approach to activism. In particular, we note the potentially insurmountable challenges it will face as it attempts to square its environmental agenda with the pragmatic desire among many Inuit to enter the contemporary global economy through the development of large-scale resource extraction projects on their territory. But we also note that such contradictions of solidarity are not unforeseen; decolonization, remains an emergent and undefined process, and one that is in many ways suited to the dynamics of contestation and change that define social movements. In this regard, Greenpeace's early engagement in this process will serve as a model to which other environmental organizations will inevitably turn. As such, it is important not only that Greenpeace engages in this process. Given the stakes for Indigenous groups, for Greenpeace, and for the future of environmental politics in general, it is equally important that it succeeds.

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<sup>2</sup> The findings in this paper are developed from a content analysis of Greenpeace Canada and Greenpeace USA organizational documents on the topics of sealing, Indigenous policy and decolonization for the years 2014 through 2017. This is a case study of Greenpeace Canada's efforts to grapple with the overlap between their agenda and Indigenous concerns but we frequently contrast these with developments in the American branch of Greenpeace. In addition, the authors examined media coverage containing Indigenous leaders and activists' statements on these issues and consulted with two key informants, one current Greenpeace campaigner who worked extensively on the Clyde River campaign and one independent activist who continues to work alongside the Hamlet council in Clyde River. Searches for the documents and media statements were conducted between April 1, 2017 and November 1, 2017. The consultations with the key informants took place in June 2017 and December 2018.

## **Becoming an ally: decolonization and the reflexivity of social movements**

This paper will illustrate that Greenpeace is attempting to make a clear and open commitment to improving its relationship with Indigenous peoples. But what is the correct path to rebuild relationships and re-establish trust? In other words, what does decolonization mean for an environmental organization that seeks to limit mining and fossil fuel extraction? Do the changes that Greenpeace has undergone amount to decolonization or is the use of this language part of a rhetorical strategy employed by an organization that has long demonstrated its skills in this arena? We believe the latter question is overly cynical but are attentive to the concerns of leading scholars in the field of Indigenous and decolonization studies that decolonization cannot simply be seen as “good intentions,” “empty metaphors” or “moves to innocence” (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Projects of decolonization take place within the context explicated by Indigenous scholars (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Coulthard 2014), who view colonialism not as a phenomenon relegated to history but as a continuing process in which “new faces” of colonialism involve ongoing “dispossession, contemporary deprivation, and poverty” that force Indigenous people “to cooperate individually and collectively with state authorities” (Alfred and Corntassel, 2005: 599). Processes of decolonization therefore, involve confronting all forms of power that continue to uphold inequalities within the institutions that structure the lives of Indigenous people (Coulthard 2014; Fellner, 2018). At the risk of blurring over many nuanced elements of decolonization, we begin with the statement, a starting point, that decolonization involves expanding spaces of indigeneity and promoting fundamental shifts in power relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (De Leeuw et al 2013).

Seen in this way, the process of decolonization involves confronting the dynamics not only of states or of economic institutions, but also of the most well-meaning social movements (Sharma and Wright 2009; Chazan, 2016). Projects of decolonization involve not just the efforts of Indigenous people to confront forms of power that structure Indigenous lives but also those of “allies” (Davis 2010). Taiaiake Alfred (2005), for instance, writes that Indigenous movements require “the support and cooperation of allies in the Settler society” (p. 64). Recent scholarship from Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors (c.f. e.g. Davis, 2010; Snelgrove, Dhamoon, & Corntassel, 2014; Walia, 2012; Wallace, 2014) has begun to confront the question of such solidarity building through the lens of decolonization (Barker, 2010). Ultimately, Barker (2010) argues, “what it means to be an ally remains an open and dynamic concept” (p. 317). We contribute to these emerging perspectives on decolonization and solidarity but given our assertion that social movements are particularly well situated to accommodate these processes of contestation and change, we begin by drawing attention to some the ways that social movements have engaged in similar reflexive processes, many of which have found it necessary to account



for the politics of difference by introducing intersectional, anti-colonial, and anti-racist discourses.

Such dynamics have been particularly notable within global and national feminist movements which have been radically transformed in recent decades by Black, transnational and postcolonial feminisms. In the North American context Black Feminists mounted a radical challenge to the racialized foundations of second-wave feminism. And in the context of feminist movements outside of the Global North where western feminism had effectively silenced the perspectives of “third world women,” particularly those of colour, by glossing over the differences between western women of privilege and those outside of the west, authors such as Chandra Mohanty (1984) challenged these asymmetrical relationships. In her later work, Mohanty (2003) lays a roadmap for building non-colonizing feminist solidarity on a global scale.

Similar criticisms have been aimed at the environmental movement’s understanding of Indigenous peoples. In 1989, Ramachandra Guha (1989a) published an influential critique of what he referred to as “radical American environmentalism,” that he associated with the movement’s interpretation of deep ecology, of which Greenpeace is an exemplary practitioner. Having previously worked on tensions between Himalayan peasants and the industrial forest sector in India, Guha (1989b) pointed out that for many such communities in the Global South, the American agenda associated with preservation, biocentrism, and an idealized ‘wilderness’ free of humans, was an expression of western elitism and a new form of imperialism (Guha 1989a). Among its most powerful expressions, he argued, was the institution of national wilderness parks that now underpin wilderness preservation activities around the world. Given that so much of the world’s wilderness has in fact been populated for thousands of years by rural people who draw directly from their immediate surroundings to sustain themselves, and whose economic and cultural identities are embedded in those surroundings, Guha concluded that “the wholesale transfer of a movement culturally rooted in American conservation history can only result in the social uprooting of human populations in other parts of the globe” (p. 76).

In subsequent work, Guha and others demonstrate that environmentalism cannot be viewed via a single lens, and that the idealization of wilderness obscures other forms of environmental politics and power. In particular, it obscures those of the Global South, where tensions over control of resources often set localized rural communities aiming to retain small-scale, subsistence-oriented livelihoods against an industrial resource extraction sector that operates at national and global levels. Such conflicts, Guha observes in a later work with J. Martinez-Alier (1997, p. 12),

pit ‘ecosystem people’ – that is, those communities which depend very heavily on the natural resources of their own locality – against ‘omnivores’, individuals and groups with the social power to capture, transform and use natural

resources from a much wider catchment area; sometimes, indeed, the whole world.

While maintenance of forests and other ecosystems is essential to such people, their objective is not informed by notions of preservation, biocentrism, or deep ecology, but rather by an acute awareness of the need to maintain such environments in order to sustain their communities over the long term. From this perspective, which Guha and Martinez-Alier labeled “environmentalism of the poor” (1997, p. 3), international NGOs such as the WWF, the IUCN, or Greenpeace that seek to preserve large swathes of territory in the Global South and the charismatic megafauna that inhabit them might pose as great a threat as the latest large scale hydroelectric project to be promoted by the state, corporate developers, or the World Bank, given that both have assumed the removal of rural practices, and in some cases rural inhabitants themselves, to be an inevitable step on the path to progress.

That critique has since been levelled much more widely at the environmental movement. Indeed, Guha’s discussion fitted into a broader response during the 1980s to the globalization of the environmental movement through these vehicles and the increasingly intricate web of trans-national advocacy networks that connect them. Ranging widely across the political spectrum, critics of various stripes have converged on the concept of ‘eco-imperialism’ to describe the power relations that underpin these developments, be it with regard to the historical transfer of biota from Europe to temperate regions around the world, the impact of environmental policy on economic development in the Global South, or the recognition of new forms of marginalization that affect Indigenous peoples and practices (Dyer 2011).

Perhaps the most important response to this issue in the 1980s came from the United Nations’ Brundtland Report (1987), which articulated a path for the future if the world’s nations could come together in a global effort to balance economic, social, and environmental considerations through the carefully crafted concept of sustainable development. Contained within the Brundtland Report, however, is a sophisticated statement on the complexities faced by Indigenous peoples. As pointed out by Guha, it recognizes as “cultural extinction” the processes of marginalization that have impacted such groups (United Nations 1987, 3.3: 73). Yet while the Brundtland Report points clearly to the threat posed to Indigenous peoples by existing patterns of resource exploitation, it also underscores the need for economic and social development based on “the recognition and protection of their traditional rights to land and the other resources that sustain the way of life” and on “giv[ing] local communities a decisive voice in the decisions about resource use in their area” (3.3: 75).

While the critiques outlined above are shaped predominantly by North-South power imbalances, they have also been brought to bear on those nations of the industrialized north with Indigenous populations. There, environmental historians have uprooted the very basis of ‘radical’ American environmentalism

by exposing both the mythic and the very real power dimensions of an idealized North American wilderness that could only be realized by challenging, ignoring, and finally forgetting the longstanding presence of that continent's Indigenous peoples, while simultaneously losing track of the considerable level of human-induced environmental change that has unfolded. Again, North America's wilderness parks stand as an excellent example, inasmuch as the wilderness ideal they represent came about in numerous instances only after the removal of Indigenous peoples from those spaces (Cronon 1996, Spence 1999). In exposing the historical context of such contestations, these and other scholars affirm the longstanding similarities around the world of Guha's 'ecosystem people,' and their experience of eco-imperialism.

Those developments are essential to understanding Greenpeace's relationship to the Inuit and the Arctic. To its credit, Greenpeace has never lost sight of the longstanding presence of Indigenous peoples, in Canada or anywhere else. It has, however, been informed by a complex and at times problematic characterization of indigeneity that traces its roots to the beginnings of the European encounter with North America, and that found its own unique expression in the context of the counterculture movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Philip J. Deloria (1998) has pointed to the long history in the United States of "Playing Indian," by which he observes the paradoxical ways in which non-Indigenous Americans, in particular white American men, have repeatedly co-opted Indigenous identities as a means to work through issues of national identity, rebellion, and authenticity in the context of modernity (p. 8). Within the counterculture of 1960s and 1970s America, Deloria argues, "playing Indian" was a means by which anti-establishment baby boomers expressed their disillusion with mainstream American society, from its rampant consumerism and lack of authenticity to its neo-imperialist endeavours in the Global South and its nuclear military program. The counterculture embrace of Indian-ness flowed easily across the US border into Canada. For many so-inclined, North America's Indigenous peoples presented the antithesis to their own experience of modernity: an authentic, pre-modern culture threatened to the point of vanishing, but that nevertheless seemed to offer an alternative. That identification with Indigenous cultures came to inform a wide-ranging process of appropriation by which Indigenous emblems, tools, practices, customs, beliefs, stories from across the continent were taken up within the counterculture and reformulated in what amounted to a generalized and often thoroughly decontextualized pastiche of indigeneity.

Unlike most baby boomers, however, the individuals who ended up forming Greenpeace had direct experience of at least part of that Indigenous world. Traveling up the west coast of British Columbia to Alaska during Greenpeace's very first campaign to prevent American nuclear testing on the island of Amchitka, the crew stopped at a number of communities along the way, where they encountered peoples of the Kwakwaka'wakw and other First Nations (Hunter 1979, Wexler 2004). Hammered by modernity in the form of western imperialism, capitalism, and industrial resource extraction that left them witnesses to the collapse of salmon fisheries and the devastation of commercial

forestry in their ancestral lands, those communities fitted neatly into the counterculture narrative as the battered strongholds of an authentic, pre-modern world that was disappearing rapidly in the face of a cold, alienating modernity that had just entered the nuclear era, and Greenpeace's stalwarts readily identified them as such (Hunter 1979). Indeed, what twenty-something member of the late-1960s early 1970s counterculture disillusioned with the direction the world was going wouldn't make this link? Embedded in the counterculture's search through Indigenous practices and beliefs for meaning in the modern world, that experience would inform from Greenpeace's early days forward an understanding of common cause with Indigenous peoples, with whom environmentalists presumably shared an interest in the protection of the environment against the ravages of modernity. Within days of embarking from Vancouver on that first campaign, Greenpeace co-founder Robert Hunter identified the group's mission as the fulfillment of what had been mistakenly identified as an ancient Cree legend, the Warriors of the Rainbow:

It's a prophecy. When the air is blackened, the rivers poisoned, the land tortured by human ignorance, citizens from all nations of the world will come together to save the Earth. Man, it's like we're helping to fulfill the prophecy, We're the Warriors of the Rainbow (Weyler 2005, p. 101-02).

That name would later grace Greenpeace's first ship, the *Rainbow Warrior*, a 165-foot trawler it purchased in 1978 with funds the organization raised through the success of its anti-sealing and anti-whaling campaigns (Weyler 2005).

The tension in that relationship, of course, rests in the assumption that the interests of western environmentalists line up neatly with those of all Indigenous peoples. In some cases, particularly those involving peoples stripped of control over lands and resources who are confronting large-scale resource extraction activities, alliances with environmental organizations including Greenpeace have proved beneficial to both groups. In other cases, though, the idealization of Indigenous peoples as representatives of a pre-modern world has led to the assumption that Indigenous use of that environment fits into the parameters of western environmentalism. From that perspective, Indigenous peoples are interpreted as seeking to remain within the confines of a highly isolated and localized subsistence economy, from which they reflect what amounts to a romanticized identity that can be traced to the longstanding conception of the noble savage of European intellectual debate. Such views, it is important to note, summarize far too simplistically the diverse range of environmental attitudes and practices among North America's Indigenous cultures. That Greenpeace's co-founders and key figures in its anti-sealing campaign saw fit to self-identify as Rainbow-Warrior heroes within a supposed Indigenous legend is a telling example of the ease with which the organization collapsed those worlds together.



### **'We do not consent': Greenpeace and the anti-sealing backfire<sup>3</sup>**

While the dynamics of decolonization and allyship may be “open and dynamic,” there is a consensus that for solidarity to be possible non-Indigenous peoples must “look inward at their own role within colonization, and confront themselves” (Davis and Shapuniarsky, 2010, p. 343). In the case of Greenpeace, doing so requires confronting their contentious history in the Arctic. This now legendary intervention began in 1975 when Greenpeace took a lead role in the *Save the Seals* campaign to end the Canadian seal hunt. Given Greenpeace’s focus on employing tactics that would draw media coverage, saving seals was ideal, and the images that emerged of blood-stained coats of young seals and brave activists putting themselves in harm’s way to protect them from the horrors of industrialized barbarism cemented the organization’s image as a group of heroes and saviors (Wenzel 1991, Harter 2004, Marland, 2014). Anti-sealing campaigns had been underway since the 1950s, but for an organization that intentionally used “mind bombs” to force moral positions on environmental issues, seals were the perfect poster-animal. Paul Watson, co-founder of Greenpeace made it clear in a 1978 interview with CBC radio that this was no mistake: “Greenpeace has always managed to raised more money on the seal issue than has actually been spent on the campaign itself. The seal issue has always turned profit for the organization...the seal is very easy to exploit as an image” (CBC Radio, 1978).

The immediate target of the *Save the Seals* campaign was the commercial sealing activities on the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. To this end, animal rights organizations convincingly framed the issue as an act of ruthless, unnecessary cruelty, and persuaded the European public to support a complete ban on the sale of seal pup skins, which led directly to the 1983 European Economic Community ban on seal pup skins and products. While it and a later EU ban in 2009 both held exemptions for Inuit-produced pelts and other products, the anti-sealing campaign’s successful targeting of the European market for pelts made any distinction between a commercial and Indigenous hunt irrelevant. The demand for seal skin disappeared almost immediately, and with it the livelihoods of many Inuit people and communities that depended on these revenues (Royal Commission, 1986; see also Rodgers and Scobie, 2015).

That collapse created the foundation for the animosity toward Greenpeace that persists today. From the perspective of Inuit communities, activists were wholly responsible for the destruction of their livelihood, and it takes little effort to map the eco-imperial criticisms outlined above onto those events. For impoverished Inuit communities engaged in a market for seal fur that suddenly collapsed due to the activities of a multi-national environmental NGO well entrenched in the ethos of biocentrism and deep ecology, there was little question that environmentalism expressed in this form cut across both their

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<sup>3</sup> Many of the themes developed in this section have been elaborated on in a previous paper by Rodgers (Rodgers and Scobie, 2015).

immediate economic interests and their capacity to maintain control over their use of the land and the resources it offered them. Given the expectation in environmental circles of authenticity in the form of traditional hunting practices conducted within a subsistence-based economy, there remained virtually no space for the Inuit to negotiate their relationship to contemporary economic forces. In effect, the need for authenticity implied that in order to be respected in environmental circles, the Inuit, and Indigenous peoples in general, had to stand outside modernity. In the case of the Inuit, the European trade of seal fur to the European market was relatively new, but it was nonetheless an important and largely self-controlled economy. What is more, it had developed in the face of failed relocations and other unsuccessful efforts on the part of the Canadian state during the twentieth century to build viable economies and livelihoods for Indigenous communities in the Arctic (Kulchysky and Tester 2008). Viewed from a broader perspective, assumptions such as these around the centrality of authenticity and tradition flew in the face of a commercial market in furs that had linked Indigenous peoples in North America to Europe for more than three centuries.

Perhaps worst of all for critics was the fact that the *Save the Seals* campaign was a huge success, both in terms of the campaign itself and the growth of the organization worldwide (Zelko 2013, Dale 1996). In 1972, just before it embarked on its anti-sealing operations, Rex Weyler (2004, p. 139) recalls that Greenpeace had one office and “\$9000 in the bank.” By 1977, two years after its first anti-sealing campaign, Greenpeace had nine offices in Canada, five in the US, and one each in Paris, London and Tokyo (Weyler 2005, p. 442). That year, the organization was reaching a million dollars in annual revenues globally, and any previous financial woes were nonexistent (Weyler 2005). And while the organization’s economic fortunes have fluctuated over the decades, it continues bring in millions of dollars in revenue. In 2015, Greenpeace Canada alone raised close to thirteen million dollars from donors (Greenpeace Annual Report, 2015). In this same period many Inuit communities have continued to face problems of hunger, joblessness and a range of social problems and it is perhaps understandable that the Inuit communities economically devastated by the loss of the seal industry would lay responsibility for their fate with the organization that had used seals to advance its own economic interests.

The animosity that emerged from these events continues to run deep in Inuit politics. Even Greenpeace’s effort to distinguish between the commercial hunt and the Inuit one is viewed dismissively as a form of environmental colonialism that presents Inuit people in romantic and monolithic terms. As Anthony Specá (2014: np) argues, Greenpeace “reckoned that a hunt involving rifles, motorboats and snowmobiles, and generating money as well as food and clothing, didn’t qualify as traditional... Appropriating Inuit tradition from the Inuit themselves, they redefined it to agree with their own preconceptions of harpoons, kayaks and dog teams. By ruling out any necessary adaptations to contemporary colonial conditions, they implied that Inuit could only hunt seal justifiably in something like a pre-colonial manner”.

## **Exploring contradictions in the politics and practice of solidarity**

For Greenpeace to advance a project of decolonization the organization needed to take on the legacy of these historical relationships and going forward, to carefully contemplate what solidarity with Inuit communities could look like. This, however, is more easily said than done because while the language of decolonization may be relatively easy to adopt, the pragmatics of such a commitment are far from straightforward. As Adam Barker (2010, p. 327) laments, “one of the frustrating implications of the decolonizing, unsettling, and ultimately, respectful approach to becoming a Settler ally...is that there is no ‘plan,’ no universally applicable model, no clear set of friends and enemies.” And as Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 3) insist, decolonization cannot be “a metaphor,” a novel discourse to replace other social justice agendas, meaning that Greenpeace needed to ensure that “Indigenous issues” did not become add-ons to, or subsumed within, their prevailing environmental platforms. In negotiating this path, therefore, Greenpeace was well aware of the need to avoid the contradictions of solidarity work such as “speaking for,” and ensuring they “follow the lead” of Indigenous peoples. And yet even such tried and true principles do not ensure a more certain trajectory as the organization found themselves confronted by competing understandings of the relationship between economic development and Inuit self-determination.

While Greenpeace continued to be an active critic of the seal hunt in the 1970s and 80s, the trajectory toward a new relationship between Inuit communities and Greenpeace nevertheless goes back to that same period, when the organization began to recognize the complex relationship between the Inuit seal hunt and the organization’s animal rights position. As outlined above, Greenpeace began with a staunch anti-sealing stance and continued participating in campaigns into the 1980s. Greenpeace co-founder Robert Hunter wrote in his 1979 memoir that early on “Greenpeace’s official policy was...absolutely rigid: no seals were to be killed by anyone, not even by Eskimo or Indians” (p. 368). By the 1980s, however, the organization was acknowledging the campaign’s impact on Inuit communities and through their well-honed position that their complaint had only ever been with commercial sealers, not Indigenous ones, attempted to refine their agenda in ways that reflected a commitment to solidarity with Inuit communities. As a representative of Greenpeace International stated in 1986: “in no way was our campaign ever aimed against natives,...we have never opposed subsistence seal hunting by natives. We were only opposed to the commercial harp-seal hunt. But what happened was that as a result of the campaign the whole market dried up. The reality is the market for all furs is going down because it is no longer socially acceptable to wear them” (Fisher 1986). To this end, many frontline activists had tried to make a distinction between the commercial and Indigenous hunts – a distinction, they argue, that was never made clear in the media. In spite of this more careful positioning, Greenpeace’s involvement in the anti-sealing campaigns did not come to an end, and Inuit communities were not convinced by the expression of concern, firing back that by destroying the

market for seal pelts Greenpeace had gutted the market for Indigenous and non-Indigenous sealers alike (Wenzel 1991). As a result, “Greenpeace” remained a “dirty word” in Inuit communities throughout the 1980s and 90s (Pritchard 1993: np).

Greenpeace’s unease over its complicity became more apparent in 2004 when Canada’s decision to increase the quota for the seal hunt galvanized the animal rights community. While that event led to the largest anti-sealing campaign in history, Greenpeace chose not to be part of it. Citing greater concerns about climate change, the ozone layer and genetically-modified organisms, a representative explained that “our role is to work on issues that are particularly urgent” (‘More Urgent Things to Do’, 2004). At that point it became clear: Greenpeace was officially moving on from sealing. As the previous discussion outlined, for Indigenous scholars, confronting complicity with colonialism is the first step of decolonization. Greenpeace’s decision to move on from sealing in favour of more “urgent” concerns was an example of Fellows and Razack’s (1998) “race to innocence” in that Greenpeace removed themselves from the ongoing marginalization of Inuit concerns in favour of their own agenda but importantly, did so without directly confronting the organization’s historic complicity in the colonial implications of mainstream environmentalism. As Curnow and Helferty (2018: 154) argue, races to innocence are not intended as “cynical strategies but rather agentic and imperfect attempts to prefigure other social relations” and in 2004 Greenpeace understood their withdrawal from sealing as an act of solidarity.

But Greenpeace’s failure to directly address their complicity meant that the legacy of Greenpeace’s anti-sealing activism remained strong in the North, preventing Greenpeace from working in solidarity with the people of the Inuit Nunangat, a reality that prohibited the organization from engaging in increasingly pressing issues of climate change and resource development in the Arctic. By 2014 the organization took on its historical legacy directly, declaring itself to be undergoing decolonization, but the way forward for Greenpeace involved negotiating complex visions of Inuit independence and often competing understandings of solidarity and decolonization. Greenpeace began by issuing a formal apology. Executive Director of Greenpeace Canada Joanna Kerr (2014: np) wrote:

Our campaign against commercial sealing did hurt many, both economically and culturally. The time has come to set the record straight. In the eight months since I took on the challenging role of executive director for Greenpeace Canada, one thing has come up again and again in discussions with staff across the country: a deep desire to make amends with Canada’s Indigenous Peoples for past mistakes, to decolonize ourselves, and to better communicate our policies and practices going forward.

Recognizing now that even a formal apology would be insufficient to make amends, Greenpeace’s pathway to decolonization also included the development



of organizational policies that would provide a foundation for changing its relationship with Indigenous communities. Following the apology, Greenpeace chapters around North America launched a series of decolonization workshops (Greenpeace USA, 2016), and both Greenpeace Canada and the US chapter developed 'Indigenous Peoples policies' in which they outline their commitment to protecting Indigenous rights and to ensuring that their own actions do not contribute to the erosion of these rights (Greenpeace, 2014). This 2014 policy acknowledged "the historic role that environmental and conservation groups like Greenpeace have played in undermining Indigenous Peoples' Rights and Title to their lands and waters and their ability to economically thrive" (Greenpeace, 2014). Greenpeace Canada further strengthened this commitment by hiring three Indigenous women to consult on issues affecting their communities, and the organization's 2015 Annual Report placed its relationship with Indigenous communities at the forefront of its campaigns (Greenpeace Canada, 2016).

Responses to the apology were mixed and ultimately, highlight a central tension in pathways to decolonization. Beginning in the 1990s, there was a notable shift amongst Inuit leadership in Nunavut, toward the view that there is a direct link between resource extraction and the goal of Inuit self-determination and cultural survival (Bernauer, 2018). As Bernauer writes, "instead of understanding energy extraction as a colonial endeavour, [Inuit] organizations increasingly see it as an integral part of regional development and Inuit self-determination" (p. 3). The negotiation of the 1993 Nunavut Land Claim Agreement placed resource development, particularly mining, at the strategic forefront to create employment, promote self-sufficiency and generally lift communities out of poverty (McPherson 2003). The ITK itself emerged out of concerns over the lack of influence that Inuit people had in decisions about resources (Obed, 2016) and the Qikiqtaaluk Corporation, a pro-development institution created by the Qikiqtani Inuit Association (QIA), was explicitly designed to "promote and protect Inuit rights" while striving to "be a major contributor to all sectors of the Nunavut economy... in servicing the emerging mining and resource development sector" (Qikiqtaaluk Corporation, 2017). From this vantage point, Greenpeace's role in the destruction of the commercial sealing industry became a symbolic representation of the threat of environmentalism to Inuit self-determination. Accordingly, Many Inuit individuals and leaders remained skeptical of Greenpeace's apology. Terry Audla, National Inuit Leader and President of Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), in his speech to Earth Day participants in 2015 reminded the audience of Greenpeace's history in the North: "You need to remember that while the world may be worried about oil and gas development in the Arctic and impact by oil companies, it was organizations such as Greenpeace who impacted us negatively, and we still recall this" (Bell, 2015). And Chair of the Arctic Council and former Conservative MP for Nunavut, Leona Aglukkaq, commented: "When you look around the world often times it is easy to get caught up in the agendas that some environmental groups like to push without considering the human dimension...there are lots of environmental groups who say that they speak for

and represent Inuit or Aboriginal people while at the same time they campaign against traditional ways of life like the seal hunt” (Aglukkaq slams Greenpeace’s attempts, 2014). This legacy also resulted in the repeated rejection of Greenpeace applications to hold observer status with the Arctic Council, the world’s main international forum on northern issues, even when the applications of organizations such as Oceana and the World Wide Fund for Nature have been approved.

