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Book review: Daniel Sonabend, *We Fight Fascists*

Review author: Alex Khasnabish

Daniel Sonabend, 2019, *We Fight Fascists: The 43 Group and Their Forgotten Battle for Post-war Britain*. London: Verso. $45.95 CAD hardcover, 369 pp.

In the aftermath of World War II and under the long shadow cast by the horrors of the Nazis' Final Solution to the "Jewish Question" Jewish servicemen returned home to England to find their struggle against fascism was far from over.

In *We Fight Fascists: The 43 Group and Their Forgotten Battle for Post-war Britain*, Daniel Sonabend tells one aspect of this story through the experiences of the 43 Group, an organization founded by 43 dedicated anti-fascists in 1946 (the vast majority of whom were Jewish ex-servicemen just returned from war).

Sonabend's history of the 43 Group is not only engaging and highly readable, it is an important and timely book offering vital lessons for the struggle against fascism today. After reading the book it seems incredible that Sonabend's account is one of the few published about the 43 Group given the importance of the grassroots campaign to defeat fascism they waged from 1946-1950.

While Oswald Mosley and his inter-war British Union of Fascists (1932-1940) get most of the attention when considering attempts to build an authentic fascist movement in Britain, both Mosley and fascism would return in the post-World War II context. Frustrated by the timidity and complicity of the Anglo-Jewish political establishment, the founders of the 43 Group wanted to create a militant organization that was committed exclusively to anti-fascism and unafraid to pull it up by its roots.

Indeed, other than this foundational anti-fascism, members were explicitly prohibited from discussing politics, giving the Group a singular orientation and criteria for membership. Despite the Allied victory over the Axis and, specifically, the defeat of Nazism, fascist organizers continued to find fertile ground amid the devastation, deprivation, and enduring relations of oppression that characterized Britain in 1946 and after.

World War II is often memorialized as a righteous struggle of good versus evil, a convenient myth that obscures the grotesque injustices very much at home in liberal democratic countries as well. Recognizing that the ruling class and its institutions, particularly the police and the courts, had neither the willingness nor the ability to effectively confront the fascists, the 43 Group resolved to do so.

Sonabend's historical narrative tells the story of the Group's militant, community-based, and directly confrontational anti-fascism. In the telling, he offers many important insights of value to the contemporary struggle against a resurgent fascism.

We Fight Fascists is populated by richly realized characters and the lived, human drama of the anti-fascist struggle is powerfully foregrounded. Political intrigue, personal details, and dramatic public, violent confrontations are here in roughly equal parts, pacing the story well and giving it depth and weight.

Sonabend's history is exciting and inspiring but, as he notes in the last pages of his book, the 43 Group's successful struggle against Mosley's Union Movement hardly signalled the defeat of fascism. A new generation of fascist organizers and activists would emerge in Britain before the end of the 1950s, beginning a new and protracted era of fascist activity, much of it intensely racist, violent, and xenophobic.

This doesn't mean that the victory of the 43 Group over Mosley's Union Movement was really a defeat. But it is worth considering what this shows us about what is necessary to defeat fascism over the longer term rather than episodically.

While the militant, community-based anti-fascism of the 43 Group was absolutely critical, if we are to do more than respond to individual manifestations of fascism we must also address the socio-economic and political conditions in which it grows. Sonabend points out how addressing prevailing relations of ruling and posing alternatives to them was not part of the 43 Group's mandate, indeed it was explicitly disavowed, a feature of the organization that did not allow it to persist past the downfall of its fascist nemesis.

Through archival research and the testimonies of the few surviving Group members, Sonabend's is a thorough history of anti-fascist work in all its dimensions. *We Fight Fascists* provides rich material for reflection and discussion by those currently engaged in efforts to defend their communities against the surging far right.

While the street fights between fascists and anti-fascists are grippingly re-told, Sonabend also shows us the intelligence and logistical work critical to solid anti-fascist practice. Some of the most compelling stories in *We Fight Fascists* are about 43 Group operatives working as spies behind fascist lines, the risks they take, and the costs they bear.

Sonabend describes a complex, collective anti-fascist practice enacted by the members of the 43 Group and he shows us some of the tensions and contradictions too. As mentioned above, because the Group had no politics beyond anti-fascism it also lacked a critical, shared analysis of other powerful institutions like the state. This meant it often ended up deferring and appealing to the ruling class and its institutions, like the courts and police, tacitly reproducing the *status quo*.

As Sonabend tells us, "The 43 Group was not a revolutionary organisation; it wanted to preserve the state and its democracy, and only acted because the

Labour government of the day would not" (p. 324). It is enough that the 43 Group was key to driving Mosley and his Union Movement into oblivion; but given the rapid emergence of a new generation of fascist activists it's worth asking what this teaches us about long term anti-fascist strategy.

Reflecting on the story of the 43 Group, Sonabend concludes *We Fight Fascists* with two crucial lessons to be learned from their struggle. The first is that "The members of the 43 Group chose violence" (p. 324). That is, they recognized the necessity of meeting fascism's essential violence with a superior violence of their own, mobilized by a community that had been so clearly targeted by the fascist threat. Sonabend is clear and unequivocal about the importance of this lesson and I agree wholeheartedly.