Greenpeace’s efforts to renew their relationships with Inuit communities in the North meant navigating the dominant view of Inuit self-determination, one that directly conflicts with their own opposition to resource development. One of the central pillars of Indigenous scholarship on decolonization is the idea that any effort to undo the harms of colonialism begins by following the lead of Indigenous leadership. Writing as an ally, Harsha Walia writes (2012:3), “one of the basic principles of indigenous solidarity organizing is the notion of taking leadership. According to the principle, non-natives must be accountable and responsive to the experiences, voices, needs and political perspectives of indigenous people themselves.” From this perspective, to demonstrate a genuine commitment to decolonize, Greenpeace would have to work from a framework that privileges Indigenous perspectives (Sium et al., 2012, p. 3). In this regard, Greenpeace’s apparent rejection of resource development puts it at odds with many leading Inuit organizations whose goal is to create sustainable communities through the integration of contemporary resource extraction operations, primarily mining. If decolonization projects are, as de Leeuw et al (2013, p. 392) argue, fundamentally about prioritizing “Indigenous peoples, presences, and voices” this places Greenpeace in a position where it must choose between prioritizing its environmental agenda over the voices of the most prominent leaders in the region. As Arctic expert Anthony Speca argues, “Greenpeace must accord that wish the same respect that they now accord Clyde River’s wish to withhold support” (McGwin, 2014: np).

For many Indigenous scholars, however, decolonization represents a particular relationship to land, one which opposes large-scale industrial development and sees Indigenous people reconnecting with their “land and land-based practices” (Coulthard, 2014: 71). Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has criticized industry and government’s exploitation of natural resources on Indigenous territories even when the community may support the industry. Simpson argues that Indigenous communities choose resource extraction because

it is presented as the only way out of crushing economic poverty... These communities are under tremendous pressure from provincial governments, federal governments, and industry to partner in the destruction of natural resources. Industry and government have no problem with presenting large-scale environmental destruction by corporations as the only way out of poverty because it is in their best interest to do so...The hyper-exploitation of natural resources is not the only approach (Klein, 2013).

From this perspective, Greenpeace, with its explicit rejection of resource extraction in the Arctic, could step forward to express genuine solidarity with the people of Clyde River who were opposed to the development of oil and gas off the coast of their community. In a recent report entitled *Beyond Fossil Fuels*, Greenpeace Canada expresses its hope that the territory will be able to “leap frog” beyond fossil fuels and resource extraction where, they caution, “multinational corporations and extractive industries [will] lead Nunavut and its people down the road of broken promises and false hopes” (Talberth and Wysham 2016, p.17). This common ground means that some expressions of solidarity and alliances between Greenpeace and Indigenous groups may be more straightforward than others. For instance, the alliance between environmental organizations including Greenpeace and several Indigenous groups opposed to the Kinder Morgan pipeline in British Columbia and Alberta is based on overlapping concerns that fuel pipelines support the detrimental impacts of the oil industry on climate change *and* potentially infringe on the rights of Indigenous people by threatening their traditional territories, diet and economic activities. Similarly, in the case of Clyde River Greenpeace became part of the Clyde River Solidarity Network along with the Mining Injustice Solidarity Network, the Council of Canadians, and Idle No More to coordinate southern activist support for Clyde River’s campaign (Bernauer 2018).

The apparent contradiction between Greenpeace’s commitment to decolonization and its inability to follow the lead of Inuit leadership therefore reflects Harsha Walia’s (2012) observation that recognizing the diversity of perspectives within Indigenous communities, decolonization is also about choosing allies with whom values are aligned. In this regard, it is worthwhile to note that Greenpeace’s *Beyond Fossils Fuels* is not a wholesale rejection of commercial activities in Nunavut. Rather, it promotes local development around renewable energy, Indigenous tourism and sustainable fisheries. In other instances, however, alliances will require Greenpeace to measure closely the degree to which its principled commitment to sustainability conflicts with its commitment to decolonization. Ultimately, it should come as no surprise that Greenpeace prioritizes environmental sustainability. In its own core values the organization states that “Greenpeace has No Permanent Friends or Foes” and the priority of Greenpeace is its commitment to “one standard...: The environment has to benefit” (Greenpeace International, 2017). In this regard, Greenpeace can only commit to acting in solidarity insofar as the choices Indigenous communities make are in keeping with their own environmental values.

In this regard, the pathway to decolonization requires organizations like Greenpeace to evaluate the sometimes-competing paradigms of Indigenous self-determination and their environmental critique of capitalism. As Greenpeace organizer Alex Speers-Roesch acknowledges,

we have to respect human rights, we have to respect Indigenous rights and sometimes that means supporting people’s right to choose things that we

wouldn't agree with and we reserve the right to disagree sometimes...there might be a situation where Greenpeace, because it is a predominantly settler organization in Canada, might not be the most appropriate voice to voice certain criticisms. In this regard, projects of decolonization for social movement organizations may not necessarily be a blanket embrace of Indigenous sovereignty and support for leadership but rather, the willingness to strategically engage with communities who are like-minded (personal communication, 1 June 2017).

For environmental advocates it may not always be possible to “follow the lead” and indeed a blind commitment to such a principle would amount to essentializing all Indigenous communities. Instead, making such decisions explicit becomes part of successfully negotiating the uncertain territory of decolonizing social movements.

### **Untangling the tensions in relationships of solidarity**

Lynn Davis (2010) contends that “the relationships between Indigenous peoples and social movement organizations...” (p. 2) remain an under-explored area of research and that such work is required to explore the tensions in these often asymmetrical relationships and especially, how power functions within them. Greenpeace has made a clear and open commitment to improving its relationship with Indigenous peoples, a commitment which is likely to better enable Greenpeace to build alliances with Indigenous communities including Inuit communities. But as Davis contends, relationships such as these are frequently fraught because of the variety of different understandings of the roles that Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups play in a relationship and the different power formations embedded in them. Thus by apologizing for its role in the collapse of the fur industry and acknowledging that the Arctic region is not just habitat for animals but is also Inuit land, Greenpeace has taken important steps toward mending broken relationships, but as the organization moves forward to identify the parameters of its solidarity, the terrain becomes more difficult to negotiate.

One of the tensions in this path forward surrounds the strategic activities in which social movement organizations engage. For Greenpeace's efforts toward decolonization to be seen as a genuine attempt to transform its relationship with Indigenous people, its solidarity must also be perceived as authentic. Given the importance of fundraising, attracting media attention and rhetorical persuasion for the organization, this may prove a considerable challenge. Through this lens, Greenpeace's apology, its awareness of Indigenous concerns, and its new relationship with an Arctic community can be seen as a set of tactical moves aimed at producing substantive political outcomes, raising the profile of the organization, and increasing financial support, reasonable assumptions given the history of the sealing conflict outlined above. Inuit leaders have openly expressed such concerns, linking Greenpeace's activism in the North and the organization's strategic agenda. “Greenpeace needs an icy, sparkly backdrop for

their fundraising pantomime and has appropriated an entire region,” observed prominent activist and former mayor of Iqaluit Madeleine Redfern. “Who cares about Inuit education, housing, health, when Greenpeace and starlets are going to ‘Save the Arctic’?” (Hopper, 2014). Inuit activist and filmmaker Althea Arnaquq-Baril shares this view, stating that the ‘Save the Arctic’ campaign “is what anti-sealing was thirty years ago, a very lucrative fundraising tactic” (Finlay, 2017).

In the case of Clyde River, Warren Bernauer, a volunteer with the Hamlet of Clyde River who worked closely with mayor Jerry Natanine on the Supreme Court challenge, similarly reflected on the necessity of authenticity for establishing lasting relationships, noting that when the pipeline conflicts of Western Canada emerged Greenpeace’s presence in Clyde River effectively vanished. Such observations underscore the concern that when Indigenous communities are no longer the basis for dramatic campaigns, their utility to activist organizations may wane, evidence not of solidarity but of strategy (Personal Communication, November 29, 2018). Eric Ritskes (2012: np) eloquently summarizes this risk:

In Northern Canada, many white eco-activists and Canadians have joined with Indigenous communities to protest a proposed Enbridge oil pipeline. What is overlooked for many, who see their involvement as an important environmental cause or even as anti-capitalist, is that Indigenous communities have life and livelihood at stake. This is not an adventure, another cause, or even just about the environment – in fact, due to their struggle the Canadian government has branded Indigenous groups as eco-terrorists. There is no ‘going home’ when this is done because it is never done and communities will always be seen as a threat. There is no thrill of taking on a mega corporation, just a continued fight for survival – one that white Canadians cannot fully understand.

While it may now be imbued with new discourses of settler solidarity and anti-capitalism (or at least anti-resource extraction), Ritskes cautions that the risk of “Playing Indian” remains. Fundraising and public appeals are realities for social movement organizations that need to occupy the political space outside of governments and corporations but so is their risk to inauthenticity. The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) is an example of an organization that is carefully managing strategy and solidarity in ways that differ from Greenpeace. The WWF has consistently maintained its work in the Arctic but has balanced its agenda of wilderness protection with the economic agendas of the Arctic communities in which they work. In its statement on Indigenous people, the WWF observes that “our policy reflects our dedication to respecting Indigenous and traditional peoples’ human and development rights” (WWF 2008). In this respect the WWF collaborates with Indigenous peoples on a variety of issues, including the “sustainable use of natural resources, and influencing relevant policy and decision-making” (WWF 2008). As an example of this commitment WWF chose not to support an international ban on polar bear hunting, despite

the public outcry, because the ban was not in the interest of Indigenous people. They stated: “we are working closely with Indigenous people in polar bear range states, as they’re the people who live and work most closely with the bears, and the ones who can help us ensure the long-term survival of this iconic species” (WWF, 2013). Such an approach has allowed the WWF to quietly participate in the regulatory systems that govern the use of natural resources in the Arctic, as observers in the Nunavut Impact Review Board’s community consultations and on the Arctic Council. The WWF invokes this influence at the expense of its ability to be outspoken and visible critics of resource extraction projects but it also permits them a respectful working relationship with the Indigenous people who live in the territory. But as Wallace et al (2010) emphasize, this should not be seen as an either/or dilemma because there is “no template” for relationships between Indigenous and non-indigenous groups. Explicit conversations, they argue, about “identity, interests and location, both internal to the organization and between allies, could provide a structure upon which to negotiate differences...” (p. 102) and therefore, what is seen as strategic maneuvering could instead be conceived of as part of a division of responsibilities.

Davis (2010) writes that another frequent relationship tension revolves around paternalism. As Wallace et al (2010, p. 103) explain, “when Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come together in alliances and coalitions, paternalism may be mobilized, subtly or overtly.” Echoing our discussion of “Playing Indian” above, paternalism can be detected in a homogenous view of how Indigenous people relate to the land. In the Australian context, Clare Land (2015: 13) explains, there is frequently a tendency for allies to promote traditional aboriginal economic activities as somehow more “authentic, homogenous and stable” than the economic development projects they oppose. Even following their commitment to decolonize, this perspective was still promoted in the Indigenous Policy of Greenpeace’s American office, which states that it “recognizes the right of Indigenous Peoples to carry out traditional activities, such as sustainably fishing, hunting, trapping, gathering first foods and medicine, on their traditional territories and waters...” (Greenpeace USA, 2017). Such a statement reflects an ongoing romanticization of Indigenous identity that continues to envision and to glorify an Indigenous economy and community based solely on traditional subsistence activities. Until very recently Greenpeace Canada shared the language found in the American policy in its own statement (Greenpeace Canada, 2014a). But recent changes to the Canadian statement point to a conscious departure from this romanticized perspective as the organization incorporates the reality that Indigenous groups are increasingly taking control of market-based activities. As stated in its most recently updated Policy on Indigenous Rights: “Greenpeace Canada recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to make decisions regarding activities on their traditional territories, such as fishing, hunting, trapping, gathering, *revenue generation and development activities*” (Greenpeace Canada, 2014b). Alex Speers-Roesch admits that these historical patterns of romanticism are something of which the organization needs to “remind itself” and explains that:

[Decolonization] is more of a direction that we go in and try to figure out the issues of colonialism that seem most immediate but there will probably be more that become clear as we address the ones that are most clear today... It's about taking direction from those communities, centering their voices and their perspectives and bringing those to a wider audience. It's about using the power and the reach that we have as an organization to do all of those things and it's also about bringing along our supporters (personal communication, 1 June 2017).

Greenpeace members and leadership have expressed a genuine desire to not only move past their troubled history in the Arctic, but also to recognize the asymmetry in their past relationships and to make amends for these. Some activists and scholars have suggested that righting these asymmetries requires restitution (Alfred, 2005). In the wake of Greenpeace's apology one prominent sealing advocate, Aaju Peter, argued that if Greenpeace really wanted to decolonize they need to compensate Inuit: "After all the money that was generated by Greenpeace over the years that they [should] compensate each Inuit \$1 million" (Oudshoorn, 2016). Given that Greenpeace built its early reputation and what is now a multi-million dollar international budget on the success of its early sealing campaigns, such a call is not unexpected. In this view, if Greenpeace is truly committed to decolonization, one of the key challenges it will face will be to find ways of compensating Inuit communities for the damage the anti-sealing projects inflicted. Greenpeace has not yet taken the step of compensating communities or individuals, but such an action would represent an unprecedented expression of solidarity. Alex Speers-Roesch, an Arctic campaigner for Greenpeace who worked closely with Clyde River on their Supreme Court challenge, commented: "that is a conversation that Greenpeace would be open to having. There are all sorts of complexities and questions about what that would look like and how that would go but there is definitely openness on Greenpeace's part and amongst leadership to talk about that" (personal communication, 1 June 2017). Greenpeace is a global environmental organization that faces a formidable struggle against the human activities that create and sustain climate change but its' openness to discussing restitution reflects its ongoing and parallel commitment to making amends. Contradictions exist at the nexus of these objectives but as Curnow and Helferty emphasize, solidarity "is an imperfect strategy" and even while efforts toward solidarity may reveal tensions and embody contradictions, they create a space within which this can be achieved (2018: 155).

## **Conclusion**

Global warming is transforming the Arctic in ways that will continue to pit corporate and state interests keen on exploiting new resource and transportation opportunities against environmentalists who oppose such activities. Together issues of marginalization, culture, economics, law, self-determination, and sovereignty, rooted in a complex historical relationship



between Inuit and non-Indigenous peoples with stakes in Arctic North America, present a political landscape that challenges contemporary environmentalism in new ways. As part of its efforts to address the fallout from its previous work in the Arctic as it re-engages in the region, Greenpeace Canada has taken on the important task of accounting for its historical impact on Inuit communities, a process complicated by divergent understandings of decolonization. Greenpeace's historic and contemporary negotiations of solidarity in the Arctic demonstrate that for activists and allies *decolonizing* cannot be a one-size-fits-all concept, not a label one applies to a series of prescriptive tasks, but rather, a process involving the ongoing negotiation of relationships. Willie Ermine (2007, p. 203) proposed the concept of "Ethical Space" to describe spaces that "can become a refuge of possibility in cross-cultural relations... for the effect of shifting the status quo of an asymmetrical social order to a partnership model between world communities. The new partnership model of the ethical space, in a cooperative spirit between Indigenous peoples and Western institutions, will create new currents of thought that flow in different directions and overrun the old ways of thinking." Extending Ermine's concept to the social movement context Tanya Fook (2010: 306) argues that these spaces become "political and politically strategic for Indigenous peoples and their allies." The case of Greenpeace in the Arctic demonstrates that because these spaces have no beginning or end and that there are potentially insurmountable differences in agendas, relationships need to be carefully curated and understandings of solidarity need to be explicit.

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## **Acts of ignorance: how could Egypt's revolutionaries overlook a state massacre of 1000+ protestors?**

**Hesham Shafick**

### **Abstract**

*Two years after Egypt's uprisings in 2011, a popularly-backed military-coup massacred 1000+ protestors in Rabaa square. Many of the activist groups that mobilised for the earlier uprisings did not condemn this act. Existing social movement literature accounts for the political settings which made this silence structurally, ideologically and strategically viable. Building on these works, this article sheds light on the framing process through which the activists justified and hence reproduced this silence. Merging feminist 'epistemologies of ignorance' with(in) a 'collective action framing' framework, the article underlines the importance of 'bottom-up' approaches for understanding the reproduction of hegemonic silences beyond structural, ideological, and strategic determinism.*

**Keywords:** Epistemologies of ignorance, collective action framing, Rabaa Massacre, Egypt

### **Introduction**

In June 2010, an Egyptian citizen, Khaled Saeed, was beaten to death while in police custody. A morgue photo of his mangled corpse went viral and he became a nationwide symbol of state brutality. Massive demonstrations followed in response, mobilised by established activist groups, like the 6th of April Youth Movement (6 April) and the Revolutionary Socialists (RevSoc), activist groups formed in response, like the Facebook-based group *Kolena Khaled Saeed* ['We are all Khaled Saeed'], and various informal groups and public figures who later merged into activist coalitions, like the Revolution Path Front (RPF) and the National Salvation Front (NSF). The collective action organised by those activist groups and others culminated into a protest wave that started in January 2011 and successfully toppled the long-ruling tyrant, President Hosni Mubarak.

On 14 August 2013, following a popularly-backed military-coup, the police massacred 'at least 817 and likely well over 1000 protestors' during their eviction of an anti-coup sit-in in Rabaa square; 'one of the world's largest killings of demonstrators in a single day in recent history' (Human Rights Watch, 2014, p. 82, p. 6). Paradoxically, this state massacre was almost entirely ignored by many of the activist groups which mobilised for the earlier uprisings. The Facebook group 'Kolena Khalid Saeed' posted nothing on the eviction. 6 April (2013) posted a very brief consolation note, absent of any denunciation or



indictment. Even the RPF, a coalition of left-wing activists formed avowedly in protest against state violence, did not explicitly mention the violence in Rabaa either in their founding statement (RPF, 2013) or in a later statement dedicated precisely to ‘address police violence’ (RPF, 2014). The NSF (2013), a ‘big-tent’ coalition encompassing thirty-five groups, mostly secular conservatives, and many of which were affiliated to the January uprisings, was amongst the few who did attend to the event in detail.<sup>1</sup> Yet their statement did not mention anything about the fact that many protestors were brutally massacred. With the exception of RevSoc (2013), the general tendency, across a wide ideological spectrum, was to ignore the culpability of the state for the atrocity. While the stances of these groups on the massacre varied, they were all, with the exception of RevSoc, characterised by a common ambivalence that suggests a collective inclination across the varied components of the earlier movement.<sup>2</sup>

How can we explain this ambivalence? Existing literature underlines the structural and ideological grounds which made these groups’ silence on the Rabaa massacre a rational decision. What remains unexamined is how these groups could justify this silence to themselves and their followers. How could they frame the event in ways which systematically marginalised their ethical and political duty to condemn it? And how did this framing reinforce – or subvert – the existing structural and ideological conditions underlined in present frameworks?

### **Studying ‘ignorance’: theoretical background**

After a brief engagement with the structural and ideological conditions that facilitated this silence as underlined in existing literature, the article draws on three bodies of social theory to explore how the activists contributed to this repertoire of silencing and the reproduction of the conditions which facilitate it: literature on ‘collective identity’, literature on ‘collective action framing’, and literature on ‘epistemologies of ignorance’.

Literature on ‘collective identity’, pioneered by Alberto Melucci, approaches these silences as acts of identity demarcation. Critiquing the conception of

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<sup>1</sup> Some leaders of the NSF were part of the Mubarak regime, which does indeed complicate its position in relation to the January revolution. Yet this presence should not deny the equally strong presence of January revolution cadres and groups in the same front. In fact, the NSF shows the complexity and ambivalence of the lines that distinguish the two sides in post-Mubarak politics.

<sup>2</sup> Egypt’s 2011 uprisings – widely known as the “January movement” – involved a set of ideologically and culturally disconnected social groups, which makes their characterisation as a unified movement – in the traditional sense – controversial. Yet taking Alberto Melucci’s complication of collective identity seriously suggests the inherent conceptual and empirical ambiguity of most groups analytically approached as one “movement” (Melucci, 1996, p.30). The classification here should therefore be approached as an analytic rather than an empirical category: it does not reflect an actual social unity but an attempt to conceptualise points of intersection and commonality between empirically distinct groups.

movements as mere embodiments of alternative politics, Melucci (1996, 49) emphasises that movements could also reproduce gaps and silences in the dominant political culture. This dual agency of reproducing and/or resisting dominant political silences makes collective action frames more than mere effects of political opportunity structures; for the former plays an active role in reproducing the regime space which defines the latter.

Literature on 'collective action framing' set the analytic grounds for examining this dual agency (Snow, 2004; Snow and Benford, 2000; Gamson, 1995). However, its engagement with silence is limited on two main levels. First, while it refutes the conception of 'frames' as rigid structures, it remains focused on the tactical negotiation of these frames: the acts activists pursue to expand or rather limit their frame alignments based on their structural situation, ideological emphases, and strategic agendas. Rarely does it explore the interplay of the epistemic standpoints into this repertoire of frame reproduction. While these standpoints are themselves products of structural, ideological, and strategic conditions; they too affect these conditions by reframing and redefining them. It is the latter that is not sufficiently interrogated in current literature and which I aim to highlight in this analysis.

Second, 'collective action framing' literature remains driven by a normative and analytic focus on the progressive, counterhegemonic dimensions of framing: like its subversion of hegemonic political discourse, the centralisation of contentions this discourse overlooks, or the unification of multiple actors under one banner of contention. Rarely does it encounter the hegemonic role this framing might play: its possible reproduction of some aspect of hegemonic discourse, this discourse's structural and ideological division of social subjects, and its silences on some forms of political violence. To address the latter, this article utilises the emerging literature on 'epistemologies of ignorance', particularly as articulated in feminist social thought (Tuana, 2006; Harding, 1991, 2009; Fricker, 2007, Mills, 2007).

Feminist 'epistemologies of ignorance' are pertinent to address these two gaps for their emphasis on the interrelation between the social reproduction of epistemic silences and the reproduction of structural and ideological hegemony. Introducing their literature methods to a 'collective action framing' framework enables the study of movement silences as a function of the interaction between opportunity structures, ideological positions, strategic calculations, and the activists' framing of both according to which these structures, positions, and strategies are reinforced and/or resisted. This should facilitate the understanding of the dynamics which prevent a movement from mobilising for causes it would normally mobilise for, without relying on deterministic structural, ideological, and/or strategic paradigms.

It is important, however, to emphasise that the concept of 'ignorance' in this literature is not conceived as lack or unawareness of knowledge. It is rather conceived as an epistemic act of avoiding, marginalizing, repressing, and silencing this knowledge. This act is also different than the mere act of ignoring:

being aware of a set of knowledge but choosing not to attend to it. The act described in feminist 'epistemologies of ignorance' is rather the reproduction of cognitive frames which complicate the possibility of both attention to and awareness of this knowledge, in which social attention and cognitive awareness are entangled in the epistemic standpoint of the ignoring/ignorant subject. This standpoint, in turn, is simultaneously constructive of and constructed by the subjects' cognitive frames as well as her structural, ideological, and strategic positions.

Building on this conception, the analysis this article pursues oscillates between the structural, the ideological, the strategic, and the cognitive factors that contributed to the ignorance of the Rabaa massacre by the aforementioned activist groups. The key issue here is not to look for the 'conditions' which motivated the actors' ignorance (of the massacre), but to interrogate how such ignorance, as an act, itself empowered the conditions from which it emerged. That is, to interrogate ignorance as formative action constitutive of strategic aspirations, ideological emphases, and structural dynamics.

The conceptual and methodological frameworks that regard these latter factors as sufficient explanations of ignorance overlook the agency of ignorance acts themselves in reproducing the cognitive conditions for such strategic, ideological and structural influences. To correct for that, and building on feminist social theorists like Sandra Harding (1991), I reject the reduction of the cognitive process of knowing or ignoring to either the mobilisation of already existing knowledge or the mere manipulation of knowledge to serve already existing structures, ideologies, or strategies. Rather, I approach cognition as an act that is itself reproductive of knowledge paradigms and their implied structural, strategic and ideological frameworks; whether it is an act of cognitive inclusion - i.e. knowing - or an act of cognitive omission - i.e. ignoring.

### **'Top-down' explanations: the ignorance-inviting political situation**

To set the scene for this analysis, this section utilises existing literature on the case to contextualise activists' ignorance of the Rabaa massacre within the situational settings that made it structurally, ideologically, and strategically viable. Notwithstanding their variances, I group those works, only for the sake of organisation, into three clusters of argument: repression; polarisation; and bandwagon. The section briefly outlines the main insights each cluster proffers; then underlines the contribution the proposed framing analysis provides to their discussion.

**Repression: lack of political opportunity**

One prominent explanation of ‘January activists’<sup>3</sup> ignorance of the Rabaa massacre is the structural constraints on activism the July 2013 coup imposed. As political opportunity theory suggests, activists are more likely to mobilize against state violations when the surrounding political conditions indicate a potential return on their mobilization: like when there is a noticeable decline in regime popularity, division within elites, or external restraint on repression (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Meyer, 2004).

At the time of Saeed’s murder, this was clearly the case: the octogenarian President was aging, his attempt at inheritance-based transition of power to his son was openly resented by the high command in the military (Kandil, 2014), and the ‘open U.S. support for reforms in the aftermath of 9/11 ... made it temporarily difficult for the ruling elite to practice its typical repressive policies against political activists’ (Selim, 2015, p. 85).

By the time the Rabaa massacre occurred, the situation was entirely upended: Military generals who were young, powerful, and popular took the lead (Abul-Magd, 2017), backed up by a ferocious police institution keen not to re-incur its previous defeat (Kandil, 2014), a conservative judiciary eager to reinstall social order at all costs (Brown, 2016), and the Gulf monarchies pressuring the international community to relax the earlier restraints on repression (Wehrey, 2014). The political space which encouraged the earlier mobilisation was obviously shut down.

**Polarisation: intensification of ideological politics**

The activists’ limited sympathy towards the victims of Rabaa could also be attributed to ideological politics. Most Rabaa victims were Islamist supporters of the ultra-conservative ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ regime. These were united with secular activists in their opposition to Mubarak. However, as Alan Touraine (1985) emphasise, unities like these are faced with their previously-submerged ideological tensions once their common adversary is perceived to be defeated.

After the fall of Mubarak, ideological divides between the progressive and the conservative camps of the movement came to the fore (Brown, 2013; Abourahme, 2013). The Brotherhood’s rise to power further complicated these divides, not only because it reframed them as a regime – rather than an opposition – actor, but because this actor was significantly ‘torn between its embedded and long-lasting conservatism and the revolutionary momentum’ which brought it to power (Al-Anani, 2015). Their reactionary policies alienated

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<sup>3</sup> The January movement, like most new social movements, has no objective grounds of affiliation, which makes any use of signifiers like ‘January movement’ or ‘January activists’ inherently contentious. While noting such inherent limitation, those terms are used to indicate figures, groups, organisations and coalitions commonly associated, in academic and popular discourses, to the repertoire of contention which began in January 2011.

a huge portion of the progressive constituencies that supported them in the final elections against Mubarak's last Prime Minister, General Ahmed Shafick. The practices of the Brotherhood regime gave rise to an ideological contention between the progressive front of Mubarak's opposition and the conservative former comrades who led the post-uprisings regime.

'The Brotherhood also alienated those with whom it marched during the uprising — liberals, leftists, and secularists — by allying with Salafis and former jihadis' (ibid). This alliance reconstituted the political landscape into the traditional Islamist-Secular division the January uprisings had temporarily transformed. The pre-revolution *Kulturkampf* ['cultural struggle] between secularists and Islamists was restored (Beck, 2013). This, combined with the growing liberal and leftist opposition to the Brotherhood's reactionary policies, gave rise to a series of protests and strikes which reconstituted the opposition front as a secular national movement against the Islamists' ideological threat. This sense of threat was further exacerbated by incidents of physical violence between the proponents and the opponents of the Brotherhood regime (Vidino, 2013). It was also emphasised and exaggerated by the 'deep state', which used it to 'securitise' the ideological contention and accordingly justify the exceptional measures deployed in overthrowing the Brotherhood and containing their resistance to the popularly-backed military coup (Pratt & Rizk, 2019).

This perception of common threat set an atmosphere of exceptionality which brought together groups who otherwise were most likely to be in conflict. The first embodiment of this coming together was the NSF, under which several influential liberal and leftist activists and politicians joined forces with some powerful cadres of Mubarak's regime to resist the expansion of Brotherhood control. The front was formed in reaction to a constitutional declaration in which the President gave his decisions immunity from the checks of judiciary agencies; an act perceived by NSF members — among many others- as a 'hijack' of the democratic process by the Islamist regime (Taabar, 2013). Nonetheless, this initial mobilisation formulated a secular opposition front which continued and further expanded after the aforementioned declaration was revoked.

An even broader front came together in the Tamarod [Rebel] campaign - a petition and protest campaign which sought to subvert the electoral victories of the Islamist regime through a popular vote of no confidence. Tamarod could effectively garner the support of ideologically variant activist groups, including the liberal 6 April and the leftist RevSoc, together with financially-sponsoring business elites (Elyachar, 2014) and openly endorsing security and military figures (Lesch, 2015). But most importantly, it mobilised the grassroots, through their active inclusion as signatories. As such, it lent a popular agency to the military junta according to which it portrayed its violent measures as protective of the 'will of the people'. Through repressing one side in the name of the other, the military junta grounded and institutionalized the developing ideological fragmentation in the anti-Mubarak front; further normalizing it (Sika, 2019).

**Bandwagon: selective repression and state manufacture of dissent**

In addition, the selective repression the junta deployed encouraged political actors to shift towards the anti-Brotherhood front. The recurrent gestures of alignment between the 'deep state', embodied in the military and security leadership, on one side, and the grassroots' movement against the Brotherhood, embodied in Tamarod and the NSF, on the other, made the winning side of the contention easily recognizable. This created a bandwagon effect (*à la* Mearsheimer, 2001): activists were systematically encouraged to align themselves with the anti-Brotherhood side as it was perceived as winning anyway. Even the Salafist Nour Party, which was a consistent ally of the Brotherhood in electoral, parliamentary, and contentious politics, sought to save the Islamists' presence in politics by aligning with the NSF positions and later endorsing the military leadership's 'road map' of power transfer (Lacroix, 2016). This move not only exacerbated the power of the bandwagon, but also reorganised the political landscape in a way that further cornered and alienated the Brotherhood; now being no longer the Islamist rival of the secular coalition, but rather the loner adversary of everybody else. This positioning of the Brotherhood increased the costs of sympathizing with them or their victims.

More importantly, the reordering of the political landscape to bring the military leadership once again in alliance with a grassroots resistance movement that is inclusive of liberals, leftists, conservatives, and even Islamists echoed the earlier January movement's order of things. The regime being resisted was different on so many levels, but the resistance movement reflected the earlier coalition in which 'the military and the people are one hand'; as the famous January protests' chant, reproduced in the protests against the Brotherhood, descriptively puts it. By carefully selecting their targets of repression, the deep state brought together a fairly representative grassroots movement which reflects the earlier one, not only in its composition but also in its relative acceptance of the military guardianship of their movement.

This acquiescence to guardianship complicated the possibility of dissenting from the military junta's violent measures on two main levels. First, as popular consent was grounded in those measures, the state could deploy its popular backing to depict dissidents from its violent policies as enemies of the people's revolution (De Smet, 2016). Second, by repressing dissidents in the name of other dissidents, the state 'manufactured' the revolutionary space in a way that only allowed compliant 'dissent' to prosper (Ketchley, 2017). The selective repression of some opposition groups in the name of others rendered the agency to speak or act in the name of the opposition movement conditional on the acceptance of, or at least silence about, the state's violent measures against the allegedly 'counterrevolutionary' dissent –itself a condition of acceptance to the 'revolutionary' bandwagon. The ignorance of the Rabaa massacre was, therefore, not only instrumental to preserving the political gains of the anti-Brotherhood movement, but was a condition for the sustenance of the movement and the avoidance of its repression.

**Framing and ignorance: 'bottom-up' reorganisation of politics**

Combined, the above analyses demonstrate the ignorance-inviting political situation; characterised by repression, polarisation, and a huge power differential. But these factors were arguably also present in the buildup to the earlier uprisings against Mubarak, although indeed with variant degrees. At the time, however, the collective action managed to expose that repression and garner public, institutional, and international resistance that consequentially restrained it, as well as transform the polarised political sphere and disturb the regime bandwagon. That is to say, if repression, polarisation, and power differential contributed to the lack of collective action against state violence in reaction to the Rabaa massacre, they were also themselves consequences of such lack. And, indeed, they were not new conditions to Egyptian politics.

Understanding the influence of these structural conditions, therefore, requires an interrogation of how they were enabled or disabled through the activists' ordering and practicing of them. In particular, it requires an explanation of how the activists' framed the structural constraints in ways that empowered their political significance, how they framed the ideological tensions as overwhelming (even to the massacring of their earlier revolutionary comrades) while they were not at some other point in history, and how they framed their strategic alliance with the brutal military regime in a way that rendered it justifiable within their revolutionary and nonviolent discourses. These questions remain overlooked in existing literature, which focuses on the structural situation at the expense of the activists' recognition of this situation and its effects.

Framing analysis complements this gap by emphasising the role of cognitive agency in mediating the aforementioned structural, ideological, and strategic conditions. Interrogating different framings of the Rabaa incident, this analysis underlines how each framing emphasised strategic aspirations, ideological emphases, and structural categories that either reinforced or subverted the hegemonic structural, ideological, and strategic conditions. This interrogation is necessary not only to understand the variance in the activists' responses to the massacre, but more importantly to recognise how the seemingly inherent ignorance of the event was partially constructed by the activists' own action, and hence was avoidable and contestable.

Frames are not mere cognitive maps of an objective reality, but rather carefully manipulated 'designations' of such reality (Snow, 2004). Framing enables activists to reconstruct the meanings of structural, ideological and strategic contexts by selecting which aspects of them to emphasise, which to marginalise, and which to entirely ignore. Framing acts, therefore, have two converse faces: collectively recognising particular aspects of contention as most significant and collectively ignoring aspects which are systematically silenced, marginalized, repressed, and/or avoided in such 'frame' of collective recognition. The latter is not merely a function of knowledge leftovers, but of the active production of collective ignorance to sustain the cognitive alignment which makes collective action possible.



Although it acknowledges the importance of the (re)production of collective ignorance as well as collective knowledge to frame alignment (Gamson, 1995; Benford, 1997), collective action framing literature has tended to focus mainly on the latter, particularly in its empirical investigations. To correct for that, this article builds on Melucci's (1996, p.9) premise that 'movements exist also in silence' and accordingly approaches collective action as equally productive of silences, marginalisations, repressions, and avoidances. Following from that, it addresses the systematic ignorance (rather than 'circulation') of particular aspects of reality – in this case, the Rabaa massacre- as the core object of framing analysis.

### **Approaching ignorance: a feminist epistemology**

But how can systematic ignorance be empirically studied? To that end, we should abandon the limited conception of ignorance as mere absence, lack of knowledge or will to know. Rather, ignorance should be approached as a dynamic, often strategic, formative act in itself. Perhaps the core contribution of feminist epistemology is its vigorous exposition of the proposition that knowledge is not objectively 'found' but rather socially 'founded': invented, articulated, negotiated, and validated through social interaction; in a way that makes the object of knowledge partially a creation of the collective action of knowing it (Harding, 2009). Inverting such logic, we may envision how this object of knowledge can alternatively be dis-created: denied its very existence by antithetical collective acts of marginalising, avoiding, repressing, and silencing this knowledge. These acts, thus, could be regarded as 'acts of ignorance': social practices reproductive of cognitive exclusions.

Ignorance, therefore, could be conceived as an 'act'. Rather than self-evident (mis)recognition of objective events, it could be an active practice of constituting events within particular paradigms of cognition. This should be distinguished from mere manipulation. Whereas the latter is an entirely strategic response to stimuli arising from the structural, ideological, or strategic fields, an ignorance act is the cognitive reframing of these fields by instigating, revoking and/or normalizing alternative cognitive habits (Mills, 1997). Nevertheless, it is through those cognitive habits that subjects constitute themselves as cognitive actors, and hence acquire both the responsibility and the agency for their action of knowing and unknowing.

In that sense, the framing of an event reproduces cognitive frameworks and their implied structural, strategic, and ideological paradigms. These frameworks have two faces: that of cognitive inclusion - facts, images, arguments, and normative positions emphasised in the cognitive framework; and that of cognitive omission - facts, images, arguments, and positions systematically excluded from this framework. The latter contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic silences, is widely overlooked in empirical studies on framing, and is the focus of the analysis which will follow in this article.

But how can cognitive omission be empirically traced? The classical way of doing so is comparing the given cognition to a more cognitively inclusive benchmark. The problem with this approach, however, is its assumption of the cognitive superiority of the pre-assigned benchmark (Janack, 2002). To avoid that, feminist standpoint theorists trace cognitive gaps not in comparison with an objective 'scientific' benchmark, but rather with other cognitive standpoints. For instance, female standpoints were extensively utilised to underline silences and ignorances in androcentric sciences and histories (Harding, 2009; Hutchings, 2007), whereas black feminist 'intersectional' standpoints were utilised to bear on gaps in white-centric feminism (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008).

Comparative standpoints create a 'controversy' that exposes areas of knowledge overlooked at some standpoints but not others, without assuming the cognitive or epistemic superiority of any of these standpoints (Harding, 2009). By positing alternative ways of knowing a subject or an event, alternative standpoints offer subjective social benchmarks through which what could be possibly known in an equivalent social setting is exposed. In social movement studies, this could take the form of comparative framing analysis; in which case the different framings of an event could serve to expose the knowledge gaps in each other's frames.

### **Categories of ignorance: Tuana's taxonomy**

But what precisely should be traced in such analysis? Combining diverse theories of ignorance, Tuana (2006) proffers a taxonomy of ignorance categories, which, although it could never be fully inclusive or reflective of the complexity of ignorance practices, could serve as an organising methodological map for the empirical tracing of ignorance as an object of analysis. In this analysis, I use four main categories from Tuana's taxonomy<sup>4</sup>:

1. Manufactured ignorance/repression: ignorance systematically cultivated by people in power by repressing attempts to know; expressed in the lay conspiracy theory: 'they do not want us to know' (Spelman, 2007)
2. Willful ignorance/avoidance: when the reluctance to know is not merely an absence of interest in knowledge, but rather a present interest in avoiding such knowledge. Here, ignorance is a strategic investment that is psychologically, politically, and socially functional (Mills, 1997). It is best expressed in the lay phrase: 'I prefer not to know'.
3. Silencing: silencing knowledge from particular subjects by denying them cognitive agency. Denying the cognitive agency of the clinically 'insane' is

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<sup>4</sup> This outline does not copy Tuana's exact terminology, but reframes her work as pertinent to the argument of this article. The original taxonomy also includes 'loving ignorance' and 'unknown unknowns', omitted here as they do not apply to this article's conception of relatively deliberate ignorance acts.

a classical case (Foucault, 1961/2001), but there are plenty of other grounds through which particular (non)knowers are denied cognitive agency based on the dominant beliefs of what counts as sources of reliable knowledge in the community which evaluates their claims (Fricker, 2007).

4. Disinterest/marginalisation: the cognitive marginalisation of subjects potential knowers do not really care to know about, not for strategic reasons, but simply because they do not seem important; expressed in the lay term 'I do not care' (Longino, 1990).

These four categories consistently appear in the background of 'collective action framing' literature, although rarely brought to the centre of its analysis.

Manufactured ignorance is part of the policing of social movements, in which elites allow certain political knowledge to be propagated in collective action while repressing others (Della Porta, 1998).

The notion of 'willful ignorance' echoes David Snow's 'frame alignment;' but reversed. 'By frame alignment, we refer to the linkage of individual and social movement organisation interpretive orientations' (Snow et al., 1986, p. 464), an endeavour that could only be sustained through a parallel collective ignorance of areas of cognitive tension. This entails the avoidance of knowledge of contentious subjects whose recognition jeopardizes the coherence of the collective action frame (Snow, 2004), the collective trust in the potential reward from collective mobilisation (Tarrow, 2012), or the sense of unity and continuity of a collective actor (Melucci, 1996). It also entails the silencing of knowers whose recognition implies the aforementioned effects.

Disinterest is the inverse side of centralising collective action frames on particular areas of interest, for this collective centralisation inherently necessitates the marginalization of other areas (Gamson, 1995). In (Gamson's) framing analysis, as in feminist studies of ignorance, areas of disinterest are not mere leftovers of the movement's/society's sphere of interest, but a careful marginalization of particular issues in pursuance of centralizing others –feigned yet normalized omission of potential interest.

Conceived as such, repression, avoidance, silencing, and marginalisation of potential knowledge – and knowers - become part and parcel of collective action framing. Approaching 'framing' from this perspective encourages us to conceive of frame omissions as active and productive aspects of mobilisation, rather than mere gaps or limits in the collective action frame. The following analysis interrogates those acts of omission in the main activist groups' framing of the Rabaa incident.

## **Methodology**

The following analysis compares the framing of the Rabaa incident by five ideologically-diverse activist groups, including the (relatively) conservative NSF,

the leftist RPF and RevSoc, and the liberal 6 April and Kolena Khaled Saeed. This sample also represents diverse responses to the incident of Rabaa sit-ins' violent eviction itself, varying from the NSF fervent endorsement to the RevSoc blatant condemnation and others' spectrum of silences. Here, RevSoc serves as a 'social benchmark' that exposes the structural possibility of acknowledging the state massacre by activists engaged in the same political settings. Comparing RevSoc's framing to such an ideologically and politically diverse sample exposes areas of possible contention which were ignored by other activist groups.

The form/structure of the responses issued by these groups varied significantly; and hence this article's analytic approaches for examining their respective positions. The NSF and the RevSoc issued official statements on the incident, which grants the researcher a coherent source from which these groups' positions could be underlined. April 6 issued a mere consolation note, but one whose analytic reading is fairly sufficient to expose their position on the incident as well as the reasons for their reluctance to issue an official response. The RPF was founded a few weeks following the massacre in response to the violent and counterrevolutionary turn in the January movement's aftermath. This article analyses their founding statement as expressive of their positions on this counterrevolutionary violence and where the Rabaa massacre is situated in relation to it. This statement is augmented by another statement they issued on 'police violence' in particular, which interestingly did not include the Rabaa massacre in its listing of police crimes. Finally, the Kolena Khaled Saeed Facebook page preferred total silence. The reaction of its leaders/admins on the incident is therefore alternatively interrogated to excavate what the incident meant to them.

Thus the analysis draws on seven statements: the statements on the Rabaa eviction by the NSF (2013), 6 April (2013), and RevSoc (2013); the founding statement of the RPF (2013), complemented by a later RPF (2014) statement commemorating incidents of 'police violence'; and finally, two statements by the co-admins of Kolena Khaled Saeed Facebook group: Abdelrahman Mansour (2016) and Wael Ghoneim (2018), where they explain this group's absence of response on the eviction incident. With the exception of the statements by Kolena Khaled Saeed admins, the studied statements are all sourced from social media platforms – particularly Youtube and Facebook- which were used as the main means of communication by the studied groups. One main reason these platforms were relied on by most activist groups was their relative autonomy from government censorship, which is also the main reason I rely on them as sources for statements/positions on this sensitive and otherwise highly censored topic.

An exception was made for Kolena Khaled Saeed admins as they intentionally and avowedly committed to not post about this matter on social media. I therefore used two texts by its two main admins: one written for the international blog, *Medium*, and another narrated in an interview with the Egyptian independent newspaper *AlMasry ALYawm*. Another exception made for this group relates to the time-frame, which, understandably, is fixed to the

Rabaa incident and its immediate aftermath (late 2013 to early 2014). Yet, the fact that this group admins remained silent for too long made their writings several years after the massacre not only significant but also interestingly reflexive of their positions on the said massacre.

The analysis seeks to underline the aspects overlooked in some activist group narratives but not others, and expose the interrelation between these narrative omissions and the structural, ideological, and strategic positions of these respective groups. Discourse analysis of public statements serves that end on two levels. On one hand, public statements are expressive of the discursive strategies the issuing agent wishes to publicly convey. On the other, they are products of attentive backstage deliberations in which those strategies were deliberately framed – and hence partially control for randomness, spontaneity, and individual anomaly. Approached with these two dimensions in mind, the statements are conceived as neither passive reflection of a pre-acknowledged narrative nor mere strategic manipulation of narrative to reproduce particular knowledge, but as a discursive field of negotiation in which power and knowledge intertwine. In other words, the statements are conceived as cognitive frames that encompass, but also negotiate, contest, or possibly reproduce, the structural, ideological, and strategic fields within which they are produced and into which they are deployed.

Accordingly, the statements are interrogated as speech acts: spoken invocations of cognitive themes with strategic effects (Huysmans, 2011). Particularly, this analysis is concerned with how each activist group's invocation of particular themes facilitated its evasion of the question of the Rabaa massacre. The analysis proceeds in two steps: First, it briefly fleshes out the main themes centralised in each of the aforementioned activist groups' frame of the event, underlining how the centralisation of these themes facilitated evading the problem of the state massacre in all cases except the RevSoc. Second, it utilises Tuana's taxonomy to make sense of such evasions as acts of ignorance which reproduce existent structural constraints, ideological emphases, and strategic aspirations that reinforce the viability of such ignorance.

## **Ignorance acts: evading the massacre question**

### **NSF: 'achieves the objectives of the revolution'**

The NSF statement on the evacuation opens with an assertion that 'the Egyptian people and their nation's institutions are writing a significant chapter in its historical national battle for democracy.' Tying the 'democratic' battle with the 'national', the statement renders logical the involvement of the state's coercive apparatus, here referred to as the 'nation's institutions', in pursuing democratic aspirations. As such, it also renders it as 'normal to see the Egyptian people united with and supporting of police and army forces ... to achieve the objectives of the Egyptian revolution.'

Hence, rather than a crackdown on dissent, the NSF framed the eviction as a victory for the 'true' revolutionary dissent. To achieve that, the NSF framed Rabaa protestors as mere representations of the overthrown regime, the Muslim Brotherhood, referring throughout the statement to Rabaa protestors as 'the Brotherhood.' While it is logical to assume that many of Rabaa protestors were Brotherhood supporters<sup>5</sup>, as the protests were originally mobilised to resist the grassroots' uprisings, then the coup, against the Brotherhood regime, treating them as mere extensions of the Brotherhood regime denied them their agency as civil dissidents. As such, the statement reversed the logic of contention: the anti-coup protestors became a force of regime repression whereas the evicting troops became a force of 'revolution'.

Moreover, the statement invoked a discourse of international conspiracy, which dragged attention away from the domestic conflict altogether. Here, the protests were framed as mere extensions of 'the attempts of the Brotherhood with the help of foreign nations to force Egyptians to retract' from their 'quest for democracy'. Framed as such, 'the present conflict' became 'not one between two political factions, but one between the Egyptian people and their institutions on one side' and a repressive 'international cult' on the other.

Furthermore, the statement emphasised what it named 'the terrorist nature' of the Muslim Brotherhood. It is worth noting that the statement made no effort to give proof for such accusation of terrorism. It was rather assumed by proxy, on the basis of a concurrent terrorist attack by 'Islamic militants' in Al-Areish, 200 miles away from the Rabaa protests. Here, the presumed identity between the Brotherhood and Rabaa protestors was extended to an assumed identity between all elements of Islamist politics; one which justifies punishing peaceful protestors for crimes committed by an entirely different group.

Overall, these thematic emphases framed the event of eviction in terms of international 'war on terror', rendering it an issue of 'national security' rather than civil right of dissent. By extension, it based the assessment of state violence on the exceptional benchmarks of war practices rather than the conventional ethics of protest evictions.

### **RPF: an irrelevant inter-regime conflict**

RPF is a left-wing coalition formed weeks after the Rabaa eviction avowedly to '[simultaneously] resist the suppression of military rule, and the

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<sup>5</sup> It is always hard to make accurate estimations about the demographics of crowds. Evidently, not all of the Rabaa crowds were Muslim Brotherhood members. Evidently, too, Coptic Christian minorities were not represented in these protests in any significant way. In relevance to this research, it suffices to indicate that it is inaccurate as well as disempowering to reduce Rabaa crowds to mere reflections of an alienated political group which they, or many of them, support.

authoritarianism, violence and sectarianism of the Brotherhood' (RPF, 2013). Echoing the NSF's unqualified presumption of the Brotherhood violence, as well as their reduction of Rabaa protests as the Brotherhood's popular arm, the RPF (2013) founding statement equated Rabaa protestors and the evacuating troops as correspondent 'violent ... counterrevolutionary forces.' This assumed correspondence rendered the violence in Rabaa seemingly proportionate on one hand and irrelevant to the revolutionary discourse on the other. As such, it made justifiable the statement's omission of any condemnation of the state's disproportionate use of violence against Rabaa protestors.

Even when the RPF (2014) held a press conference dedicated precisely to commemorate police brutality, of all the violations their opening statement reviewed, from Khaled Saeed murder to the recent crackdown on labour strikes, the Rabaa massacre was never mentioned. The omission of the 'gravest incident of mass protestor killings' (Human Rights Watch, 2014, 5) from this review remains unexplained; but could be partially rationalised in terms of the disclaimer the statement opens with: 'we insist ... [that] there is no any degree of coordination, and will never be any degree of coordination, between us and either the ... Muslim Brotherhood or any agency associated to the current regime.' The comparability reiterated between the Brotherhood and the military regime framed the violence in Rabaa as an irrelevant combat between counterrevolutionary forces, rather than an incident of police violence against civil dissidents; making its omission from their account of condemned police brutality plausible.

## **6 April: a depoliticised catastrophe**

The statement issued by 6 April is exceptionally brief: a consolation note addressed particularly to one of 6 April's 'former' members who was killed in the Rabaa evacuation. The statement emphasised that this member was no longer a member of the 6 April group and also that his presence in Rabaa was for professional journalistic purposes. This double distancing of their mourned victim demonstrates a desperate attempt to avoid any possible political affiliation between 6 April and the Rabaa protests, particularly as evidence suggests the continued affiliation of this member to both groups simultaneously (Yaqeen News Network, 2013).

The statement closes with an extension of this consolation to 'anonymous people who fell as victims [in Rabaa] without doing a sin or being affiliated to any of the sides in the conflict.' The utterance of the phrase '[without] being affiliated' following the phrase 'without doing a sin' as conditions for the accustomed consolation suggests an implicit comparability between sinfulness on one hand and political affiliation on the other. Comparing political affiliation to sinfulness, the statement conditioned the mourning-deserving victimhood to apolitical subjects. In such case, all sides of the political conflict were conceived as equally problematic, the victims and the assailants alike; as expressed in the generic phrase 'any of the sides'.



Perhaps for this reason, the statement referred to the murdered as 'victims', a term rarely used in reference to activists murdered in confrontations with police forces. In earlier events, those were referred to as 'martyrs' (Youssef & Kumar, 2012). The reluctance to use this term this time reflects a reluctance to frame the event in the revolution's political terms. Also, the use of the passive tense 'fell as victims' portrayed the victimisation as an action done by the victimized (who 'fell') rather than done to them (as in expressions like 'were murdered', 'were victimized', etc.). As such, it discursively omitted the political subjects who committed this crime from the expression of mourning. By focusing on the politically-emptied news that victims 'fell', the statement marginalised the political details that brought about this victimisation. Overall, the systematic avoidance of the language commonly used in the context of Egypt's recent contentious repertoire – like the mention of intended murder or the description of the murdered as martyrs – served to distance the event from the narrative of January movement.

Combined, these discursive maneuvers framed the massacre as an apolitical catastrophe with no agency to be held accountable for. Therefore, although the atrocity was admitted in this narrative, it was framed not as a violation attributed to a particular agency but as a catastrophic incident whose victims are mourned but not politicised. In this framing, mourning the victims was the central theme, but the whole question of the state responsibility for their victimisation was entirely evaded.

### **Kolena Khaled Saeed: everyone to blame = no one to blame**

Kolena Khaled Saeed had no response whatsoever to the Rabaa incident. Later, the group's co-administrators, Mansour (2016) and Ghoneim (2018), justified that in terms of depression. Depressed, they separately explained, they decided to give up any political activity whatsoever.

But while hinting at this depressive situation, neither Ghoneim nor Mansour associated it with a particular accountable agent. Rather, in directing the blame, they used generic terms like 'political powers', 'involved actors', and sometimes 'everyone'. Mansour condemned the Rabaa eviction as a 'harsh violation' and blamed 'the corrupt performance of all civic leaders' who failed to control the conflict, but never the police troops that concluded the conflict violently. Ghoneim took a softer approach, contending that we should not 'point fingers' but rather appreciate the conflicting 'struggles, fears, and hopes' of all sides involved. Regardless of the approach, be it blaming everyone or blaming no one, the conclusion in both cases was the same: the accountability for the massacre was diffused along a very broad spectrum that no agency could be directly blamed for it.

Such diffusion of blame allowed Ghoneim to conclude his statement with a subversive note: 'Cops are not bastards. Activists are not saints'. This note is subversive of an earlier popular graffiti used to mobilise against the police in the

aftermath of Saeed's murder, which states 'all cops are bastards' (Sharaf, 2015). Compared to the earlier graffiti, Ghoneim's suggestion of the cops' innocence after such a massive massacre is telling of a profound alteration in his conception of police violence. With a philosophical twist, Ghoneim reframes this violence as a social product more 'complex' than the 'good and evil' division which marked their earlier framing of Khaled Saeed's murder.

Mansour reiterates this distinction between the two incidents of violence, the Saeed murder versus the Rabaa massacre; stressing the exceptionality of the former as 'someone like us': 'when you look at his photo or know about his life, you feel as if he is your neighbour or brother'. The fact that Saeed was not 'politicised' (meaning not politically active), Mansour avers, made his murder an alarming signal that 'no one was safe'. Underlining Saeed's apoliticality, Mansour implicitly hints that the dangers inherent to political activism are partially a 'choice' the activists make by being politically active. In such context, the fate of Rabaa protestors could be conceived as a choice which could have been possibly avoided (by not protesting, protesting on the right side, and so on.); giving them a portion of the blame for their own victimisation.

Diffusing the blame for the atrocity, to encompass 'everyone' including the victims themselves, Ghoneim's and Mansour's framings decentered the state accountability for the massacre.

### **RevSoc: 'can only be considered deliberate massacres'**

The RevSoc (2013) was the only group in this sample to attend to the state responsibility for the atrocity at Rabaa. Although their statement denigrated the Muslim Brotherhood as a 'criminal regime that failed and betrayed the objectives of the Egyptian revolution', it differentiated between the Brotherhood regime and the Brotherhood-endorsing sit-in. Hence, while standing firmly against the demands of the sit-in to reinstall the Brotherhood regime, RevSoc was still able to condemn the use of excessive force to evict it.

Also, the statement urged audience to put such violent eviction 'in the context of [...] a road map openly hostile to the aims and demands of the Egyptian revolution.' This framing subverted the NSF's framing of the evacuation as a revolutionary force, to contextualise it instead as 'a bloody rehearsal on the path of liquidation of the Egyptian revolution.'

The statement concludes by lamenting 'those who describe themselves as liberals and leftists [but] betrayed the Egyptian revolution' by not having a firm stance on such a brutal massacre. Invoking the 'revolution' as a guiding concept, the statement replaced the widely-propagated identity discourse, which takes for granted contention between seculars and Islamists, with a revolutionary discourse in which the sides of contention are determined not by the identity the group 'describe themselves as' but the positions they take *vis-à-vis* the repressive state.

Invoking conceptual differentiations between the Brotherhood regime and the Brotherhood-supporting protestors, between anti-Islamist politics and anti-Islamist violence, and between liberal-leftist as identity and liberal-leftist as (revolutionary) practices, RevSoc were able to frame their position through a dualistic balance between their radical rivalry with the counterrevolutionary politics of the Brotherhood regime and their revolutionary position against state violence regardless of the ideological affiliation of its victims.

### **Ignorance in context: structure, ideology, strategy, and cognition**

The abovementioned statements exemplify how the invocation of particular framing themes had direct implications for the acknowledgement or the ignorance of the state massacre. Ignorance here, as aforementioned, is more and different than either unintentional misrecognition or intentional manipulation. It is rather an epistemic standpoint influenced by, but also constitutive and reproductive of, active cognitive biases, as well as ideological emphases, strategic aspirations, and structural dynamics. It is at the intersection between these four dimensions (cognition, ideology, strategy, and structure) that ignorance is reproduced as a marginalised, avoided, repressed, and/or silenced epistemic space. This final section utilises Tuana's aforementioned taxonomy to examine how each of these four aspects of ignorance (marginalisation, avoidance, repression, and silencing) were reproduced at the intersection between the ideological, strategic, and structural conditions which facilitated the ignorance of the Rabaa massacre and the reinforcement or mitigation of these conditions by the activists' cognitive framing acts.

### **Dis-interest/marginalisation:**

To begin with, most of the abovementioned frames reveal a systematic marginalisation of the state violations committed in the eviction of Rabaa sit-in, a deliberate construction of disinterest. This was most evident in Kolena Khaled Saeed group's utter silence and 6 April's selective mourning of a 'former' member and 'anonymous' others. In the cases of the NSF and RPF, disinterest took a more complicated form. The NSF was interested in the event, but not the police brutality it entailed. The RPF was interested in the problem of police brutality writ large, but not in this particular event. With the exception of RevSoc, no activist groups in this sample demonstrated genuine interest in the 'state massacre' problem. Why so?

Literature on genocide suggests that mass murder, in general, might be less attractive to public sympathy than individual murders, as it converts the personal stories of the murdered into de-personified 'numbers' (Feierstein, 2012; Jones, 2017). According to this argument, the anonymity of most of the Rabaa victims, firmly enforced by state censorship, complicated personal

sympathy with them; at least when compared to the widely-distributed stories of Khaled Saeed's life and death and the renowned photo of his mangled corpse.

This discrepancy, however, is not an inherent implication of the scale of murder. It is rather a product of the structural reproduction of one story of victimisation but not the other. Rabaa sympathisers did try to personalise their victims' stories, producing a plethora of moving documentaries that described their experience of victimisation in depth and detail (e.g. AlJazeera, 2013; Tha'er ElNahhas, 2013). But these efforts were blocked by the coup's systematic censorship of narratives sympathetic to Rabaa victims, which denied the population access to all media channels that did not openly endorse the coup as well as to 513 websites belonging to independent media and human rights agencies (Freedom of Thought and Expression, 2019).

As such, activists knew, mainly through state reports, that violence was committed against some victims in Rabaa; but they did not get the chance to 'know' these victims and relate to them on the personal level. The implication of this was particularly apparent in the contrast between Mansour's romantic description of Saeed - 'when you look at his photo or know about his life, you feel as if he is your neighbour or brother' - and 6 April's rigid mourning of 'anonymous others'. The fact that these activists did not get the chance to know the Rabaa victims as they knew Khaled Saeed made their responses to the death of the former far colder. In turn, this coldness in presenting and framing the later event of mass murder limited the possibility of relating to its victims on a personal level. That is to say, the distant and disinterested framing of the massacre reproduced the structural conditions which gave rise to this disinterest.

The NSF and RPF's disinterest could be understood in terms of strategic and ideological prioritisation. As evident in its statement, the NSF was overwhelmed by the concurrent 'national threats' of 'terrorism' and 'international interference'. Whether or not those concerns were evidentially grounded is irrelevant to their reaction, as long as they preoccupied the activist group both cognitively and strategically. As for the RPF, their (leftist) ideological priorities were more revolutionary than nationalistic. Yet, their peculiar cognition of the revolutionary discourse, marked by secular essentialism, distanced the problem of the Rabaa eviction, as it rendered the predominantly Islamist Rabaa protests inherently irrelevant to revolutionary dissent. In both cases, the problem of violence in Rabaa was marginalised, whether as strategically insignificant or ideologically irrelevant.

The discrepancy between the RPF's response to the massacre and that of another leftist group, RevSoc, is a function of their different framings of what Rabaa protests represent. Although both groups were explicit in their ideological and strategic position against the Islamist regime, it was only the former that regarded Rabaa protests as mere representation of such regime. RevSoc did not conflate Rabaa protestors with the Islamist regime they supported. Their lack of sympathy with the agenda of the dissidents did not,

therefore, overwhelm their concern with the state crackdown on the civic right of dissent itself.

### **Willful ignorance/avoidance**

Willful ignorance is evident in the inverse correspondence between the extent of attention given to the massacre by each group and the extent of privilege this group enjoys in the post-coup political regime.

At the time the massacre occurred, the NSF was strongly represented in the ruling regime – occupying the positions of Vice-President, political adviser to the president, and five ministers. In such context, the NSF evasion of the massacre question not only evaded a confrontation with their patron regime, but also with its own self as the core civic component of such regime.

At the other end of the spectrum, RevSoc's exceptional attentiveness to the junta's violations could be understood in terms of its exceptionally antagonistic relationship with the ruling junta. Of the five activist groups analysed, RevSoc was the only group which, at the time of the massacre, was legally criminalised, had members incarcerated and strikes violently repressed, and explicitly opposed the coup. These antagonistic factors made their recognition of the state massacre more structurally and strategically, but also cognitively and psychologically, viable.

RPF, 6 April, and Kolena Khaled Saeed did not have any significant privilege in the new regime. Nonetheless, they recognised, from the experience of RevSoc and others, that their relative privilege of merely being left unrepressed is conditioned by their silence towards state violations. This recognition was explicitly expressed in Mansour's (2016) lamentation that the military regime was ready to turn against its most zealous allies to wipe away the least glimpse of opposition. The RPF's (2013) statement also recognised those limits and explicitly demanded their expansion. Paying attention to the state violations was thus clearly understood as politically suicidal.

However, it was also burdensome, not only strategically, but also ideologically and psychologically, to conceive such violations but not attend to them. Ignoring the problematic violations altogether, avoiding this 'dusty chaos' – as Ghoneim (2018) puts it, was thus the most strategic act for these activist groups. This avoidance was particularly encouraged by the fact that all these groups cumulatively contributed, in their earlier contentions with the Brotherhood regime (mainly Tamarod), to the grassroots' agency the military deployed in their justifications of the coup and its violent measures; which meant that these activist groups' recognition of the massacre would have been a recognition of their own culpability.

## **Manufactured ignorance/repression**

The state manufacture of ignorance around the Rabaa massacre by means of selective repression was covered in De Smet's and Ketchley's respective analyses discussed in the bandwagon section above. These works underlined the ways in which the state sought to portray its crackdown on Rabaa protests as protective of the revolution from a popularly-ousted counterrevolutionary regime. This was executed through forcefully blurring the distinction between the Brotherhood regime and its endorsing protestors. The state main civil ally, the NSF, reproduced this conflation fully, the RevSoc fully challenged it, whereas the other three activist groups problematised the state narrative but failed to provide an alternative one. The variation in the activists' (re)cognition of such propaganda demonstrates their agency in reproducing, mitigating, or entirely contesting it; challenging its common conception as a one-way imposition 'from above'. But what explains this variation?

For the NSF, the state manufactured ignorance of the 'civility' of Rabaa activists was strategically rewarding. Being part of the ruling regime, the NSF would have been obliged, as simultaneously a democracy-advocating group, to confront and hold accountable their own members who became senior state officials, if the state offensive on the Rabaa sit-in was framed as a crackdown on civil dissent. To avoid that confrontation, the NSF reframed the conflict as an international war. This framing not only overwhelmed the domestic political conflict but also rendered 'exceptional' violence used against civilians – now conceived as rather combatants- more acceptable, particularly within the NSF's relatively conservative discourse.

The RevSoc was on the opposite side of this spectrum. The group's distrust of the ruling junta (expressed most evidently in its earlier popular campaign - '*Askar Kazebon*' [army liars] - aimed particularly to challenge the growing public trust in the military leadership by exposing their lies) rendered their refutation of the military-state conception of the Rabaa sit-in a logical development. Mobilising their distrust further, the RevSoc accused those who accept this narrative as 'betrayers' of the revolution; subverting the state propaganda which framed contentions to the state narrative as counterrevolutionary. But this subversion could only be made possible through their distinction between the arguably counterrevolutionary Brotherhood regime and the Brotherhood-endorsing civilians in Rabaa. This framing act of distinction allowed them to posit an alternative narrative of the incident which decisively emphasised the Rabaa protestors' right to dissent and the state violation of this civil right.

For the other three activist groups, their distrust of all sides of the conflict made them end up 'unsure' about, rather than oppositional to, the state narrative – as expressed explicitly in Mansour's (2016) statement. Although he emphasised that this confusion was state architected, Mansour's equal distrust of the victims' narrative impeded him from proposing an alternative narrative. The same applies to 6 April (2013), which equation between all sides of the conflict

made them conceive as culpable everyone who is affiliate to 'any of the sides'. Perturbed by the event and its two conflicting sides, their reaction to it was mere condolence. The same applies, as well, to the RPF, which critique of state narrative, in the absence of a more profound alternative, only produced 'questions and confusions' (RPF, 2014).

In short, the power of state propaganda was not merely a function of accepting or rejecting the state narrative, but also of being capable of finding an alternative narrative that contests it. The muddled and unclear information environment at that time rendered most activists equally suspicious about alternative narratives, giving way to confining confusions. Nonetheless, this suspicion was itself a function of framing civil dissidents in Rabaa as mere extensions of the Brotherhood regime; a discourse manufactured by the state and reproduced by most of the aforementioned activist groups' framings.

## **Silencing**

Significantly, there were contentious voices that were silenced in the collective framing of the incident. These were not merely voices of individuals with less influence, but sometimes of high profile individuals who only lost their influence by their very act of contesting the dominant narrative.

The most prominent example of these voices is Mohamed El-Baradei, the founding leader of the NSF. Being one of the main leaders of both the anti-Mubarak and the anti-Brotherhood movements, El-Baradei was appointed as Vice-President after the overthrow of the Brotherhood regime. Following Rabaa violence, El-Baradei resigned in protest, urging public contention against the violent eviction. However, his resignation only invoked contention against him. As his former campaign manager and NSF founding member, Mostafa El-Naggar (2013), himself puts it, El-Baradei's 'bizarre understanding of the political situation ... [rendered him] a disruptive and divisive loner ... [rather than] the unifying leader he used to be'. As expressed in El-Naggar's statement, El-Baradei's leadership was conditioned by a certain mode of cognition that is aligned with the conventional. Suggesting a different perspective, thus, became itself a reason to deny him the leadership agency.

A less prominent, but equally interesting, subversive voice silenced is the mourned ('former'?) member of 6 April murdered in the Rabaa massacre. His death as a liberal activist in Rabaa strikingly serves a counter-narrative to the conception of Rabaa victims as purely 'Islamists', which subverts the identity grounds that distance Rabaa victims from liberal activists' discourses. By rendering him former, denying him martyrdom, and cataloguing his presence in Rabaa sit-in as journalistic/professional rather than political, the 6 April leadership denied him the agency not only to speak but even to die in the name of their liberal movement; alleviating the subversive agency of his (possible) martyrdom.

Both cases are strikingly reminiscent of Fricker's (2007) 'paradox' of epistemic injustice. Simply put, her paradox entails that since knowing injustices is partially a function of experiencing them, those who practically know about injustices are usually the socially oppressed who do not have an agency to express the knowledge they know. As such, ignorance about injustices remains socially intact through the systematic exclusion of knowers. But the above cases suggest that such exclusion is not only a structural function of the knowers' social position, but also a function of what they know. If a particular cognition defines the epistemically dominant group, knowing 'otherwise' could itself become a ground for socially and cognitively stigmatising – and thus silencing – the knower.

Perhaps the aversion of such stigmatisation was one reason behind the silence of many individuals and groups at the time of the massacre, a time when particular narratives of the event were allowed to dominate and others were readily and often violently suppressed. It is here important to emphasize the junta's fierce punishment of those who contested their narrative of contentious events, usually executed through judicial prosecution under the allegations of 'spreading rumors' (Brown, 2016). Such legal and social stigmatisation silenced counter-conventional perspectives.

## Conclusion

The analysis above underlines three main political conditions that encouraged most of the studied activist groups to approach the Rabaa contentions with a degree of ambivalence; particularly ignoring the state culpability in it: the relative closure of the political opportunity to mobilise, the intensified ideological tension, and the reconfiguration of both the regime space and the opposition front. The analysis also highlights the ways in which the activists' framing of the event and its involved actors usually empowered these conditions. It closes with a discussion of the interaction between the structural elements and the activists' framing acts and how it contributed to the discursive marginalisation, avoidance, repression, and silencing of the issue of state culpability in the Rabaa massacre.

As such, this analysis contests the ubiquitous presumption that the silence on the Rabaa massacre was structurally inevitable given the peculiar restructuring of regime space in the aftermath of Mubarak; marked by the reinvigoration of the deep state, the polarisation of the opposition front, and the (deep) state cooptation of the secular elements of this front. While it acknowledges the influence of these structural elements, this analysis emphasised how the framing acts executed by the involved activists played into the reproduction of these influences, or, as in the case of RevSoc, their mitigation. By shedding light on the role the activists' selective framing of what the Rabaa massacre politically represented played into the (re)production – or rather resistance- of the hegemonic silence on the event, the analysis re-centers the overlooked agency of



activists in the epistemic-political field: the field where the limits of knowledge about political events is contested.

By doing this, the article makes two main theoretical contributions: First, it brings 'ignorance' as a conceptual tool to the centre of 'collective action framing' analysis. This centering enhances the latter analysis on three main levels. First, it allows for an understanding of ignored subjects of contention not as mere gaps in collective action frames, but as often deliberate products of marginalising, avoiding, repressing, and silencing potential knowledge and knowers of these particular subjects. Second, as such, it transcends the pathology-logical conception of ignorance in social movements as an epistemic deficiency that could be cured simply through exposure to knowledge. Rather, it urges social movement analysts to approach ignorance as an integral part of mobilisation and hence as a useful analytic category through which the limits of this mobilisation could be interrogated and negotiated. Third, overall, it demonstrates the possibility that framing becomes restrictive to -rather than productive of- collective cognition and action.

Second, it contributes to the study of ignorance more generally, by bringing in feminist methods of ignorance analysis from the realm of abstract political philosophy to bear on concrete practices of ignorance in collective action. This move builds on an earlier foundation in literature on critical pedagogy, which drew on those methods to study the reproduction of racial and gendered ignorance in classroom settings (Applebaum, 2010; Mueller, 2017). Expanding those methods to social movement studies enables the study of ignorance within settings generally characterised (at least in comparison to classrooms) by relative instability, looseness, and horizontality. Those characteristics make agency more visible, and hence highlight the works of acts – rather than structures - of ignorance. This facilitates not only a 'bottom-up' account of societal ignorance, but one which highlights the relative power of the ordinary in reproducing, or alternatively revoking, such ignorance through her own action.

As Erving Goffman (1974) avers, reality cannot be fully conceived all at once. Ignoring, like knowing, is a social act of organising such reality towards a particular mode of selective cognition. This article builds on Goffman's dual conception of framing, but uses feminist 'epistemologies of ignorance' to complicate his conception of 'selective cognition.' It demonstrates that this cognition is not 'selective' in the traditional sense of the term. While the activists do consciously play into selecting the themes they wish to emphasise in their frames and the ones they wish to ignore, this selection is conditioned by various structural, ideological, and strategic conditions within which they have to maneuver. However, their maneuvers are 'selective' inasmuch as they emphasise particular elements of the aforementioned conditions and marginalise, avoid, repress, and/or silence others. It is at this complex intersection between the cognitive and the structural/ideological/strategic that reality is organised, contested, and reproduced or rejected.

This complexity notwithstanding, the emphasis on the twin-faceted nature of collective cognition paves the way for a more profound analysis of the works of knowledge and ignorance in collective action. Particularly, it enables a more politically and ethically reflexive approach to and practice of collective action framing. This article underlines one situation in which framing contributed to the reproduction of an ignorance that is analytically, but also politically and ethically, problematic. Feminist literature on 'intersectionality' already touched base with such problematic acts of collective ignorance in their analysis of feminist movements' frames (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008). Invoking feminist epistemologies of ignorance, this article postulates a revival of feminist critique on collective action frames; a critique especially attentive to the duality and possible downside of the framing process.

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## **Cooperation and competition in the wave of British student protests 2009-2011**

**Hector Ríos-Jara**

### **Abstract**

*This study analyses the impact that the dynamics of cooperation and competition of collective action had over the political trajectory of the wave of student protests in the UK between 2009 and 2011. Using an exploratory qualitative case study design, the research describes the political trajectory of the student conflict, analysing the relationships of alliance and competition between the main social movement organisations during the conflict. The study suggests that the presence of multiple factionalisms and a predominant competitive relationship between the leading organisations produced a fragmented social movement, which reduced the political impacts of the wave and extension of the protests.*

**Keywords:** anti-austerity movements, students protests, collective action, social movement organisations, factionalism.

### **Introduction**

During the last decades, Europe has been fertile ground for extended and diverse forms of anti-austerity movements (Hayes, 2017). This label describes a wide range of protests that developed distinctively in the region after the 2008 crisis, as well as the correlative implementation of austerity packages (Hayes, 2017; Della Porta, 2015). In the UK, the wave of student protests of 2010 is a paradigmatic case of one of the earliest anti-austerity movements. The wave of student protests was a reaction against the reduction of teaching grants, an increase of the tuition fees cap from £3,000 to £9,000 and an expansion of the student loan system implemented by the government during the winter of 2010 (Scott, 2013). As an anti-austerity movement, the wave opposed material and political changes introduced by austerity policies, the rise of inequality and the lack of representation associated with them (Hayes, 2017; Della Porta, 2015a).

Despite their relevance, the wave of protests remains in an exploratory state of inquiry with significant gaps in its history and internal organisation. For example, most of the studies have been focused on the main events of November and December 2010 (Cini, 2018; Myers, 2017, Hensby, 2017, Ibrahim, 2014; Solomon, 2011), leaving unexplored the processes of prefiguration and configuration of the conflict during the last months of 2009. Additionally, the internal organisation of the wave and the links between the leading social movement organisations (SMOs) have not been thoroughly analysed. Those omissions make it difficult to construe the internal dynamics of collective action

and its impact on the political trajectory of the movement, which represents relevant aspects of anti-austerity movements.

Anti-austerity movements have been associated with the spread of new forms of political participation and processes of democratisation (Hayes, 2017; Benski, Langman, Perugorría & Tejerina, 2013). They have innovated the ways of organising movements and of introducing horizontal and open structures of association that combine territorial assemblies with offline and online networks of participation. Protests also show a distinctive pre-figurative character, where the forms of contention and organisation are always moving between a critique of undemocratic practices and an innovation in the form of political organisation (Della Porta, 2009, Della Porta, 2015a). To explain those aspects, scholars have emphasised the impact of technology and the use of social media networks as material or technological support of democratic organisations (Hardt, 2017; Rheingans and Hollands, 2013). Authors have also suggested that the adoption of horizontal and democratic organisations represent an ideological transition from old left values to a new political tradition, characterised by the incorporation of experiences and values from New Social Movements and political traditions of anarchism and feminism (Prichard and Worth, 2016).

One of the limitations of the ongoing discussion is the uncritical approach towards the novel aspects of anti-austerity movements, which misses the existence of common processes of competition inside and between movements (Prichard and Worth, 2016; Della Porta and Diani, 2006; Balser, 1997). For example, analysing the digital protests in the context of anti-austerity movements, Treré, Jappensen and Mattoni (2017) explain how the dynamic of competition between eco-pacifists, anti-neoliberals and post-autonomists produced divisions among anti-austerity groups. The competition among groups stopped the process of convergence of the anti-austerity movement in Italy. Similarly, in Britain, the tension between Marxist, Anarchist and Feminist traditions are still significant objects of conflict that keep several expressions of the left and anti-austerity struggles fragmented (Maignashca, Dean and Keith, 2016). Those examples challenge the romantic view of anti-austerity protests as a pure expression of horizontal and participatory democracy, pointing out the role that the dynamics of cooperation and competition play in the political trajectory of anti-austerity movements.

Despite the relevance of the British student protests of 2010, the role of social movement organisations (SMOs) and their alliances have not captured the attention of scholars. The internal organisation of the wave and the links between SMOs have not been analysed in detail. In light of this, the article proposes a new timeline of the wave of protests, which includes the process of articulation and resolution of the conflict. The article also analyses the process of cooperation and competition between SMOs, and the impact that the processes have on the extension and influence of protests. The study suggests that the existence of a fragmented social movement limited the capability of



SMOs to articulate a convergent strategy and make the movement prevail. This effect tended to reduce the extension of protests and their impact over policy.

The article is organised in four sections. First, it describes the current debates on organisational dynamics of anti-austerity movements, and the dynamics of cooperation and competition between SMOs. The second section describes the methodology of the study. Third, the article provides a historical overview of the political trajectory of the movement. Then, the research analyses the alliance system of the wave and the limitation of its collective action. The article finishes with historical reflections on the wave of protests, the role of factionalism and cooperation in anti-austerity movements, and some lessons for activists engaged in anti-austerity struggles.

### **Cooperation and competition in social movements**

The relationship between activist groups has always been a fundamental element to understand the trajectory and power of a movement. As Fligstein and McAdam (2011) argue, social movements can be defined as a strategic field of actions where different groups interact in a constant dynamic of articulation and differentiation. As a symbolic space, social movements are collective agents, circumstantially formed of different groups, associations and networks or social movements' organisations (SMOs) (Zald & McCarthy, 1980). Kriesi (1996) describes SMOs as formal organisations whose support is based on the direct participation of their members when they share common political goals, and mobilise their constituency through different forms of contentious activity. As part of a social movement, SMOs share a common understanding of the conflict and their political orientation, or collective framework, which provides a sense of membership and makes the political coordination between SMOs possible (Tarrow, 2011; Della Porta and Diani, 2006). However, as independent organisations, SMOs are in a continuous process of differentiation between each other, affecting the ability to mobilise resources, and limiting the range of cooperation between groups (Balser, 1997; Rucht, 2007).

Internally, SMOs are formed of different groups or factions, which compete with each other for leading or having a more influential role within the organisation. When this competition becomes regular, it can lead to factionalism or splits. Boucek (2009) defines factionalism as an informal process of subgrouping in a given social group. Particularly in left politics and social movements, factionalism has been described as a process of an informal grouping of members of the same organisation that modifies the process of the movement (Balser, 1997; Zald & McCarthy, 1980). Factionalism can trigger processes of division or splits of an SMO that happen when competing subgroups can no longer be part of the organisation, and they divide or separate from the original organisation.

## **Cooperation, competition and alliances in SMOs**

Dynamics of cooperation and competition between SMOs are fundamental to understand the strength of movements and their impact. Since social movements are collations of activists and organisations, the development of an alliance between SMOs is a fundamental process in the generation and trajectory of social movements. Brooks (2004) remarks that alliances between SMOs relay on programmatic affinity and mutual political gain that allow to mix sources during a common campaign. However, alliances are fragile and depend on the degree of affinity in structures of organisation between movements. The literature remarks cultural and organisational differences as common factors that determine the strength of alliances or the development of competing relationships.

SMOs usually have different values, ideologies and organisational habits embedded in the everyday activities of each organisation (Caniglia & Carmin, 2005; della Porta & Diani, 2006). These are elements of cohesion within movements. This notwithstanding, values also play the role of exclusion and distinction from other groups, operating as barriers that limit the opening of the group to new members and cooperation with other groups. Organisational differences are also relevant (Minkoff & McCarthy, 2005). In social movements, differences about tactics, decision-making processes, or the level of internal formalisation are critical points of cohesion and differentiation between organisations (Brooks, 2005). Alliances also relay on the organizational capabilities that each organisation has in order to interact with others. Emergent organisations, with less developed structures of coordination, tend to be more flexible and less formalised than old ones, with more institutionalised systems of coordination. These differences can produce clashes of communication, temporalities and doubts between SMOs that can reduce the possibilities of cooperation (Zald & McCarthy, 1980).

In light of these factors, Rucht (2007) proposes the concept of social movement alliance system to analyse the dynamics of cooperation and competition between SMOs. The alliance system can be defined as the new network of agents involved in collective action and the factors that determine their dynamic of cooperation and competition (Rucht, 2007). The author suggests that the possibilities of cooperation relay on the infrastructural and strategic affinities of SMOs in a specific conjecture. SMOs with high infrastructural and strategic affinity will have more chances to cooperate than groups with organisational and political differences, who would probably tend to compete or ignore each other during a conflict.

To understand the alliance system of a movement, it is also essential to consider the interactive effect between SMOs and the political context (Tilly & Tarrow, 2007). Alliances between SMOs can be affected by political opportunities and the links with third parties. If SMOs privilege a more instrumental orientation in an attempt to maximise their influence or success on a target, they will be likely to establish pragmatic alliances with third parties and distribute the

benefits with their constituencies (Tarrow, 2011). On the contrary, emergent SMOs that are more inclined to ideological cohesion or that have a strong identity will be more reluctant to alliances with other movements and third parties, protecting their autonomy and the symbolic value of their membership (Tarrow, 2011). In contexts of political negotiation or critical conjunctures, these orientations tend to cause tensions in the alliance system of social movements.

The interaction between the features of movements and their context makes it difficult to offer a general theory of cooperation and competition in social movements. However, the theoretical contribution described earlier provide useful tools to explore the relationships between SMOs involved in the wave of student protests of 2010 and analyse how competition between these organisations affect the trajectory of an anti-austerity movement.

## Methodology

The design of this research was a case study with an exploratory qualitative design (Flick, 2009). It encompassed three qualitative sources of inquiry. The first one was a selection of mass media reports. The analysis considered 211 pieces of news published during June 2010 and March 2011, which were explicitly related to the conflict. The collection was made using the Lexus database and considered the news that included the words "students, protests and higher education". The selection of articles involved three newspapers: the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, and *Times Higher Education*. These media outlets contain the highest number of articles on the subject. The BBC is not part of Lexus, therefore it was not considered. Local media with less than ten news articles during the 2010-2011 period were also excluded.

Critical event analysis was used as a data analysis technique. This facilitated the study of the historical process and the actors' dynamics involved in a conflict (Tarrow and Tilly, 2007: 16). The data obtained from the media were organised into a timeline, which included the contentious and political issues related to Higher Education. The initial map was complemented and triangulated with selective reviews of media and other sources. The map of critical issues was composed of the 155 critical events developed between January 2010 and March 2011, including government, stakeholders, SMOs, and activists' actions.

The second source was documents produced by the SMOs relevant to the conflict between 2009 and 2011. The selection included official documents that described the organisational structure and documents that expressed strategical changes during the conflict, such as declarations, blogs, or press releases. The majority of the documents were collected from official websites, and some sources that were shared by the participants. The selection considered: 12 documents from the National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC), eight from the University and College Union (UCU), and seven from the National Union of Students (NUS). The selection of these organisations was based on four criteria: an explicit structure of work, a declared national range of action,

an active role during the conflict, and current existence. The analysis technique at this stage was deductive and selective content analysis, which considered an organisational analysis of the SMOs and political strategy as main categories.

The third source was a group of 7 semi-structured interviews with local and national leaders of the SMOs described before. The strategy of participant contact was direct contact through social media and snowball strategy through gatekeepers (Flick, 2009). In the research participated three students, two were members of the NCAFC, one of the NUS, two academic members affiliated to UCU and party officers of the left organisations involved in the NCAFC and NUS. Qualitative content analysis was used as a data analysis technique using NVivo 10.

Additionally, the research considered some ethnographic tools and different levels of personal engagement with the topic. Having moved to the UK from overseas in 2015, I did not have any previous contact with British student movements and British left politics. However, as a part of my political interests and experiences as a student-activist in Chile, since my arrival in the UK, I got involved in the political field of the British left. These personal and political connections facilitated the production of an understanding of the local students' politics and the development of connections with some activists involved in the wave of protests of 2010. Therefore, my position as a "foreigner activist" facilitated the engagement of the interviewees with my project and gave me access to discuss the dynamics of competition and divergence in the social movements, topics that are usually discussed in informal contexts.

### **The political trajectory of the wave of protests**

This section analyses the political trajectory of the wave of anti-austerity student protests between 2009 and 2011. The trajectory was built using the categories described by Della Porta (2015), who suggests four main processes involved in the production of a conflict. *Structuration*, which refers to the convergence of different preconditions that create a climate of change in the political regime of the targeted social field. *Identification*, where the agents of a target field recognise the changes and assume themselves as an affected community or group. *Mobilisation*, which refers to the explicit conflict and confrontation with the political regime. Finally, a wave can find different types of resolution, which include processes of institutionalisation, commercialisation, radicalisation or dissolution (Tarrow, 2011).

From an overall perspective, the political trajectory of the wave of British students' protests can be described through four main stages that occurred between November 2009 and March 2011. From October 2009 to January 2010, it was a stage of pre-figuration of the conflict. This stage was characterised by the generation of the conditions of conflict, which included changes in the HE policy and the first experiences of students' mobilisation. From February to October 2010, it was a process of articulation of the conflict,

characterised by parallel and distributed episodes of contention with a low level of coordination. From November 2010 until January 2011, it emerged a stage of direct conflict, which included the most radical and famous events. Finally, after January 2011, it was a stage of decline or resolution with different processes of resolution for each organisation. The next sections analyse each stage in detail.

### **Prefiguration of the conflict**

The prefiguration of the conflict started with the draft of a new agenda in Higher Education (HE) policy. This agenda was introduced by the Labour government through the Spending Review of 2009, and the parliamentary agreement to call for an independent panel to review the HE finance system in November 2009, the so-called "Browne Review" (Browne, 2010). Both issues marked the beginning of a mixture between structural reduction in public spending and the radicalisation of the marketisation process of HE (McGettigan, 2013: 150; Roberston, 2013). Those changes opened a wide range of conflicts at national and local levels that structured the wave of protests (Hensby, 2017). Nationally, the first package of austerity and the new system of funding triggered a conflict between the Government and HE stakeholders, which mainly involved the Russell Group and other university associations. Locally, and because of the new policy, universities implemented correlative plans of reorganisation, which included the restructuring or elimination of departments, schools, and programmes, in addition to changes in the contractual regime of academic and professional staff (UCU, 2010f).

These transformations changed the attitude of social agents in the HE field, which started parallel processes of articulation and association to oppose the measures. These processes operated at the local level with the emergence of different anti-cut groups, whose most advanced expression was the occupation of Art College in London during November 2009. This occupation transferred the repertoire of occupations from the anti-war movement to HE, acting as an example and cannon of the collective action in the new HE struggle (Ismail, 2013). Nationally, the reform also changed the position of the more institutionalised SMOs. The University and College Union (UCU) and the National Union of Students (NUS), the main unions of HE, created a context of opposition to the reform using media pressure and political lobby preferentially. For example, in June 2009, the NUS launched the blueprint document, "Funding our Future" (NUS, 2009a; 2009b) suggesting an alternative progressive tax system to avoid raising fees. Similarly, UCU published frequent statements criticising the intention of the Labour government to modify the HE policy.

### **Articulation and identification of the conflict**

The process of articulation of the conflict started in February 2010. The stage was composed of local and isolated episodes of contention with reduced

adherence and participation, but with significant processes of association and alliances. This stage was defined by the concatenation of three main processes that facilitated the radicalisation of the conflict during November and December of 2010. The most significant element was the rise and creation of new SMOs. The NCAFC was organised because of the first National Convention Against Fees and Cuts held the 6th February 2010 in London (Ismail, 2013). This convention was the first national effort to coordinate and expand the organisation of local groups of activists against the cuts across the country. As one of the NCAFC founders said, "We organised the convention in February 2010, and we passed the motion to build the convention as a meeting of delegations of local activist groups engaged in anti-cuts struggle or in industrial issues in education" (Participant 4, 2017). Similarly, the Education Activist Network (ENA) was formed after the "Take Our Education Back" conference organised by the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) in King's College on February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 (ENA, 2017). Although with differences, both organisations were created as a national, grass-rooted coalition of activists, explicitly focused on opposing HE reforms.

From the side of the institutionalised SMOs (NUS and UCU), the opposition kept growing and becomes more organised and coordinated. Between April and May 2010, the NUS approved the motion for a national demonstration to oppose raising fees (NUS, 2010a) and led the campaign "Vote for Students". The campaign included a pledge signed by parliamentary candidates who promise do not support rising fees policies (NUS, 2010e). Similarly, during this period, the UCU's National Executive Committee and different UCU branches led different kinds of contentious activities. Particularly significant was the call for a strike led by London UCU on the 19th of March 2010 and a regional march the next day (NCAFC, 2010c). Even though these actions were not massive, they were the first local coordination between local anti-cuts groups, emerging national organisations, and unions. Additionally, in June 2010 the NUS and the UCU founded the "United for Education" coalition, a common platform to oppose changes in HE. This coalition called for the first day of action on the 21st of June, without perceived massive support and adherence (UCU, 2010e).

The third factor of structuration was the creation of a coalition government between the Conservative and the Liberal Democrats Party. The coalition produced a peculiar political situation in the country that opened multiple foci of tension in the government and the political system. As Mathews and Flinders (2017) and Evans (2012) describe, the first challenge for the coalition was to define a common programme and cabinet. These processes of negotiation changed the governmental priorities of each party, increasing the tensions between parties, party MPs and cabinet members, and between voters, elected MPs, and policy networks. The Coalition tried to control those tensions with an explicit agreement between the parties to postpone the HE policy until the publication of the Browne Review (HM Government, 2010: 31). The agreement defined freedom of action for each party if they thought that the policy was not in line with the principles and party policies. This agreement successfully

reduced the tension during the first months of the government. However, during the last weeks of October, when the Browne review was published, the tensions reappeared and provoked the stage of explicit conflict (Scott, 2013).

### **Triggering the conflict**

The third stage was the conflict triggering, from October 2010 until January 2011. Even though most of the literature defines November 10 as the beginning of the stage of national conflict and December 9 as its end (Solomon, 2011; Kumar, 2011). Most of the participants recognised that the beginning of the national conflict occurred during October 2010, as a result of the concatenation between the tensions produced by the HE reform, and the programme of the coalition Government. Similarly, the majority of the participants placed the end of the national conflict in the last activities of January 2011, when the national conflict lost social support and media attention.

This stage groups the main and most significant episodes of contention during the wave of protests. It was characterised by an explosive and massive display of collective agency, which operated through centralised actions, or day of action calls by the main SMOs, together with frequent and distributed local actions, organised by local groups weekly. Both activities reveal the existence of hybrid mechanisms of coordination with parallel processes of top-down coordination when many SMOs called for different national activities and distributed bottom-up activities that were not formally connected with the SMOs.

The results facilitated the enumeration of the leading national events. During this stage, there were eight national days of actions, which included the national demonstration called by NUS-UCU on November 10. The national walkouts called by the NCAFC on November 24 and November 30. The day of action called by NCAFC-EAN and the parallel vigil called by NUS during the day of legislation of raising fees on December 9. In January 2011, there was one day of action for the 'save Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) campaign' called by the NUS on January 19, one day of action for free education called NCAFC-EAN on January 26, and finally the parallel demonstration called by NCAFC, EAN and UCU in London and by NUS and UCU in Manchester on January 29.

This stage was also characterised by an explosive wave of university occupations across the country. The exact number of occupations is still part of the debate, ranging between 40 and 59 occupations across the country (Hensby, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014; Solomon & Palmieri, 2011: 60). Even though the analysis could not provide a precise number, the qualitative analysis gives a significant characterisation of the phenomenon. As described by the participants, the occupations assumed an idiosyncratic character, which was not derived directly from the national conflict. The number of participants, their internal organisation, purposes, relations with other organisations, and their temporal and physical extension on campuses were different (Hopkins, Todd, Newcastle Occupation, 2012; Salter and Kay, 2011). In fact, some occupations started

during the first stage of the conflict as a local reaction to cuts, as was the case of University College of Communication occupation in November 2009. Westminster, Sussex, and Aberdeen Universities, which were occupied during March 2010, and Middlesex University in May 2010. Clearly, the majority of the occupations were concentrated in November and part of December 2010 (Solomon, 2011). After that, just a few occupations persisted, such as the case of Kent until January (BBC, 2011a) and Glasgow until March 2011 (Scotsman, 2011). This heterogeneity suggests that despite the general adherence to the national wave of protests and the general opposition to the set of HE reforms, each occupation had their own dynamics and their own purposes, having in some cases a different trajectory with respect to the national movement. As one participant who was involved in the local campaign at UCL occupation remarks:

Yeah, so there were basically three levels. One was university-specific demands. So, for instance, a lot of the catering staff had been outsourced to a different company, and their conditions were worse. There was kind of a problem with the low payment for basic staff and a problem of cuts in the university. Then there were demands about the university taking a stance against the government and opposing it (Participant 5, 2017).

Two main processes explain the explosive and massive character of this stage. Firstly, the articulation of an unexpected juncture that was created by the first round of policies of the new government. Secondly, the articulation of a system of alliances between SMOs that spread the contentious activity across the country. In October 2010, the legislation and implementation of a broad number of changes in HE occurred concurrently. The changes included the Spending Review 2010 on October 10, the publication of the Browne Review on October 12, and the general alignments of the HE reform announced by David Willets, including the announcement of raising fees on the November 3. As a reaction to those changes, there emerged early and expanded waves of sectorial anti-cuts groups and networks, the new SMOs, and the formal campaigns led by the UCU and the NUS. Additionally, an emergent and large sector formed of school students and families against the EMA reform, university students against the triplication of fees, and voters who denounced the break of the electoral pledge made by Liberal Democrats (Lib Dems). As Ibrahim (2014) and Hensby (2017) remark, the last issue gave the generalised sense of deception, indignation, and betrayal of the political system which characterised the movement.

The early development of a system of alliances between SMOs capitalised this critical juncture facilitating the coordination and expansion of protests across the country. As the participants recognised, the demonstration called by the NUS and the UCU on November 10 provided an opportunity for a national mobilisation of all groups who opposed the new policies, becoming a catalyser for the national conflict. Additionally, the occupation of the Conservative Party



HQ gave a national image of the movement that was quickly spread around the country, becoming a symbol of the students' protests (Hensby, 2014; Haywood, 2011). Even though this element had negative connotations for the public and media (Cammaerts, 2013), from the activists' point of view, it was a political symbol that expanded and encouraged the students' protests, further spreading the conflict (Haywood, 2011).

Despite the historical role of the demonstration on November 10, the wave of protests showed a low level of articulation in terms of demands, campaign coordination, framework (Hensby, 2017), repertoires of action, and strategy. Particularly relevant were the tensions between the NUS and the rest of student organisations after the occupation of the Conservative HQ, which ended with the NUS' motion for not calling for a new national demonstration and the split of the movement during the last day of actions on January 29, 2011 (NCAFC, 2010a; NUS, 2011). This also applied to the occupations, which, despite their connections with the general context, were correlative and independent actions led by local students. Although some of them had an organic relationship with the NCAFC – the principal SMO that called for occupations – most of the occupations worked independently from national co-ordination. As one of the participants recognised, "in the majority of the cases was something already organised, we certainly provided a lot of materials, but we left people to lead and do locally their own, and we tried to affiliate those anti-cuts groups to NCAFC" (Participant 6, 2017).

### **Conflict resolution**

After January 29, the last national episode of contention called by the SMOs, the wave of protest tended to dissolve as a massive and generalised form of conflict. As the literature suggests, social movements and SMOs have different routes of resolution or exits from a conflict (Tarrow, 2011). In the case of this trajectory, it is possible to identify four routes of resolution, which operated differently at local and national levels.

At a local level, there were parallel processes of dissolution, re-localisation, and institutionalisation of the conflict. In the case of dissolution, some emerging anti-cuts groups tended to disappear after the conflict because their members were no longer students (Brooks, 2017). In the case of re-localisation and institutionalisation trajectories, emergent activist groups and networks kept operating locally in new episodes of contention but organised themselves around new sectoral and local campaigns, within more formalised structures. After January 2011, many groups remained involved in the campaigns to save the EMA, the local opposition to a new package of university cuts, the reduction and redefinition of international student visas proposed by the Home Office, and the decision to raise fees in each university.

At the national level, the emergent SMOs formalised their groups, following a process of institutionalisation. For example, during their summer conference,

the NCAFC defined a formal structure of working, which remained active until 2011 (NCAFC, 2011a). The EAN kept growing and played a role in the years after the conflict but was dissolved after 2012. In the cases of the NUS and the UCU, the research did not consider their trajectories after February 2011; but the participants agreed that the protests introduced a political cleavage in these organisations, which tended to assume a more radical position, renewing their repertoires of action, and becoming more socially oriented (Woodcock, 2013). This process was also related to the articulation of a new political coalition of activists from the NCAFC and the EAN, who tried to compete for the leadership of the NUS immediately after the conflict had ended (NCAFC, 2011b). As the participants confirmed, the purpose of this coalition was to radicalise the NUS leadership and capitalise the political cleavage created by the wave of protests. Even though the coalition could not obtain any position in the 2011-2012 NUS National Executive Committee (NEC), the participants agree that after 2010, more left-wing officers were part of the NUS and its political attitude changed, becoming more engaged with students' activism.

Finally, from a general perspective, there was a process of extension of the contentious activity, where the local and national networks converged and became part of a general anti-austerity movement. The general movement emerged in the UK during 2011, after the first general strike and national demonstration called by the Trade Union Conference (TUC) on March 27, 2011 (BBC, 2011b). Around 250,000 people in London attended the march called for that day, becoming the first national demonstration against austerity and the coalition Government. The action had the support of the majority of the SMOs involved in the wave of student protests. This post-conflict trajectory is not considered in the literature (Tarrow, 2011) but has been particularly relevant and common in the study of AMs, which are described as a broad coalition of social movements (Della Porta, 2015: 213).

From the perspective of outcomes of the movement, the participants and the literature recognise that its impact was highly limited considering the size and power of the wave of protests in the UK (Hensby, 2017; Ibrahim, 2014). The wave of protests could not stop the main changes proposed by the Government and the installation of the new policy agenda. In 2011, a new wave of cuts was implemented with the first growth in tuition fees and the legislation of a new Education Act in 2012 (Scott, 2013). Authors such as Myers (2017) and Cini (2018) emphasise that the wave delayed and softened some reforms initially proposed by the Brown review, like the cuts on maintenance loans and other financial aids. However, after 2015 a new wave of HE changes was implemented, and the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) was passed, completing the unfinished business of 2010 and 2011 (Hillman, 2014).

The results confirm that the main impacts of the movement were in the cultural and political fields (Tarrow, 2011). The movement renewed and radicalised the repertoire of action of a generation, acted as an example for other social sectors, and become a fundamental part of the general anti-austerity movement (Myers, 2017). Additionally, it legitimised the demand for free education in the public

debate, established mechanisms of political participation between factions of the Labour party and other left groups, and became fundamental in the articulation of Corbynism and the emergence of a left-wing British party-movement (Hatcher, 2015). As a participant summarised:

for British history, it marks the beginning of what we are seeing now, an age, because happened at the same time when became the tory government, so marked the beginning of the anti-austerity movement, of contention of social policies and also mark of the beginning of the new labour party politics that we are seeing today (Participant 6, 2017)

On the whole, it is possible to point out some fundamental characteristics of the political trajectory of the wave of protests. It can be described as a reactive or defensive concatenation of protests, which emerged as a non-centralised convergence of diverse and distributed struggles, whose main purposes was to oppose the HE policy changes. The contention activities played an important role in building a diversified opposition to the HE policy changes, being highly determined by the characteristics of the HE system and the policy process of the reform. Nonetheless, the wave was just partially canalised by parallel and divergent efforts led by SMOs. For the organisations involved, the size, complexity, and intensity of the contentious reaction were unexpected and hard to conduct. Those difficulties made the consolidation of a cohesive and convergent social movement problematic, and inhibited its ability to capitalise the political opportunities opened by the HE reforms. The next section explains why SMOs had problems to cooperate with each other, and how competition affected the trajectory of the movement.

### **The alliance system and collective agency**

This section analyses the impact of the alliance system of the social movement field on the political trajectory and outcomes of the wave of protests of 2010. Although the system of alliances is composed of a wide range of organisations and actors, the research focused exclusively on the main SMOs.

The social movement field of the wave of the 2009-2011 protests was organised by two blocks of SMOs with a competitive relationship. The first block was a coalition of institutionalised SMOs composed by the NUS and the UCU; the second one was an instrumental co-ordination of emergent SMOs composed of the NCAFC and the ENA. The coalition of institutionalised SMOs was formally organised at the end of June and was called the "United for Education coalition" (UCU, 2010e). This block was characterised by a high level of co-operation, determined by infrastructural affinity and political agreement during the conflict. The second block was not a formalised coalition, but the result of a pragmatic coordination developed during the last stages of the conflict. Despite the level of infrastructural affinity that the second block had, the political

disagreement and the existence of strong factionalism caused a competitive relationship inside the emergent block.

Similarly, the relationships between blocks triggered the development of a competitive pattern during the conflict, with constant efforts of differentiation in terms of values and strategy. It included public criticism and confrontation between SMOs and few attempts of infiltration, particularly between students' organisations. The next sections analyse the internal determinants of the alliance system and its impact in the articulation and political trajectory of the social movement field.

### **Infrastructural affinity between social movement organisations**

From an organisational perspective, the NUS and the UCU can be described as bureaucratic centralised unions. They are formed of constituencies that delegate power in an elected and centralised executive body, which is in turn formed of full-time officers who are responsible of administrating the Union and implementing the annual policy (UCU, 2010b; NUS, 2017). In terms of social composition, the NUS is composed of sabbatical officers, employed by NUS and affiliated Student Unions (NUS, 2017). The UCU is formed of employees in higher and further education, which includes lecturers and professional staff, plus retired employees and postgraduate students. Regarding the predominant values, both organisations shared a mutual sense of corporatism as they privileged the exclusive interests of affiliated members and had a limited or sectorial range of action. Nevertheless, the NUS is characterised by predominant managerial values, assuming the position of a professional provider of student services rather than being a political representative of its constituency (Brooks, Byford & Sela, 2015; Woodcock, 2013). In contrast, the UCU shared the sense of welfare provision and group representation, displaying a more confrontational performance, highly committed with other unions and with a more extensive range of action.

During the wave of protests, the prevailing pattern of governance of the institutionalised SMOs was "executive"; it was highly centralised, professionalised and vertical, and had a low level of accountability and participation from their constituencies (Schnurbein, 2009). This description is particularly accurate for the NUS and less so in the case of the UCU, in which case the local branches and the more extensive and regular bodies of members introduced federal mechanisms of governance and accountability from local groups over the executive body. Despite these differences, the characterisation of both organisations is coherent with the tendency of highly institutionalised SMOs to adopt a more commercial and constituency-orientated position, reluctant to disruptive mobilisation and more orientated to act as an interest group rather than a pressure one (Kriesi, 1996).

During the conflict, this infrastructural affinity between unions facilitated mutual recognition as equals in terms of status and political value (Rucht,

2007). Similarly, the highly formalised structure and the common pattern of governance of the alliance facilitated the definition of formal and recurrent mechanisms of communication. Additionally, their corporatist view and the existence of well-differentiated constituencies avoided community competition, assuming a corporatist representation of a shared political field, with mutual and equal benefits. Moreover, they had access to the policy process, in terms of information and consultative participation, which facilitated their mutual recognition and a similar political strategy.

In contrast, the emergent block presented a reduced level of infrastructural affinity. The NCAFC was a semi-factional coalition of local activist groups, organised in an open network, composed of a body of affiliated members and an elected executive committee of volunteers. The EAN was a factional coalition of left-wing activists with a monopolistic and centralised network of one left-wing organisation, which was led by a designated National Committee (EAN, 2017). Culturally, both shared radical leftist values. Perhaps, the predominant values of the NCAFC were a mixture of left-wing traditions, mainly Trotskyism, and Libertarian-communism, highly orientated to massive disruptive repertoires of action (direct action), with preferences for direct and participatory democracy (Ismail, 2013, Woodcock, 2013). This combination of values and structure produced a delegate or federal pattern of governance, with a strong influence of the local groups over the central body (Schnurbein, 2009). In contrast, the predominant values of the EAN were inspired by British Trotskyism, highly inclined to direct action, working-class solidarity, and entryism<sup>1</sup> (Webber, 2009), which produced an inner-circle pattern of governance, characterised by a centralised but non-formal distribution of power, and controlled by minority groups of influence (Schnurbein, 2009).

Additionally, the emergent SMOs shared a similar social composition and constituency that stimulated their differences and competition. While the NCAFC was more student-orientated and the EAN was worker-student oriented, both were formed of a mixture of independent local groups of student activists, non-student activists, militant activists, and militant HE employees. Therefore, both organisations competed for the incorporation of activists who emerged from local anti-cut struggles, who were not represented by the institutionalised SMOs. The infrastructural differences, the absence of well-developed organisational structures, and a shared constituency led to relationships of competition between the organisations of the emergent block. Likewise, the same factors explained the relationships of exclusion and competition between blocks. The low infrastructural affinity between the SMOs created a structural tendency to scatter the social movement, which affected the political affinity between the SMOs (Rucht, 2007), producing a bipolar alliance system with a limited range of expansion to third parties and other actors.

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<sup>1</sup> Entryism refers to a political strategy characterised by establishing relationships with other groups for one's own cause, to provoke and capitalise on political division between groups, and influence external groups through infiltration (Webber, 2009).

### **Political affinity between social movement organisations**

The second dimension to analyse is the political affinity between SMOs. This variable describes the strategic position and tactics of SMOs during the conflict (Rucht, 2007). The SMOs shared a sense of criticism to the HE reform and the marketisation process, with an explicit opposition to a specific group of measures. In that regard, the SMOs had a similar conflict framework, which placed the government as the main adversary, HE reform as the main object of contention, and civil society and MPs as the central public to persuade. The main differences between the SMOs were related to the predominant repertoire of action, the political aims of the campaigns, the factional composition, and the position of influence in the policy process.

The NUS focussed on influencing the policy process, avoiding raising fees, and stopping the elimination of widening access mechanisms (NUS, 2009a; 2010a). These were the most restrictive and corporatist aims in the social movement field. In addition, they were pursued through a predominantly managerial form of influence, focussed on technical and political lobby with selective tactics of pressure and a low preference for constituency mobilisation and direct action. In the case of the UCU, its political aims were more expansive and inclusive. Their main goals were to stop the university job cuts, pension reform, and changes in their contractual regime. They also included non-corporatist demands. In the manifesto, "Education for the Future" UCU declared a campaign for "the removal of all financial barriers to access to education, a high quality publicly funded education system, accessible to all [...], institutional autonomy, academic freedom and democratic governance, an end to privatisation, marketisation and bureaucratisation of education," (UCU, 2010a: 3). In addition, the UCU displayed a more diverse and more disruptive repertoire of action, which included a combination of a technical and political lobby with direct action as local strikes, demonstrations, rallies, and concentrations. Additionally, the deep engagement of some local branches in direct action and their alliances with students pushed for a more militant engagement of the executive body, which facilitated expansive and less selective strategies (UCU, 2010c).

The NCAFC formally had a double political aim; to fight for free education, opposing the HE reforms, but also to unify the student left on a national platform (NCAFC, 2010b; 2010c). This combination of sectorial and general political purposes placed the organisation in an open but highly selective dynamics of alliances privileging collaborations with emergent local anti-cuts groups rather than other SMOs or political organisations. The EAN had a similar motive but with an emphasis on a student-worker alliances rather than left-wing student unification. If such preferences were objects of mutual criticism, both organisations displayed a similar repertoire of action. They aimed to promote local organisations, occupations, and days of action to create a generalised massive state of agitation that was able to block the government's

agenda. The political pattern placed the new organisations in a competitive position with the NUS, which was increasingly antagonistic during the last months of the conflict. This was especially so after the critique of Aaron Porter for the Milbank occupation and the NUS' refusal to support the demonstration between December 9 and January 29, that was called by the emergent pole, denoting public critique of the NUS' leadership and a campaign for removing the NUS president.

We the undersigned believe that Aaron Porter should be removed as NUS National President as he is unable to lead the student movement. His failure to call or even back another National Demonstration, his refusal to back up his promises of support for occupations, his weak stance on police brutality and his collusion with the Government in identifying cuts means that he has lost the confidence of the movement. (NCAFC, 2010d: 1)

Another factor to consider is the role of the dominant factions within SMOs and their relationships with political parties. If formally the members of NUS could not play a role as members of political platforms (NUS, 2017), the participants coincide that before and during 2010, the majority of the NUS' NEC members were members of "Labour students" – an internal structure of the Labour party, largely dominated by "Blue Labour" or "Blairite" factions of the party. In the case of the UCU, the two dominant wings were UCU-left, which groups SWP militants and members of the left-wing faction of the Labour party, who were dominant in the UCU's NEC since its foundation in 2006. In the case of the emergent pole, during 2010, the NCAFC was formed of an alliance of far-left wing organisations, which included the Alliance for Worker's Liberty, Worker's Power, and Counterfire, plus independent activist groups (Ismail, 2013). The EAN was led unilaterally by the SWP.

This factionalised distribution of the social movement field had a double impact. On the one hand, it facilitated the articulation, diversification, and expansion of the movement. The radical left-wing organisations led parallel and competitive processes of national co-ordination between isolated local groups, and they created new SMOs, being a case of expansion by competition (Tarrow, 2011). For the most institutionalised SMOs, the factions used their networks of information and influence as sources to proactively building an early opposition to the HE reform, particularly in the first stage of the conflict. Nevertheless, the tension between political groups and factions inside of the SMOs limited the executive capabilities of some organisations, increasing the cost of internal negotiation and reducing their consistency during the stage of conflict (Zald & McCarthy, 1980). This was relevant for the UCU and most significantly for NCAFC, which could not define an executive body until 2011 (NCAFC, 2011a). As an NCAFC member suggested, "It was impossible to make decisions, and the decisions that we got were made in a given day was made by full-time Trotskyists who were answering their emails fastest" (Participant 4, 2017).

For the monopolistic factional organisations, namely, the NUS and the EAN, the hegemonic position of some political groups produced antagonism and distrust between SMOs, stimulating dynamics of competition between organisations (Zald & McCarthy, 1980). It also reduced the adaptability of the organisation to new political scenarios, limiting the range of strategical and tactical innovation. This was particularly relevant in the case of the NUS, when the convergence between managerial values and its predominant Blairite composition enforced the dependence on technical and political lobby as the main mechanisms of pressure, dismissing the innovation of repertoires of action produced by the emergent block, which, during November, concentrated the majority of attention and supporters.

Another impact of factionalism was the lack of connection between SMOs and political parties. After the elections and the articulation of the government's coalition, the only potential political ally for the movement was the Labour party. Even though the Liberal Democrats were the fundamental actors in the critical juncture, the new right-wing political tradition of reluctance to ally with social movements, plus the absence of organic relationships with them, and their position in the government's cabinet (Scott, 2013; Hillman, 2016) made it practically impossible to oppose the reform. In the case of Labour, its post-election crisis and the extended factionalised social movement field impeded a political articulation and the extension of the alliance system to a third party. Additionally, although during legislation the majority of Labour MPs voted against the fee triplication (HCH, 2010), the Blairite sector of the Labour party was involved in the early stages of the design of the policy and shared, at least, an ideological agreement with the reform (Hillman, 2016). These limitations placed the political parties as irrelevant allies for the SMOs and as objects of mistrust amongst them, being excluded from the alliance system.

### **The national system of alliance and local activism**

Another element to consider is the independent or non-aligned actors involved in the movement. They were preferentially non-aligned groups and activists involved only occasionally in contentious actions, but they were the most numerous and explosive agents of protests. As the participants coincided, the protests had a generalised sense of anger and injustice (Ibrahim, 2014). Even though were not the SMOs who spread those emotions, they had an impact on the population outside the SMOs' agencies, having an unexpected and floating participation. These were characteristics of the stage of direct conflict, but absent in the previous and later stages.

Furthermore, local conflicts had particular political trajectories and their own alliance systems. Whilst this research explores emblematic cases that cannot be generalised to other circumstances, it gives a preliminary view of the conflict at the local level. In this regard, the conflict started from the UCU branches against cuts or/and as emergent local student groups who organised protests on campuses. Overall, the student union played a conservative role, not leading the



local protests and being particularly critical of university occupations (Salter and Key, 2011; Ismail, 2013; Brooks, Byford and Sela, 2015). Therefore, the relationships of co-operation were preferentially between UCU branches and emergent student groups, who opposed university governing bodies, particularly vice-chancellors and student unions. The strategic position of local activists was to oppose cuts in jobs and departments during the first stage of the conflict and after the parliamentary vote opposed the raising of fees locally. The exception to this model was Sheffield, where the university and the Student Unions played a cohesive role, leading the mobilisation and producing an expansive alliance system that linked the university with local activists.

This structure of conflict indicated that at the local level, the experience was connected, but it was considerably different at a national scale. In fact, local groups had precarious coordination with the national SMOs. Moreover, the strategies of the SMOs that required local mobilisation were not particularly effective. The lobby and pressure on MPs called by the NUS (2010a) and the UCU (2010d) in Lib Dems student constituencies were limited. Just 21 Lib Dems MPs voted against the reform, and eight abstained from voting (HCH, 2010). Similarly, as the participants admitted, the attempt to organise a national wave of occupations to put pressure on the Vice-chancellors to be against the HE reform called by the EAN and the NCAFC (NCAFC, 2010a) was also limited in terms of coordination and consistency. The UCU was the only SMO that was able to mobilise their constituencies territorially on a national scale, but its numbers were small (Coderre-LaPalme & Greer, 2017). The emergent pole had an insufficient structure to organise a territorial mobilisation. Despite being the most prominent student organisation, the NUS had a limited mobilisation capacity. Its pattern of governance left it disconnected from the other Student Unions and far from the campuses' networks and groups (Woodcock, 2013; Brooks, Byford & Sela, 2015). Those weaknesses help to explain why the wave had a transient massive adherence to protests, which was concentrated during a few months, and it was highly reactive to a critical juncture.

## Conclusions

This paper attempted to provide a historical analysis of the political trajectory of the wave of the British student protests between 2009 and 2011, and to explore the dynamics of cooperation and competition between SMOs during the conflict. The research confirms discussions of the current literature (Cini, 2018; Myers, 2017; Hensby, 2017; Ibrahim, 2014, 2011, Solomon, 2011) and it adds new elements to the debate.

First, the paper proposes the existence of a long process of articulation occurring one year before the most significant protests. Second, it suggests the presence of different stages of contentious activity during the conflict with a different political process. Third, it remarks the significant role of the emergent SMOs and the emergent local groups in the articulation of the wave. Fourth, the research contributes testifies to the existence of heterogeneous trajectories of

decline and reallocation of the conflict. It also suggests that the low structural and political affinity between SMOs and the constant dynamic of competition tended to break up the collective action, limiting the system of alliance and capability of mobilisation. Additionally, the paper shows the role of factionalism in student politics and its impact on the alliance system of the wave of protests.

From the perspective of anti-austerity movements, the research shows that the wave protests was an anti-austerity movement, sharing similar characteristics as other European movements. The most significant similarities are the explicit opposition to austerity measures, its combination with a critique of the political system, the coalitionist character of the movement, and the presence of pre-figurative political practices. Also, the analysis suggests a similar trajectory of its development. Like other anti-austerity movements, the British student-activists become part of the general anti-austerity movement in the UK and the rise of Corbynism. Those characteristics indicate the existence of a similar pattern of conflict structuration and development as the movements in Europe.

Despite those similarities, the existence of political factionalism and different dynamics of governance in SMOs challenge the assumption of internal democracy and horizontalism in the anti-austerity movements (Hardt, 2017; Della Porta, 2009). The case study shows that protests had a democratic role in terms of popularising some demands and increasing the participation of the civil society in non-formal mechanisms of participation; however, this did not mean that the movements were governed by democratic systems internally. The results reveal the existence of horizontal networks which played a role in the coordination and spread of the protests (Ibrahim, 2014; Hensby, 2014), but that these were objects of monopolistic practices, factionalism, and concentration of power. This phenomenon, usually omitted in the literature, has proved to be a relevant factor in explaining the political trajectory of movement.

Furthermore, the research does not provide any findings of the role of social media and information technology as relevant tools in the dynamics of democratisation of the movement (Rheingans and Hollands, 2013; Guigni, 2012). Even though the participants made some references to social media platforms as tools for coordination, they did not play a distinctive role in the mobilisation or the dynamics of cooperation and competition between organisations. This suggests that the role of social media is conditioned by the values and practices that activists produce during the conflict, rather than their properties as communicative instruments.

From the perspective of activism, the case study provides telling insights about alliances and internal divisions of SMOs in anti-austerity struggles. Anti-austerity movements are coalitions of protestors triggered by changes in living costs derived from policy change. This decade of austerity has been a permanent source of contention and political opportunities, which has not always generated protests. Therefore, the successful spread of protests and their achievements rely on the activists' ability to resolve internal conflicts and to build strong alliances between their organisations. The British wave of student protests

suggests that the dynamics of competition between traditional organisations (unions) and emergent ones damaged the national coordination of movements substantially. In addition, the competition between factions and groups within the emergent groups also weakened the unity and expansion of the movement.

Most of the conflicts between organisations came from infrastructural differences between groups rather than significant strategic differences about the struggle. This means that the differences between movements can be solved during the processes of conflict if organisations put the collective interests of their constituencies first rather than their quotes of power. As the case of the political shift of UCU during the conflict proves, the structure and strategy of unions are sensitive to the context. They can embrace a more confrontational role and reinforce the movement. This shift also requires a more comprehensive approach from emergent SMOs and a less interventionist critique from vanguards and factions to unions.

Overall, one the key questions that remains unexplored in this paper is how SMOs can coordinate or establish better links with the non-aligned protestors, who are the massive support and the critical agents spreading the protests. This research does not provide significant information about this problem, but it draws a line about how the competing interests of vanguards reduced the possibilities to build that coordination. The political efforts that were reduced by competition and criticism in SMOs would be better spent on coordinating with local groups rather than boycotting other leading organisations. Future research and reflection on how this dynamics of cooperating can keep growing during crucial conjunctures of anti-austerity struggle.

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## **Learning in movements: how do we think about what we are doing?**

**Laurence Cox**

### **Abstract**

*This practice note discusses why movements have a need to learn and the kinds of problems that present them with this need, both in identifying the need for movement and when movement institutions fail to have the effects intended. It discusses who owns the means of intellectual production that movements rely on and the differing capacities movements have around learning. It asks how we can place movement logics rather than media or academic ones at the centre of our learning, and concludes with three brief examples.*

**Keywords:** social movements; learning and knowledge production; radical education; popular education; social movement training; social movement strategy

### **What can we do?**

I spend a lot of time talking to activists in different social movements and countries. Rather too often, they say one of two things about what they do. Either they are completely enthused by the experience and almost messianic about the value of how they do things in their group, organisation or movement – or they are cynical and bitter, convinced at some level that the forces arrayed against them are too powerful, too clever, too ruthless and so on and that their own movements stand little real chance in comparison.

What both of these feelings represent is a sense that “what we do” is pretty much given. It may be perfect, or it may be hopeless – but there is little real space for change. Often the group or organisation itself is totally identified with a particular way of doing things, so that real discussion is a threat to your friendships, your chance to engage in activism, your position in the community or (for professionals) your job; often, too, there is just not that much discussion, just some more or less formal training in “how to do the thing that we do” and some informal socialisation into “here’s the story we tell ourselves about it”.

Of course having a firm belief in a certain model is fine when it works and the movement is getting where we want to. And sometimes cynicism is the only way people can remain active and hold fast to their core beliefs in hard times. It’s also true that sometimes our main focus has to be simply getting as many people as possible involved (who may then in turn work out better ways of doing things), and that sometimes the forces arrayed against us are so large that just

keeping going is the most we can hope for. But there is a wide space in between where our choices *matter* – and that means understanding what those choices are and what effect they might have.

Of course, getting to this point – of taking action in movements – is itself a big step for many people. The everyday strategies people rely on to solve their problems only sometimes involve action in movements; often because those problems can be solved (or at least managed) individually without challenging the strategies, the interests or the routines of the powerful, the wealthy and the culturally privileged.

For people who don't already have a picture of the world shaped around struggle, it can be quite a shift to recognise that they are in a situation where meeting their needs meaningfully would be a threat to wider structures, so that they have to rely on working together with others in a similar situation to force that change through, against opposition from above. Making this shift – recognising what the situation is and acting accordingly – is a crucial learning process for people who have not yet done so, and often a very uneven one.

In other cases, around less personal problems, it can take time to unlearn the ideologies which tell us that all will be well if only enough individuals change their behaviour, if only education or technology are more widely distributed, if only the right people are in power – and to recognise that this is one of the difficult problems that cannot be solved this way. We can all watch this happening in relation to climate change – and see just how difficult the learning often is.

There is of course quite an extensive literature on learning and knowledge production in social movements (eg Choudry et al 2010, Hall et al 2012, Cox 2014). This practice note is not so much aimed to contribute to empirical academic research on the subject or pedagogical reflection as an extended version of some of the conversations I have with movement participants about learning and knowledge in movements.

### **When “just doing something” isn't enough**

Stepping into this space of relying on each other rather than on pseudo-scientific theories of social change, on the magical effects of education or the IT industry, or on individual politicians or other brokers is not an easy move to make. It involves strategies that rely on our numbers, our capacity to disrupt and our capacity for creativity rather than on formal power, on economic resources or on cultural privilege.

There is a reason why this process is called struggle – it is not simply the conflict with an opponent, in a wargaming model where the nature of the situation is unambiguous and everyone has perfect insight into how it works. Rather, we are changing our own understanding of the world, our relationships with each other

and our relationships with people we may previously have deferred to, worked for or obeyed.

Few people start this process with a wide range of possible strategies to choose from. States, education systems, media production, religious organisations and other bodies transmit accounts not only of how to work “through the proper channels”, but also of what “unofficial action” might mean. Sometimes – as in mythologised accounts of e.g. Gandhi or Martin Luther King – these are constructed as politically safe (if personally risky), more or less legitimate ways of seeking to affect the system. At other times – as in mythologised accounts of revolution – they may be constructed so as to discourage such action as inherently futile, bound to lead to tyranny or bloodshed.

This does not mean, of course, that people do not try these models out. It means, rather, that when they act out narratives provided by dominant institutions of how to challenge such institutions, what actually happens may well be different from what they intend. Extinction Rebellion (XR) in England has recently provided some rather painful examples of this<sup>1</sup>.

At other times people’s models of action may come from popular memories of how to struggle, or they may be mediated by existing organisations and networks. This is one of the most important things social movements – at these different levels – can do: to transmit popular learning about struggle. At the same time, the pressures that movements are under – and movement-internal logics of various kinds – mean that what they transmit is often selective and stylised.

Even when their sources are good, in other words, the stories we tell within movements and communities in struggle about how to win have a hypothetical quality to them; simply knowing these stories, and even being in movements that draw on them, does not mean that we are winning. We may simply be “fighting the last war”, or acting out stories that keep us going in hard times.

## **Learning for social change**

In the broader picture, the simple existence of a movement points simultaneously to future possibility and to present failure: almost by definition, we are in movements from below because we are not (yet) able to win the change we seek. What we can transmit with a fair degree of confidence is “this is how to do this kind of thing” – how to win a strike, how to organise a direct action, how to run a periodical, how to fundraise. These are things we do regularly and which happen within a manageable timescale, where we can sit down afterwards, talk it through, and think what to do next time.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://whysocialmovementsmatter.com/news/2019/10/3/dear-xr-why-not-be-more-honest-with-your-participants>

Large-scale social change, though, doesn't work like that. It is full of unintended consequences, of apparent victories which do not have the effects we expected, of intra-movement processes which leave many participants struggling for some of the same things they wanted before but unable to articulate why "success" as seen by movement leaders doesn't mean the change they hoped for in their own lives.

There may well be cases where our forms and models are fine and the challenge is "just add water": if enough people fill those models and forms with life, we will win. And of course it is often true – given people's creativity even when they don't recognise or acknowledge it themselves – that if enough people are in movement, they can win many things.

But not everything, and not all the time: our own period and earlier periods have many examples of massively popular movements that were nonetheless defeated, whether dramatically or by not being able to win and not able to sustain mobilisation past a certain point. At present in both France and Hong Kong we see elites acting on the assumption that if they keep going long enough, movements will be exhausted or will lose popular support. We do not yet know if they are right.

It is also of course not true that if we are "right" in our strategy that we will infallibly win. But it is true that a better strategy can raise the chances of winning on the most crucial issues, against the strongest opponents, and without having absolutely overwhelming numbers – in the messy spaces where movements in the current period are often fighting.

Movement learning – learning at the level of a movement, about how to bring about substantial social change – is itself a struggle, but a necessary one. Simply acting out an inherited narrative – whether inherited from dominant institutions, popular cultures or movement institutions – is a recipe for a lot of effort and suffering.

Learning in this perspective is a way to not simply keep banging our heads off a brick wall. It can also be a way of not having to reinvent the wheel on our own and in the middle of a struggle – at the cost of lives ruined through repression, broken organisations and relationships, movements and communities pushed into defeat, individuals turned to cynicism or easier personal rewards. There will be enough of all of these in any case; but the more we can learn about movements and social change, the more we can keep the days of fire and the years of hard slog to the necessary minimum, and come out on the other side with more of our own people still intact, and still active.

So "just do something", according to taken-for-granted models, is not enough: and this is a second key learning moment.

If from the perspective of activist educators there are logical learning sequences, everyone – each group, each movement – finds itself in a specific place around this learning, perhaps conscious of some things that its existing strategy or analysis doesn't enable it to solve (without, often, realising that this is the real

problem) and maybe aware that as a movement it needs to find allies and even remake itself in order to really tackle the problem (without, perhaps, being able to see an immediate way to do that).

## Thinking strategically about means and ends

A central question here is: “Is the thing we are putting our time, energy and suffering into actually in line with the reason we started the struggle?” One of the few really robust findings of research on social movements and revolutions is that the means have a powerful tendency to become an end in themselves. We create movement organisations, institutions, cultures, power relationships, routines, forms of action and so on together, and doing so (naturally) tends to perpetuate them, separately from the question of whether they are really leading (or capable, under better and plausible circumstances, of leading) to the change we want to see. So asking this question is difficult.

It is much easier for *movement organisations* to think strategically – in other words, broadly taking the way they have defined “how to win” for granted and to think how best to achieve that goal, often within a framework of organisational patriotism that identifies the organisation with the movement. But the question that often needs to be asked is whether perpetuating the organisation is really the same thing as advancing the movement.

It is also relatively easy for organisations to “train” their members, both at the technical level (“here is how to do this thing”) and in terms of socialisation – what histories (if any) they tell them, what other organisations or movements they mention, what songs they sing, what stories they tell.

In this sense, movement organisations have momentum – they have a relatively powerful tendency to keep on doing the same thing and to keep variations and debates within a manageable space, defined by “what this organisation is”, “what it does” and “how it does it”. This is not a bad thing – movements need organisations, and we need organisations to have some coherence – but it does mean that past a certain point our learning of how to do whatever that organisation does in a particular way can easily become the real barrier to recognising when that activity – or that organisation – isn’t doing the thing we got involved for, and perhaps isn’t capable of doing so. Notoriously, trade unions, NGOs and political parties have a strong tendency to become ends in themselves in just this way.

Within neoliberalism in particular, our organisations (and at times our movements) come to operate fundamentally as niche markets, disconnected from or competing with other movements and organisations. Without much discussion, participants in a given movement or organisation draw on *these* kinds of training (and academic allies), invite *these* kinds of speakers, consume *these* kinds of media, hear about *these* other movement stories – and do all this rather than other possibilities which come to define other movement cultures

and knowledge. In this sense, being an autonomist or a 350.org activist (for example) can easily be structured in ways that are not fundamentally different from being a fan of Scandinavian death metal or alt-country music.

This is painfully clear when it comes to international solidarity. Lacking language skills, personal connections or direct relationships of cooperation, activists in one part of the world are fed stories not just about one country rather than another (Venezuela rather than Rojava), but also from this perspective rather than that one (MAS leadership rather than indigenous organisations), often blatantly focussed on our own local needs to have something to say about what's in the news rather than any serious attempt to understand what is happening elsewhere. *Interface* is structured the way it is in part to attempt to avoid this, and particularly to avoid giving a small number of metropolitan, Anglophone "stock exchanges of struggle" power in this process. The problem is not just what this means, say, for solidarity activism: it is also that it systematically misleads the nominal givers of solidarity as to what might work in their own contexts, by telling them selected and translated morality stories.

The point of saying this is not to condemn all movement activity as pointless: it is to ask how far our own organisational and movement structures are driven by this kind of logic, and how far we make systematic and effective efforts to avoid it.

### **Who owns the means of intellectual production?**

Even "bad" movement organisations' learning processes, though, are at least *movement* ones, driven by movement logics of various kinds. In the twilight of neoliberalism, such movement processes and structures are routinely dwarfed by other logics – notably those of commercial publishing, social media celebrity and academic production (as well, of course, as political parties and the state). At the extreme, in the middle of the UK election and US impeachment processes, a substantial proportion of what movement activists shared on my own Twitter feed consisted of articles from the *Guardian* and a handful of other liberal news outlets. Outrage, and energy, is diverted into responding to an agenda which our movements have not set and only have little effect on.

More broadly, what Alan Sears (2014) calls the "infrastructure of dissent" has probably never been so weak in a century. It is not just that the days are long gone when (for example) the German SPD had 29 daily newspapers and a vast array of trade unions, women's and youth groups, sports associations and all sorts of other associated institutions.

It is also, and much more recently, that the days are largely gone when activists talked to one another across multiple movements on Indymedia, in Social Forums or in summit protests. A commercial social media has imposed new logics, privileging both the construction of tighter boundaries around organisations and an orientation towards a largely passive wider audience, no



longer “lurkers” who might be brought to participate, but quantified sources of likes and shares.

In many if not most countries, our movements control far less of what Marx calls the means of mental production – publishing houses, communications sites, educational structures, discussion spaces – than they have done in living memory. The difficulty is not that we have less work to do – it is that the people who do this work are less accountable to our movements, and more affected by other logics.

This is fairly clear in the case of the mainstream media; what seemed like the long march of alternative media in the post-1968 period or the alter-globalisation movement has been largely reversed in recent years in favour of explicitly commercial media, even when these have roots in movements and treat people who care about movement issues as their market.

Similarly, while we might have activist academics in many countries and disciplines, it is significant that they usually *are* in disciplines, in other words employed under circumstances not of their own choosing; rarely in fields created by or in response to movements (as sometimes in the aftermath of 1968) and operated collectively on the basis of a shared commitment to struggle.

So too with radical celebrity: half a century of attempts at movement ownership of who is identified as symbolising particular struggles has had only partial success, not least because of the relative weakness of our movements’ media and education.

Taken together, this all means that what Gramsci calls “organic intellectual” relationships of thinking, speaking, teaching, researching and reflecting have to swim against much more powerful currents of “traditional intellectual” relationships. Not only at an individual level but in terms of institutions and processes, the most effective relationships are not set up by or for movements but reflect the forms of power, money and cultural privilege we are typically trying to challenge.

Commercial media, social media celebrity and academia differ in significant ways from movement institutions. The latter traditionally set out to agitate, to educate and to organise. The dominant institutions have virtually no interest in organising: when commercial media discuss organising it is almost always only to celebrate or condemn. It can hardly be the insider / practical question: “how could we do this better?” Social media, too, offers us a politics of opinion in which what is rewarded is the verbal taking of sides rather than effective action. As has been widely noted, it is a space of symbolism – which is of course important, but not when symbols are confused for change, as so much of the wider culture encourages us to do.

Academia, for its part, routinely privileges “deep analysis” (in its radical forms, often deep and pessimistic analysis) to show at length (and using language designed to exclude) just how intractable a particular problem is, and by implication how clever those are who see it as so deep-seated that it can hardly

be solved by human action. It does not reward – beyond the most trivial, technical / tactical – serious discussion of how popular movements from below can in fact win against these (economic, political, cultural structures).

### **Differing movement capacities**

It is important to note that different movements, and different organisations, have different capacities in this respect. Vanguardist, NGO and “populist” approaches both misunderstand this point – assuming that most people have very limited capacity and therefore preferring to hand thinking over to more or less professional movement elites. And yet some of the most remarkable social movement experiments – from the Zapatistas to Rojava, from the Civil Rights Movement to early second-wave feminism and from Abahlali baseMjondolo to Irish working-class community activism – are simultaneously large-scale learning spaces.

In fact real revolutions are almost always large-scale popular learning moments: very large proportions of the population become politically active, and not only “take sides” in a general sense but make much more specific choices about how to pursue their preferred strategy. They debate, organise, publish, polemicise and fight each other, not only the opponent.

Proponents of “unity at all costs” (which in practice means supporting the leadership of dominant organisations) are horrified by this, but there is no way of understanding the conflicts of, say, the Russian Revolution or Indian independence, of European resistance to fascism or postcolonial Latin America without understanding this. If “mobilisation” is in part the learning that simply relying on the powers that be, on providence or on traditional models of leadership and clientelism will not bring the desired change, then “radicalisation” is in part the learning that inherited organisations and political traditions are not capable of doing so either.

Outside revolutionary moments, *some* movements, organisations and political traditions have a greater interest in discussion, theory, history and education, while some are more programmatically anti-intellectual. In others again, participation involves going through the motions of thinking, learning and discussion but only in ritualised forms where the “right” outcomes are known in advance and the task of cadres is to steer newcomers through an approved sequence of thought.

All else being equal, diversity stimulates learning: constructing a “we” from disparate parts means trying to find common ground, ideally around a more radical critique of the underlying causes of multiple problems. This can also be the case across geographical distance – but, as the twentieth century taught us painfully, only when that distance also includes some kind of freedom. Membership of a national organisation, or a top-down international body, can mean a one-sided adaptation of local realities to the needs of the centre (which are equally specific even when cloaked in universal rhetoric).

Participatory practices – those which try to “start where people are” but not leave them there, and build a conscious agreement to work together out of people’s multiple starting points (even within a single community) – also tend to have a more educational / reflective shape. Authoritarianism, obviously, only needs education and discussion as a form of control and “training”; something which can be as true in NGOs and trade unions as on the far left.

## **What can we do?**

So how can we manage to sustain serious thinking about what we are doing, and find a way towards winning on the largest and most intractable issues?

One obvious answer is that it depends how “we” are situated – what our possibilities and needs are in our own specific context. If we don’t think hard about these, we will get nowhere: there is no one-size-fits-all account of how movements learn, or how they should learn – because learning is a universal human activity, historically and culturally shaped, so that different movements start in different places.

Another, equally obvious, answer is that often activists are thinking and learning about their practice but without acknowledging this to others or at times to themselves. People may feel themselves to be loyal followers of a “line” while in practice being very creative in their adjustments to a specific situation, the needs of participants, etc. Some of the skills involved in both bridge and formal leadership may even benefit from a certain degree of self-deception in this regard.

Voting with your feet, or splitting, can often represent the practical outcome of learning where an organisation (or movement) is unable or unwilling to engage with what those departing have to say – their unacknowledged experiences, the discontents of the organisation, their strategic dissent and so on.

Experiment – trying one thing, then another, in order of relative obviousness – can also be an unspoken form of learning. Participants may be able to justify their current strategy with the same fluency that they previously defended something radically different, with no sense of incongruity. To return to XR: before their two weeks of direct action in London this October, the organisation was faced with massive critique from many quarters about its naïve view of the Metropolitan Police. Following the aggressive strategy pursued by the Met, XR began to present itself as victim without acknowledging that it had in fact been wrong in the past. Something has been learned; but do participants know what?

## **Placing movement logics at the centre**

It is important that these kinds of arguments are not used simply to justify a transition from activism to academia, the importation of trainers and consultants or an orientation to follow the themes developed in the commercial

and social media. The purpose of movement education and discussion, like that of other movement activities – fundraising, communication, political representation or whatever – should not become a goal in itself or subject to the logics and interests of its specialists.

Rather, the challenge is how movements *as movements*, as well as organisations and networks within them, can recognise both their own “knowledge needs” (what they, and participants, need to know) as well as the various “knowledge interests” (what people see as valuable, worthy of respect, etc.) at play.

Typically, of course, movements and organisations are contested spaces: internally conservative (often, historically dominant) factions are likely to resist pressures to learn, while pressures for change often (not always) reflect the learning of emergent groups. One particularly problematic outcome is to seek to contain educational and theoretical concerns by marginalising them from day-to-day politics, as a playground for those who enjoy such things but irrelevant to most members.

When movements arrive at a dead end, or are simply going through the motions, or have been defeated, how can they develop their own capacity to learn, discuss and change, so that they can meet at least some of these knowledge needs in ways that participants recognise as meaningful – and move towards being able to win? Movements and organisations which are already successfully doing this, to whatever degree, are in a far better situation than those which struggle to ask themselves this question.

One important option at present, given how few of the “means of intellectual production” we control, is to see whether and how far it is possible to divert such means from elsewhere. Short of revolution, we are rarely in a position to seize those means, but a certain amount of piracy is often possible.

The logics of academia, of commercial publishing, of celebrity and so on can perhaps be pirated for a purpose, in different ways. A key challenge here is creating relationships of genuine dialogue and at least informal accountability. At one extreme, it is of course true that an individual in any of these spheres can construct an individual ethics for themselves in which they seek to make their own work benefit the movement in one way or another – the ethical component being a practical realisation that power is so centred in an institution that movements cannot realistically exercise significant influence on the writer, celebrity or academic beyond what the latter freely grants.

A second possibility is to construct an audience or market relationship. Radical media in practice tend to have the choice of doing this or being dependent on a political party (or similarly specific organisation); publishers are often secondarily dependent on students as a market, hence on the academics who can assign certain books. This is of course also true for other kinds of artists like musicians; in some cases, like theatre, there may also be some public or private money available for work with certain kinds of audiences or performers. These kinds of activity tend towards producer – audience relationships.

Genuine partnerships, then, are a real challenge. They are not impossible – every day I come across examples – but they are often very situationally-specific, in other words worked out in complex practice and often quite precarious. Probably the best starting point I have come across is where movements, organisations, or groups of activists within them have set out consciously to either create their own space in these other worlds, or to identify allies they can work with.

### **Learning from each other's struggles**

I want to finish by discussing the biggest kind of challenge, and one which potentially outstrips any individual movement: how can we change the world, together? In other words, what do we know about social transformation beyond but including our individual struggles, movements and communities? How can we find things to do which are meaningful in terms of these more manageable contexts but which add a wider dimension, of deep structural change on many dimensions?

In a world of TED talks, 90-minute workshops and social media, we often fail to really discuss the question “how would we know?” What basis do we have for thinking that a particular approach or model really has anything to offer? Too many books offer a blank-slate, managerial or scientific model which seems attractively simple and gives consumers something they can talk to others about – but without representing anything more than “what seems convincing to me”. Too many trainings, perhaps, reflect an ideological concern with how the world should be that has not yet grown into the sort of experience and practical understanding needed to reflect how to turn “ought” into “is”. And too many workshops transmit a learning that has been useful for growing a movement which has yet to win significant victories.

Some of the deepest learning available, then, comes from a serious understanding of the movements which have been successful at changing our world historically: but “serious” then means critical, aware of the failures and disappointments of that experience. Movements which have not yet won in their own terms but have managed to survive and develop over decades rather than years, too, have something important to tell us. In particular, where movements have managed to disrupt hegemonic relationships or sustain genuinely revolutionary processes, we need to pay attention.

There are probably few simple “lessons” that can be lifted, say, from the experience of Rojava or the Zapatistas, of the struggles that won independence from empire or welfare states, from the long history of the workers’ and women’s movements: but a three-dimensional understanding of any of these can help us think through the problems our own movements face, better.

I want to close, though, with short discussions of three fairly ambitious movement learning projects based on a different strategy, of dialogue between

experienced activists. These all rely on difference – diversity of issues and actors, of geographical situation and of organising traditions – to help participants think through what they know and to learn from others at this strategic level.

## **Interface**

This journal can be understood as a small contribution to this project. If in our individual movements, our local situations and our specific political and intellectual traditions, we have come to think about the struggle for social change in particular ways, what do we stand to learn from listening to people in other places, fighting around other issues and using a different language?

What we ask of our writers is to attempt to explain what they think their movements (or the movements they work with) have learned, or what challenges they feel they face, to this wider world of activists, movements and communities in struggle. This means a double process of articulation – of movements and activists coming to articulate things to themselves in the process of discussion, theorising, researching their struggles – and of the writers finding ways of talking about all of this in ways that can be read by others unfamiliar with their specific situation and language.

Doing this isn't everyone's cup of tea – but it can allow strategically-minded organisers in particular a way of stepping out of their own situation, to explain it to others or to think about a different set of problems. There is not, after all, a Book containing all the answers we need for the problems we find ourselves up against – but we can learn from each other, together.

It is a constant struggle to make *Interface* happen, despite an incredible group of activist researchers, all making great voluntary efforts and with little formal recognition or support – and a constant struggle to avoid it falling victim to the gravitational force that often makes such things become a vehicle for a specific generation or group of friends (it is a source of pride that only one of the current team of editors was there at the foundation).

That same gravitational force tends to pull towards the global North – and, today, very powerfully, towards the use of “global English” rather than the multilingualism many of us have come from and attempted to employ in the journal. We also have to make efforts not to become dominated by a single political position, academic discipline or movement interest: but these are more easily changed with a bit of thought and effort.

As an unpaid and largely unfunded effort our costs are very low – or rather, they consist of our own time and energy. That also means, however, that we do not need (and cannot produce) the same relationships with readers that commercial media involve – although we did carry out a positive Facebook survey a couple of years back. What is possible in our situation is to have a close relationship between authors – as producers, as referees and sometimes as future editors –

and editors; a low-status, unresourced journal depends on this kind of community and movement between positions. And of course the research represented by our articles itself represents a close relationship between the researcher and a wider movement.

We no longer have a standing request for new participants, but that doesn't mean we don't need people; it just means that it's quite an effort to bring new people on board a complex project like this in a way that's fair to them and to us. Still we are (always!) looking for activist researchers (in movement or academic institutions, or independent scholars), especially for those regions where we are not strongly present. And we would be incredibly grateful for IT or graphic support from people who don't need us to all become techies. But it is all unpaid!

### **“Social Movements / Activist Research” book series**

A new project in a related area is Pluto Press' "Social Movements / Activist Research" book series, edited by myself and Alf Gunvald Nilsen<sup>2</sup>. In some ways this extends the logic of *Interface* to book length: we aim to publish research carried out "from and for" movements, not simply on or about the movements. In other words, the idea is to support the articulation of movement thinking, discussion and learning processes in book form – so they can be shared beyond that specific movement. A key audience here is actors in other movements and traditions elsewhere, who we hope will find this a worthwhile way to think about their own practice, as well of course as radical intellectuals of various kinds.

It is a complex editing challenge to help authors frame what they want to say in a way that goes beyond their own movement but does not fall back simply on expressing outrage about the issues and experiences that the movement has grown around, or on celebrating the movement's existence: in most cases, neither is particularly helpful to the movement, and certainly not in the form of books that (like most such books) will sell hundreds or at most thousands of copies.

The challenge, again, is to articulate movements' own learning and discussion processes in ways that can be understood by people involved in other movements, people who express their thought in different political and intellectual traditions, people in different regions of the world. This, though, is an important part of how – at this late time in human history – we can come collectively to own our different movement histories, rather than simply acting out our own locally specific traditions.

The first few books in the series are in the review process as I write and with luck we will see one or more on the shelves by the end of 2020.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ceesa-ma.blogspot.com/2019/10/announcing-new-social-movementsactivist.html>

## **Ecology of social movements**

A final project, along rather different lines, is the “Ecology of social movements” course run at the Ulex activist training centre in the foothills of the Catalan Pyrenees<sup>3</sup>. Now in its third year, Ulex brings together a wide range of activist facilitators and participants from radical social movements across Europe for residential courses organised on a solidarity economy basis. Key to Ulex’ effectiveness is a popular education model geared towards starting from activists’ and organisations’ own felt needs and lived experiences and moving further from there, without a predetermined ideological endpoint.

Courses and events at Ulex cover themes like “Sustaining resistance”; “Climate justice strategy and movement building”; Transformative collaboration”; “Community organising and social transformation”; “Resourcing resilience: working with trauma”; and “Thinking diversity radically”.

The “Ecology of social movements” course is an advanced movement-building course rather than organisational development training. Participants are already experienced members of their own organisations, or have stepped out of such roles – the challenge for them is not to learn how to do the thing they do, but rather to articulate and reflect on their organisation’s situation in the wider ecology of its movement and social context. What does it contribute to the wider movement; how well is it doing this; and where do the blockages and challenges lie? How does that wider movement sit within a yet wider ecology of movements, and in the longer history of struggles for social change?

Participants learn from each other, directly and indirectly, as much as from their own efforts. (Often groups send two participants in different situations, which is proving a very powerful learning tool, and a good way of helping what is learned to translate back into their organisation and the wider movement.) In the one- or two-week residential situation, it is possible to use the interactions between participants, and with the facilitators, for participants to think more deeply about what it means to be part of a wider movement, and to translate simple discontent and frustration into a rethink of organisational and movement strategy.

## **What now?**

These personal experiences are quite specific ones: and there is no perfect, fixed form that social movement learning can take. Rather, we keep on exploring and experimenting, trying to find useful and meaningful ways of helping develop reflection around our own struggles. Like compost-making, a lot of learning is in a sense the by-product or result of action, fed back in not only to the specific organisation but to individuals, communities and cultures - whether enabling

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<sup>3</sup> [http://ulexproject.org/courses\\_events/the-ecology-of-social-movements-2-2/](http://ulexproject.org/courses_events/the-ecology-of-social-movements-2-2/)



the same plant to grow further or making it possible for a new season's seeds to flourish.

From a radical point of view, the challenge is an extraordinary one: our species, and for that matter the planet, *cannot* trust capitalism, patriarchy, the racialised global order or the state to shape our future – and we cannot rely on academia, commercial media or the celebrity machine to do our thinking for us. But our own attempts at learning, theorising, reflecting, researching are very fragile flowers, often surviving best close to the ground as the transmission of immediate practical skills and struggling to thrive at the heights and complexity needed for us to have any real collective ownership of our shared future.

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## About the author

Laurence Cox is a founding editor of *Interface* and has been involved in many different social movements and movement education projects. His next book (with Alicia Turner and Brian Bocking) is *The Irish Buddhist: the Forgotten Monk who Faced Down the British Empire* (Oxford, March 2020). Contact: laurence.cox AT mu.ie

## **Book Reviews: *Interface*, 11(2)**

**Review editor: Dawn M. Paley**

### **Books reviewed in this issue:**

adrienne maree brown, 2019. *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*. Chico: AK Press (448 pp. \$20 paperback).

Review author: Lorax B. Horne

Azumi Tamura, 2018. *Post-Fukushima Activism: Politics and Knowledge in the Age of Precarity*. New York: Routledge. (210 pp. £105 hardback).

Review Author: Alexander James Brown

Olga Baysha, 2018. *Miscommunicating Social Change: Lessons from Russia and Ukraine*. Lanham: Lexington Books (246 pp., hardcover, £65.00 hardback).

Review authors: Patrick Sawyer and Alexander Finiarel

Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skaerlund Risager, Laurence Cox, 2018, *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North*. London: Pluto Press. (309 pp. £19.99 Paperback).

Review Author: Louise Knops

**Book review: adrienne maree brown,  
*Pleasure Activism***

**Review author:** Lorax B. Horne

**adrienne maree brown, 2019. *Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good*. Chico: AK Press (448 pp. paperback, \$20)**

If in 2019, impending planetary extinction has become an urgent shared concern, author and editor adrienne maree brown's call to heed the physical body for orientation in facing the future suggests that a missing piece in social justice organizing has been a liberatory framework of joy.

In *Pleasure Activism*, brown offers one such framework, a guide for the practice of pleasure that emerges from a rich lineage, and a "diversity of care tactics," in the words of Leah Lakshmi Peipzina-Samarasinha (p. 315) to counter the scarcity mindset of much anti-capitalist organizing. The book also works as a sequel to brown's *Emergent Strategy* (AK Press 2017), although I read the two books in the reverse order.

The edited collection opens with a set of eight pleasure principles (p. 14) building on brown's pleasure lineage. The principles at the start become fleshed-out in the nine sections and subsections of the book, with chapters consisting of essays, poems, manifestos, journal entries, and edited dialogues or trialogues. Many of the chapters written by brown began as essays in her *Bitch* magazine column "The Pleasure Dome." More than 30 other artists, thinkers and doers appear in the collection, either in conversation with brown or as essay authors. The principles to open the book are mirrored by the end with another list: of 11 practices, to make a path to active pleasure (p.431).

*Pleasure Activism* grounds itself in the work of writers like Audre Lorde and Octavia Butler, with Lorde's "Uses of the Erotic" republished as a first chapter, and Butler's science fiction referenced throughout. Given that the current president of the United States was elected on a platform ripped from the mouth of the villain in Butler's *Parable of the Talents* (Butler, p.15), brown's background is a welcome guide. Rather than an academic collection, the meat of *Pleasure Activism* are interviews with the people who have shaped the author's concept of pleasure, and who speak to the ways in which engaging with joy on a cellular level should guide movement's pursuit of a better world. She writes: "on a species level, I can feel there's not a story for our survival in the cards and in ourselves right now" and that pleasure activism is about moving from dying to reproducing (p. 51).

In sections dedicated to sex, drugs and fashion, among other endeavors, brown interrogates the possibilities for pleasure in the human experience and lays out the spells and rituals she follows in bringing about transformative justice. The

thought is provoking: if the planet is indeed going extinct, perhaps sensations of joy hold the key for extending time? As brown puts it: “What was dinosaur humor? Those moments where you’re like: we’re going extinct, let’s enjoy it.” (p.342)

The collection avoids veering into nihilism, nor does it propose responding to pain with hedonism. There is early disavowal of excess, and acknowledgement that while suffering can crystallise political communities, it does not contain the ingredients for liberation. Instead, brown leans on science fiction, as she believes that “all organizing is science fiction—that we are shaping the future we long for and have not yet experienced” (p.10). The collection of voices engages with the imaginary as urgently as it anchors itself in the physical body.

“Hot and Heavy” homework assignments, of which there are 14 throughout the book, include instructions to track one’s consent in physical activities, and to pay attention to your nipples. brown often calls to focus attention on physical sensations and activate dormant cells. *Pleasure Activism*, as curated by brown, is a fitting example of the collective experience of love and the relationships that define every mass movement (p. 276) and whisper the most ancient wisdom about possibilities for a shared future.

What brown calls her pleasure activism lineage (p.25) speaks to her trajectory as a generative somatic student and healer. Here was not the first place I encountered positive mention of the field of somatics, but it was the first time this practice was articulated as something accessible to a movement or a larger group. Previously, I might have considered somatic therapy as one branch in the field of health practices, to be purchased by privileged members of my environment, for self-contained explorations with a health specialist of the injuries they’ve carried in their bodies.

Instead, brown invites a broader consideration of pleasure as guide through the field of healing the body. “It turns out being present is the most important part of every single experience in my life” (p. 277). *Pleasure Activism* can boil down to paying attention, to being present for the best parts of being human and then recreating the behaviors that contain within themselves our reasons for choosing life. Alana Devich Cyril, who shares the book’s dedication, says in her interview with brown that “pleasure is practice” and one can fall out of practice but life is better when that muscle is strong.

The erotic component of the argument is central, so much so that brown encourages readers to give themselves an orgasm before reading each new section (p.3). In attempting to review the collection with the intention of the writer close at heart, I mostly followed this homework assignment, although it slowed down my journey through the text. Other homework assignments included tracking one’s consent boundaries around any physical touch, like hand shakes or hugs, for a week.

The author expands new avenues for “tuning into what brings aliveness into our systems” (p. 6) and “learning from what pleases us about how to make justice

and liberation the most pleasurable experiences we can have.” (p. 252) She opens by laying out eight principles for pleasure activism, which become fleshed out in the author’s interrogations of her relationships. In the conclusion, brown mirrors these principles by offering a list of suggested practices to guide the pleasure activists, like “find the ease” and “be absolutely committed to your process” while being detached from the outcomes of it (pp. 432-433).

From my own healing journey –frequently interrupted by self-sabotage and scarcity economics– brown’s certainty that pleasure is the missing piece has already been a revelation.

I anticipate in the future I will no longer feel the urge to shirk ownership of the experience of seeking pleasure, and am game for the pursuit of making the revolution irresistible, an aphorism Toni Cade Bambara expressed as the role of the artist and which brown has repurposed to guide those who identify with her call to a pleasure-led activism (p.65).

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## About the review author

Lorax B. Horne is a latinx teacher, haberdasher, journalist, non-binary activist and the publisher of the Trans Panic poetry zine. Contact: transpanic AT riseup dot net

## **Book review: Azumi Tamura. *Post-Fukushima Activism: Politics and Knowledge in the Age of Precarity***

**Review Author: Alexander James Brown**

**Azumi Tamura. *Post-Fukushima Activism: Politics and Knowledge in the Age of Precarity*. New York: Routledge. (210 pp. Hardback £105).**

Azumi Tamura's *Post-Fukushima Activism: Politics and Knowledge in the Age of Precarity* is a rich study of urban social movements in Tokyo in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster in March, 2011. For Tamura, activism in the metropolis has changed fundamentally since the disaster, hence her use of the term "post-Fukushima activism."

Her account focuses primarily on the anti-nuclear movement, but also addresses subsequent movements against the Shinzō Abe government's attempts at Constitutional reform, which is intended to normalise growing militarisation in Japan, as well as a raft of draconian national security laws.

Tamura's treatment of these movements stands out from many other monographs in the field, thanks in large part to her deep engagement with contemporary political theory. She rejects dispassionate, academic approaches to the study of social change, seeking instead in both her fieldwork and her theoretical speculation to become a part of the "we" that speaks through the movement.

*Post-Fukushima Activism* surveys a number of competing strands of political thought, from liberalism and feminist care ethics to post-workerist and post-anarchist thought. Tamura takes seriously liberal claims about the need for universalism but recognises the powerful critiques from postmodern thought which have demonstrated the instability of universal categories.

In the age of precarity, she insists, "we need a new political imaginary using what we have now: vulnerable bodies, emotions and desires" (p. 59). While skilfully discoursing upon a theoretical tradition drawn mainly from English and European-language sources, she integrates this discussion with the cultural and intellectual history of Japan in the 1980s and 1990s.

A particularly upsetting and powerful voice, which serves as a foil for Tamura's argument throughout the book, is that of Akagi Tomohiro. Akagi is a young precarious worker who wrote a notorious essay in 2007 in which he claimed that his only hope for social change in Japan was a war which could completely disrupt the existing order. Tamura treats Akagi's claim seriously, in all of its

violence and despair, as an extreme expression of a wider sense of hopelessness and internalised violence in neoliberal Japan.

*Post-Fukushima Activism* is based on two main periods of fieldwork conducted with the anti-nuclear movement in Tokyo in 2012, as well as follow-up interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015. Tamura interviewed 146 protesters. While she initially categorised her research subjects as either independent activists, demonstration organisers or demonstration participants, as her fieldwork progressed she largely abandoned these categories as they became increasingly unstable.

This responsiveness to the fieldwork is evident throughout the book's substantive empirical chapters, where she encounters the shifts in the mood and vibrancy of the movement over time. While staying faithful to her interview subjects' own words, Tamura brings them into conversation with the post-anarchist and post-workerist ideas she interrogates throughout the book. Chapter Three is organised around the idea of the "dissolved subject", which explains the way protesters in an age of precarity engage in movements as ambiguous and highly individualised subjects without necessarily producing a stable collective identity.

Tamura describes how the production of subjectivity in the movement emerges through an emotional and ethical engagement with the issue of nuclear power and this affective dimension serves as a critique of scientific rationalism. There is an emphasis in the movement on the politics of life, not in terms of a particular lifestyle (*kurashi*) but as a raw life force (*inochi*), which is threatened in the context of a risk society.

Later in the book, Tamura analyses the structure of Tokyo's anti-nuclear movement using the notion of "resonant bodies," through which different activist groupings and protest events expressed different political and strategic orientations. The protesters at the Kanteimae, the prime minister's official residence, organised some of the largest protests in 2012. These protesters tended towards a hegemonic understanding of power and thus they conceived of their own actions in terms of a counter-hegemonic struggle.

On the other hand, the more anarchic members of Nuclear Free Suginami, had a more decentralised view of politics and saw themselves as an *uzomuzo*, a rabble or multitude. They focused on taking creative and spontaneous actions without attempting to build and maintain an organisational form. Yet despite these differences in orientation Tamura finds that there was a continual cross-over and overlap between the bodies of the protesters in different political moments. She describes this composition of the movement using the notion of "resonating bodies."

*Post-Fukushima Activism* goes on to criticise academic theorising about social movements, noting the tendency to analyse movements on liberal rationalist grounds in an effort to produce objective knowledge about movements from the outside. Tamura eschews attempts "to establish a general model about" post-

Fukushima activism and instead ponders what the movement can tell us about what it means to generate and bear knowledge about social change.

Fieldwork was instrumental in changing her own positionality, from that of an outside observer to one of engaged participant while remaining focused on “what I could do as a researcher to make a contribution to my society” (p. 127). She proposes thinking about the action of post-Fukushima activists in terms of an “anarchic subjectivity,” a concept she argues can be applied both to the majoritarian-oriented *Kanteimae* protesters, with their emphasis on confronting hegemonic power, and the multitude-type movements such as Nuclear Free Suginami.

Many activists move seamlessly between the two movements and are able to separate the different roles they play in different instantiations of activism. “Rather than behaving as a consistent self, they change the presentation of themselves according to what they connect with and what they want to achieve” (p. 131), she explains, in an ontology Tamura compares with the rhizomatic worldview described by Deleuze and Guattari.

The contingency of lives and struggles in the movement produces forms of knowledge which are embodied and situation dependent. Tamura found that activists show little interest in ideological consistency, adopting a pragmatic approach to particular issues and strategies. The knowledge generated through their struggles is not rationalistic but affective. It is based on emotional responses to an overwhelming disaster and does not seek a transcendent position from which to have perfect knowledge, as in Rawls’s concept of the veil of ignorance, but is instead “an attitude or a mode to live with uncertainty” (p. 138).

Direct, embodied engagement with the movement is important in the transmission of this knowledge because it is based less on linguistic arguments than on an opening to possibilities of highly contingent situations. Tamura is conscious that in the era of “alternative facts” and “post-truth”, some liberal theorists have attempted to buttress rational truth as generally shared and accepted truths collapse. However, she argues that this strategy is dangerous and invites further backlash given the widespread rejection of liberal ethics. Tamura suggests instead that an embodied and affective knowledge is needed, one which values “the encounter with a particular body and create[s] new expression together with it, and pass it to other bodies as a form of affect” (p. 140).

In the final chapter, Tamura integrates her fieldwork observations with her theoretical framework by focussing on two concepts: the creation of collective “non-identity” and non-hegemonic knowledge.

She asks: if the identities of the protesters are “dissolved” in the movement, then what kind of “collective identity” emerges? Drawing once again on Deleuze and the philosophy of assemblage, Tamura describes an ontology devoid of separate, individual agency, where “lines” converge in heterogeneous



assemblages in which “each individual takes intentional action, but the outcome of accumulated individual actions as the assemblage would be unintentional to each of them” (p. 152).

Vulnerable bodies, which are already interpolated in relations with otherness, interact as expressions of desire, without a clear self-other distinction. Rejecting the politics of recognition, Tamura maintains that protesters affirm life without necessarily seeking recognition within existing structures of power. Rather than demanding human rights from the state, they express their desire for dignity through their actions.

In interrogating the epistemological implications of the dissolved subjects and resonant bodies she found in her fieldwork, Tamura analyses the literature on science and risk and makes an argument about the relationship between ethics and knowledge in the case of nuclear power. While scientific knowledge attempts to impose order on a chaotic reality in which observers are themselves intertwined, when disaster strikes, reality talks back and reveals itself as ultimately unknowable. In this context, she argues, it is not possible to make an ethical defence of nuclear energy without obfuscating risk’s ultimate unknowability.

*Post-Fukushima Activism* is bold in its theoretical ambition and yet grounded in a deep engagement with the movement and the debates between movement participants as well as other researchers. Tamura’s contribution is an interesting and valuable one not only to the literature on protest culture in Japan, but to the broader intellectual debate on social movement activism in an increasingly precarious age.

### **About the review author**

Alexander Brown is a Japan Society for the Promotion of Science International Research Fellow at Japan Women’s University and an Honorary Associate at the University of Technology Sydney. His research focuses on anti-nuclear activism in Japan and Australia. He is the author of *Anti-nuclear Protest in Post-Fukushima Tokyo: Power Struggles* (Routledge 2018). Alexander is also a translator of Japanese social science, most recently of Shimizu Hiromu’s *Grassroots Globalization: Reforestation and Cultural Revitalization in the Philippine Cordillera* (Trans Pacific Press and Kyoto University Press, 2019). He can be contacted at [abrown AT kemblatranslations DOT com](mailto:abrown AT kemblatranslations DOT com).

## **Book review: Olga Baysha, *Miscommunicating Social Change***

**Review authors: Patrick Sawyer and Alexander Finiarel**

**Olga Baysha, 2018. *Miscommunicating Social Change: Lessons from Russia and Ukraine*. Lanham: Lexington Books (246 pp., hardcover, £65.00 hardback)**

Olga Baysha's recent work *Miscommunicating Social Change* concerns a specific form of postcolonial discourse that continues to dominate in post-Soviet social movements. She calls this discourse the "uni-progressive imaginary," by which she refers to the eurocentric view of the world which envisions "progress" as any transformative social change that brings a country closer to "imitating the West."

The discourse produced by this imaginary divides society into a "progressive avant-garde" of history against an "uncivilized other" which leads to framing social conflicts in hierarchical terms and generating both symbolic and physical conflict (p. 181). In so doing, "progressive forces" are able to target both their compatriots in the opposition movement, as well as bystanders who may be hesitant to join in the protests. Not only does the "uni-progressive imaginary" demonize those located outside of the centers of power, but in employing the West as the unquestionable model for society, it also leads to a "discursive closure" which renders "creative and critical thinking impossible" by presenting a single unchallenged discourse that prevents others from surfacing (p. 181-2).

*Miscommunicating Social Change* revolves around the discourses emerging from protests often read as being pro-western opposition movements in the context of former Soviet states in the 21st Century. Borrowing from discourse theory as developed by thinkers as Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, and Nico Carpentier, Baysha sets about examining three main case studies involving the uniprogressive imaginary in the post-Soviet sphere. She takes as her main case studies the 2012 movement for fair elections in Russia, the 2014 Euro-Maidan and anti-Maidan conflict in Ukraine, and the anti-corruption movement in Russia that was ongoing at the time the book was published, and which subsequently merged with the other protest movements (against unfair elections, political repressions, pollution, etc) in the summer of 2019.

In each case, Baysha points out the common thread in each movement. She points to the embodiment of the uniprogressive imaginary when those who might sympathize with the regime in power are referred to by the opposition as "*souki*" (a derogatory term for someone with a "Soviet mentality"), "*rabi*" (slaves), "*anchovies*" (someone who blindly follows Kremlin propaganda), or "*terrorists*" (in the case of the anti-Maidan movement in Ukraine) (p. 183).

By framing popular opposition to the uniprogressive agenda as a question of “fear”, “mental underdevelopment”, and “moral degradation” (p. 183), the pro-democracy movement alienates and undemocratically ostracizes the people from their symbolic representation of “the people”. The imagery proposed by uniprogressive imaginary pictures the Other as an almost inanimate object incapable of acting in their own best interests. In so doing, the Other is, thus, viewed by the pro-Western subject as preventing the inevitable progression of history. In the case of Ukraine, *Miscommunicating Social Change* looks at how uniprogressivism led to a “totalitarian disclosure” which lumped in all anti-Maidan individuals as “pro-Russian separatists” and “terrorists”, and erased any possibility of exploring the views of the moderates.

It would be absurd to claim that this form of discourse is problematic when these movements far from hegemonic, especially when compared to state power, as held by Vladimir Putin or Viktor Yanukovich. But when we observe power relations in an international context, we find that opposition protesters are supported by international actors who also seek to advance this narrative themselves.

Baysha makes it understood that this discourse could not exist without implicating the global community at large. Terms such as ‘modernization’, ‘development’, and ‘progress’ are commonly used, and often play an imperialist role in the periphery countries of the world system, giving value to the ideals that allowed for the West to dominate them in the first place.

Criticism from the West and Western corporate media regarding “modernization” and “democratization” provide “progressive” alternative media in both countries with the justification to demean the opposition as being, in essence, “anti-modern.” From the quotidian framing of Russia and Ukraine as having “backward” regimes to the European and American politicians visiting and cheering on the Euro-Maidan protesters, core countries do not exist as neutral bystanders, but as active propagators of the uni-progressive imaginary.

The uni-progressive imaginary, as described in *Miscommunicating Social Change*, emphasizes the “supply” side of anti-opposition ideas (state media, political talking points, etc). The author points out that more often than not, there is no mention of the complex “demand” side of any human being’s thought process, which allows liberals to take the leap to considering the Other as ‘hopeless’. Despite the many imperfections of the Soviet Union, a consistent majority of the Russian population continues to harbor positive sentiments for past times because of the “web of values” that allowed Soviet people to live full lives” (p. 97).

This “web of values” held dear by the so-called “sovki” allowed for the creation of institutions to look after the well-being of citizens while avoiding the extremes of wealth inequality found in the capitalist world. Contrast this to the 1990s, when “shock therapy” reforms instituted by Boris Yeltsin, considered part of the introduction of “freedom” by liberals at the time, was discredited in

the eyes of the majority of the Russian people, who saw their economic security replaced almost overnight due to “soaring inflation, skyrocketing prices, massive unemployment, and rampant crime” (p. 98).

From the point of view of an ex-Soviet citizen observing pro-Western slogans used by the opposition and derogatory words employed to demonize a society which they remember with nostalgia, there is little wonder why many would be hostile to the liberal movement.

In all three of Baysha’s case studies, uni-progressivism undermined democracy instead of expanding it as these movements had intended. By placing the West as the uncriticizable model for what a country should strive for, uni-progressive discourse becomes a tool for symbolic and political domination over the “underdeveloped” Other, closing off any alternative intellectual discourse.

*Miscommunicating Social Change* argues that uni-progressivism is something that democratic social movements in the post-Soviet countries should absolutely avoid. She writes:

It is necessary to make the solid and impermeable frontiers between the self and the “other” porous, which will allow the activation of a diversity of positions, the forging of connections between former enemies, and the creation of alliances across borders. This, in turn, will pave the way for working out mutually acceptable terms of co-existence and reducing the chance of violence, whether physical or symbolic (p. 184).

This position, however, is not without its limits. As the experience of the Euro-Maidan in Ukraine demonstrated, a complete “dissolution of boundaries”, or “total pluralism” (p. 184), in order to create a popular front can lead to the cooptation of the movement by radically nationalistic and neo-fascistic forces, as with Svobodna and Pravy Sektor in Ukraine. Once this takes place, symbolic violence can ultimately transform into physical violence.

Russian citizens were also affected by the Ukrainian conflict and the discursive closures that occurred on both sides. The liberal opposition welcomed the Euro-Maidan as the event that “liberated” Ukrainians from an outdated, Soviet-like, corrupt regime dependent on authoritarian Russia, bringing it closer to becoming a “normal” European country.

Pro-government forces within Russia tried to portray Euro-Maidan as an example of western intervention that drowned the country in chaos and blood. The state then used this threat as an excuse to restrict the laws concerning demonstrations, making it possible to render any meeting illegal.

It was not only the post-Crimea annexation euphoria that stabilized the political situation in Russia for a time but also the fear of revolution and a new political crisis that came with the Ukrainian conflict. While this fact almost always goes unnoticed by the media and researchers, Baysha points out that many post-

Soviet people are afraid of changes and revolutions, do not really sympathize with liberal ideas, and feel nostalgic for the Soviet times.

What *Miscommunicating Social Change* sorely lacks is an analysis of Russian pro-government discourse. It appears that this discourse is constructed through an interplay of colonial and anti-colonial discourses.

When the Russian government needs to apply repressive measures, it either states that the exact same measures are a “normal practice” commonly applied in the West, or, when these exceptional measures transgress ordinary laws, that without them Russia would be colonized by the West. The opposition is usually depicted by pro-government media as agents of the West. Or perhaps Russian politics do not actually exist independently from the West. The West is both used as a positive example for repressive measures and a negative one when certain actions of protesters need to be demonized.

In this way, Russian politics is defined by colonial thinking on both sides. Russian liberals use the West as an example of what Russian society should aspire to be, whereas the Russian government uses the West as both an example of what is “normal” and a constant threat.

In order to pursue meaningful policy, either side has to overcome colonial thinking and denounce the coloniality of the opponent. Baysha’s analysis of oppositional media shows the coloniality of Russian liberals, who fail to understand their compatriots’ needs and desires, giving the opposition a tool that could help it to recognize its own mistakes and understand that in pursuit of democracy it acts and thinks in undemocratic ways.

An investigation of pro-government media could encourage meaningful criticism the Russian government in a way that is understandable to the majority of the population. In order to do that, the opposition needs to find issues, such as the Soviet social security system, for example, that are actually appealing for Russian, and make the country more “progressive” than the West.

Luckily, the opposition seems to have learned from their mistakes. During this summer’s protests surrounding the banning of certain independent candidates for the Moscow state Duma election, opposition forces managed to attract tens of thousands of people every week. More than half of Moscow’s population sided with the protesters for the first time in many years (Kommersant 2019).

The analyses of the posts of opposition leaders and oppositional media headlines in August showed an encouraging trend: the uni-progressive imaginary was absent in the majority of cases.

Another unfortunate thing about Baysha’s book is that she only analyses publications from the traditional liberal media (*Novaya Gazeta* and *Ekho Moskvy*) making it hard to compare to what extent the oppositional discourse has changed. Nevertheless, less than five per cent of articles in *Novaya Gazeta* and a couple of articles at *MBKh-Media*, *The Moscow Times*, and *BBC-Russia* used uni-progressive discourse (in the last two cases they were used by their

guests who were either political scientists or opposition candidates) (Olshanskaya 2019, Radchenko 2019, BBC-Russia 2019).

On the news website *Meduza* and on Alexey Navalny's blogs, this discourse was absent. Lubov Sobol, one of the key oppositional candidates in the Duma election, used hierarchical rhetoric only once, calling the protesters "the best people of Moscow" (2019). Only one of the influencers, Ury Dud, who supported the protests, made use of the uni-progressive imaginary in his posts (2019).

Several members of the opposition, mainly Russian feminists, criticized the hierarchical structure that liberals create when describing themselves and those who do not participate in protests. On her Twitter account, Nika Vodwood, one of the most well known Russian feminists today, criticised the way in which *Novaya Gazeta* (Aramyan 2019) painted a heroic portrait of Egor Zhukov, a student of one of the most prestigious Russian universities, the Higher School of Economics, who was facing trial for allegedly participating in massive "riots."

Vodwood's critique points out the hierarchy created between Zhukov and other protesters, which resulted in the validation of his toxic anti-feminist views and an unequal share of public attention to the cases of other protesters, though they were facing the same accusations for the same actions. She pointed out that it is the action, not the person, that matters in such cases. Darya Serenko, another renowned Russian feminist and artist-activist, supported these statements, writing an article in which she criticized the romanticization of the protests, the idealization of the victims of the system, and the blame placed on those who did not participate (2019).

Only *Ekho Moskvy* still holds to uni-progressive rhetoric, which was present in half of their posts. However, even their rhetoric seems to have moved away from colonial discourse. *Ekho* speaker Yulia Latynina is famous for her extremely liberal views, which would be considered as right-wing conservative in the West, proving Baysha's point that Russia's old-school that liberals still use uni-progressive discourse have become outdated and cannot keep up with the times themselves.

Nevertheless, Latynina noted last year that "the Kremlin is not strong, Europe is weak" and that "the regimes that did not modernise began to survive because Europe became weak and started to flirt with them" (Latynina 2019). Such disappointment in the West could make even hard-core Russian liberals like Latynina finally overcome uni-progressive discourse and potentially even make them listen to their compatriots.

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**Book Review: *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North***

**Review Author: Louise Knops**

**Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skaerlund Risager, Laurence Cox, 2018, *Voices of 1968: Documents from the Global North*. London: Pluto Press. (309 pp. paperback, price £19.99)**

“There have only been two world revolutions. One took place in 1848. The second took place in 1968. Both were historical failures. Both transformed the world” - Giovanni Arrighi, Terence K. Hopkins, and Immanuel Wallerstein.

*Voices of 1968* is an extraordinary account of the movements of the 1960s and 1970s, movements which transformed the world, and continue to do so today. Salar Mohandesi, Bjarke Skaerlund Risager and Laurence Cox, the editors of the collection, open a window into the many scenes of what has been described as “the first global rebellion” (p.19).

The editors focus in particular on the contentious cultures that developed in the US, Canada, Mexico, Japan, West Germany, Denmark, France, Italy, Britain, Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia. The book’s originality and relevance to the field of social movement studies lies in the richness and authenticity of its empirical dimension, as well as to the contributions it makes to ongoing discussions of research ethics.

Research is, by definition, a collective affair. To understand current and past events, we rely on our own observations, but also on work that has preceded ours. Rarely, however, are we invited to take a look at the raw material underpinning academic analysis. The collection of texts and primary sources presented in *Voices of 1968* invites us to do just that, contrasting theoretically-driven and deductive scholarly work in the field of social movements studies.

The editors adopt a historical approach, privileging descriptions of events over conceptual interpretations of them. In *Voices of 1968*, the reader is taken to the unfolding there and then, across the many countries reviewed and the vast array of movements that co-existed during “the long 1960s.”

*Voices of 1968* is particularly remarkable in showcasing the heterogeneity and complexity of the tumultuous decade: a kaleidoscope of tactics (p. 24) and struggles emerged, and were hybridized and internationalized with varying levels of success and popularity. We learn about feminist movements and the emergence of radical feminist thought, anti-racism movements, gay liberation movements, workers movements, environmental movements, anti-war movements and many other forms of struggle.



For each country in the book, the reader gets a snapshot of what these movements looked like, but also of how particular events took place. These include well-known actions, such as the student occupations and protest which often acted as a catalyst for other forms of collective action. But also less mediatized ones, such as the women's "liberation from the toilet movement" in Japan, which "re-appropriated and reworked Marxist and Black Power concepts to politicize sexuality and sex-based relations" (p.120)

We also learn, in the poetic prose of Jaime Sabines, about the student massacre in *Tlatelolco* (Mexico, 1968) which became a point of reference for social movements' popular memory (p. 94). Community experiments, such as *Kommune I* in West-Germany, are included, as a place of contestation where "members attempted to live in ways that broke with the bourgeois family" (p.140).

The text is replete with thick descriptions of the repertoires of actions and provides insight into the emotions that accompanied the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s: protests, sit-ins, occupations, (hunger) strikes, pickets, arrests, armed confrontations, theoretical discussions, party formation, and also, the humor, fear, joy and indignation that these events contained.

This diversity is presented in a parsimonious way, through the book's straightforward structure: each chapter focuses on one country, and after a brief historical introduction into the specific context, the editors present a selection of relevant pictures, letters, posters, manifestos, and other artistic contributions. Our attention is drawn, in a series of black and white prints, to the specific materiality of the empirics presented in the *Voices of 1968*: the papers, the streets, the music, the festivals, and the fashion.

At times, the authors provide translations of key slogans, such as those deployed in France: "the economy is suffering—let it die," or "the more I make love, the more I want to make revolution," (p. 194-195).

Elsewhere, readers encounter articles published in activist journals, such as the description, by Dave Slaney, of the LSE occupation (Britain) in the *Bulletin of the Vietnam Solidarity Campaign* (p. 234). The reader can dive into poetry and artistic productions, or into the personal reflections of activists, such as Ui Jun (Japan) who writes about "the worst environmental problems of any country in the world" (p. 126).

Sporadically, we come across pictures of the posters announcing upcoming protests, like the Civil Rights March in Northern Ireland (p. 258), flyers and campaign material, but also original photographs of events like the Black Power March in West London in 1970 (p. 230), or manifestos, such as the "Thirteen point program and platform" of the Young Lords Party in the United States (p. 55).

These materials and locations, and the networks between them, made it possible for movements to internationalize, by enabling the synchronization of protests

and the cross-fertilization of political communications. We are thus reminded that “a shared sense of unity across borders” (p. 19) and “the first global rebellion” were not only possible, but also that they were successful in a pre-digital age. There was “connective action” before Facebook, Google maps and online petitions.

Many of the struggles of 1968 –the slogans, claims and repertoires of collective action– resonate with movements that are unfolding worldwide today. Hence, the question arises: what would a “Voices of 2018” look like? It would likely, just like *Voices of 1968*, extend the period of analysis to the years just before and just after 2018.

It could speak of uprisings in 2011 in many parts of the world, such as the Arab Spring, the Occupy movements, and the anti-austerity movements in the South of Europe. It may also document the *#RefugeesWelcome*, *#MeToo*, and *#BlackLivesMatter* movements, and the People’s marches against Brexit. It might make mention of the mass mobilizations that sparked off in the autumn of 2018 in France, and how the “yellow vests” became a unifying symbol of the working poor. It might even speak of a new type of revolutionary messiah, the youth, and the millions of activists denouncing political inaction in the face of climate change, in the name of their future.

Upon reading *Voices of 1968*, I was struck by the similarity of grievances and denunciations mobilized then, and still mobilized today, often coalescing around the same culprit: capitalism and its destructive effects on humans, non-humans and our shared societies.

This is all the more striking given that the 1960s was a period of unprecedented wealth in many of the countries reviewed in the book. The editors underline how back then, “even those who enjoyed the fruits of the affluent society were often left with a bitter taste in their mouths” and signal the tension between “the optimistic and triumphalist rhetoric of modernizing governments and the realities on the ground” (p. 10).

Besides a critique of capitalism and its flaws, we can see the past and present coinciding on another front: challenges to parliamentary democracy and electoral forms of representation. Activists in 1968 and activists today question “the relationship [of activism] to power, both within the state and within organizations” (p. 25). In this regard, the editors acknowledge how the *Voices of 1968* worked to push “democracy in new directions, overturn social roles, challenge accepted forms of representation and redefine the very meaning of politics” (p. 1).

However, the movements covered by *Voices of 1968* displayed at least two critical dimensions that are missing today.

First, 1968 was characterized by a close connection between struggles in the South (decolonization in particular) and those taking place in the North, which inspired and fed off each other in a fluid way. As the authors remind us, “it was

precisely the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in Africa, Asia and Latin America that made possible the radical 1960s in the Global North” (p. 5). In this regard, as the authors explain, the focus on “Voices of the Global North” should not be seen as disregard for the voices of the Global South. It was rather a choice driven by empirical reasons, like the need to acknowledge the reality of different dynamics at play in different parts of the world – as well as material ones, like the difficulty of accommodating an even greater diversity of cases in a single volume.

This close connection between the Southern and Northern struggles departs sharply from the contemporary context where movements in the North, around climate change for example, are sometimes accused of taking a Eurocentric and neo-colonial position in the production of their frames and claims.

A second notable difference between then and now lies in the explicitness of the movements’ ideological orientation. At the very heart of 1968 was the sharing of a common language of revolution: Marxism (p. 20). Of course, as the authors note, not everyone was a Marxist, “but many activists became familiar with Marxist concepts,” which “contributed to the feeling of sharing a kind of *lingua franca* despite the various dialects of Trotskyism, Maoism and so forth” (p. 21). Taking pride in siding with an alternative ideology could not be more different to attempts by contemporary movements to go “beyond and above politics,” often without proposing a counter-hegemonic paradigm to see the world and offer solutions.

Despite the existence and the articulation of alternative ideologies at the time, the reader is forced to recognize that the ’68 revolution did not succeed in meeting the revolutionary expectation: there was no overturn of the capitalist model of society, as “activists ultimately failed to bring together a diversity of voices into an inclusive unity” (p. 27).

The most revealing example in this regard is Britain. In *Voices of 1968*, the country is described as the center of a “global culture,” a nation with a “resurgent left” and intense “labour militancy.” Britain experienced the crisis of capitalism in the 1970s but, as the editors remind us, “it was not the radical left that ultimately benefitted from this breakdown, but a new right under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher” (p.231).

Similarly, the most recent crisis of capitalism, embodied in the financial meltdown of 2008 and the uprisings that followed –the anti-austerity movements in Southern Europe or the Occupy movements– did not result in a global resurrection of the left and far-left. Quite the contrary.

Despite the local and brief successes of the left in some countries (e.g. Syriza in Greece), we were reminded of the incredible resilience of neoliberalism: its capacity to absorb moments of rebellion without reforming itself entirely. “Cooptation”, as the authors remind us, “has been perhaps the most obvious feature of the neoliberal order that consolidated itself in the 1990s and 2000s” (p. 29). The years after the financial crisis took on a rhythm of new austerity

measures and more financial deregulation, leading to the worsening of economic inequalities and environmental degradation.

For all of these reasons, *Voices of 1968* is a timely read. It is inspiring, awakening, and thought-provoking, but in an unconventional way: it does not impose its own questions or interpretations upon the reader. Rather, it provides succinct and comprehensive descriptions from a selection of (northern) countries and movements: enough to answer some questions and encourage further reflections. In doing so, this book makes an important contribution in terms of research ethics and priorities.

*Voices of 1968* exemplifies what researchers should always keep in sight: the subjects, the matters, the objects at the heart of the story, and stands as a beautiful demonstration of research as a field of knowledge-building and exploration.

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