The second lesson he offers is derived from the 43 Group's exclusively anti-fascist criteria for membership: "It is vital that anti-fascists never forget they are always on the same side, and that every potential new recruit to the fight should be welcomed with open arms, no matter what their other politics are" (p. 325). As Sonabend highlights, this radically inclusive approach allowed the 43 Group to grow its membership into the thousands at a time when rallying people to confront fascism was absolutely critical. Unfortunately Sonabend doesn't take this analysis any further and while he admits that the prohibition against talking politics within the Group was probably more of a principle than an enforced practice, issues of political conflict and their consequences within the Group seem somewhat conveniently marginalized.

The openness that allowed the group to rapidly recruit and organize in the face of an imminent fascist threat proved decidedly less useful as a point of unity when the battle lines were less viscerally and clearly drawn. There's nothing wrong with a group dissolving or project ending in its due course but, as history would show, the fascist threat had not been expunged and would take only a handful of years to reconstitute itself. Clearly there remained work to be done and the Group's refusal to consider larger political questions can't simply be dismissed in this context. It should also offer an important point for reflection for contemporary anti-fascist organizing.

In addition to its value as a highly readable political history, *We Fight Fascists* is also an important contribution to the scholarship on social movements and fascism. Sonabend's book stands alongside other excellent works focusing on fascism and anti-fascism that explore the lived, social dimension of these movements and not just their organizational formations or ideology (Blee 2018; Belew 2018; Bray 2017; Moore and Tracy 2020; Renton 2019; Strickland 2018; Tenold 2018).

We Fight Fascists is a valuable politically-engaged contribution to social movement scholarship that takes movements seriously not only as vehicles for contentious politics but as knowledge-producers and vital engines of social change. Sonabend offers us an inspiring history of people collectively organizing and fighting back against those who would dehumanize and then destroy them.

Confronted by a resurgent far right and accelerating eco-social crises, we would do well to attend to the lessons it offers.

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About the review author

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Book review: Susana Draper, *1968 Mexico*

Review author: Plácido Muñoz Morán

Susana Draper, 2018, *1968 Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy*. Durham: Duke University Press (251 pp., paperback, $ 20.99).

In *Mexico 1968: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy*, Susana Draper proposes a series of encounters at the margins of the ’68 global movement. The incorporation of less known voices, views and locations fills the gaps of the dominant imaginary of the ‘68 in Mexico and beyond.

Draper presents the movement of 1968 in Mexico as a contemporaneous open-ended process shaped by multiple situations, bodies and temporalities. Drawing on an alternative politics of memory, the author explores the impact of collective processes of emancipation activated by the movement. The main body of the philosophical analysis that informs the book is built upon the experiences of participants in the movement and how they reflected and embodied ideas of freedom, equality and democracy.

1968 is known today for a series of global movements that pursued the social transformation of everyday life through collective participation. However, the author notes that academic studies have tended to exclude until recently the participation of countries in the Global South. Mexico played a particular role between the north and the south in 1968, hosting the Olympic games that year just days after its government had repressed demonstrators in the Tlatelolco massacre.

But the better known 1968 massacre in Tlatelolco (a neighbourhood in Mexico City) and the prominence of social agents linked to the National Strike Council are, in *1968 Mexico*, eclipsed by Draper’s focus on less visible and less heard experiences and actors. The uncovering of these memories counters the imbalance between the memory of horrors of repressive state practices and that of collective processes of emancipation produced within the movement.

Making connections between the most remembered memories of ’68 and those of the margins, Draper fosters the production of new meanings and ways of understanding the Mexican social movement. To do so, she depicts the ’68 as a polyphony of voices which welcomed participation regardless of class, gender or political affiliation. More than a spontaneous and apolitical movement of the past, she helps us understand this movement as a flow of social transformations and ways of making politics that have lasted until today.

1968 Mexico highlights the transgressive nature of the movement, which questioned the entirety of existing political, artistic and philosophical orders in Mexican society. This critical perspective is present throughout the book, in connection with different temporalities of the movement or the role of history within it. In regard to the former, Draper avoids falling into a chronological and continuous narrative of events. In contrast, she proposes a fragmented and incomplete history of the movement which is shaped by encounters across situations and over time. This extraordinary book on the '68 events in Mexico is itself driven by the memories of some of the people who ended up in prison or were politically and socially marginalised due to their participation in the movement.

Draper's analysis of the philosophical and literary work of José Revueltas (1914-1971), who actively participated in the movement and helped produce the foundations of its theoretical framework, is used as a catalyst for the encounters with the protagonists of the different chapters in the book.

Revueltas' concepts such as "Self-Management and Cognitive Democracy" (p. 40) become operative channels to interpret the ways of understanding and making politics within the movement. In this context, Revuelta argues that the idea of a Marxist revolution based on state takeover by a political party must be substituted by a democracy in practice, in which everyday life is transformed into a contested arena against social alienation.

Social transformation, therefore, is understood in *Mexico 1968* as a never ending experience that is shaped by experiments within the complexity of everyday life. For instance, the writing of Revueltas is intermingled with tales of his life in prison. His body, the prison and the time that he spent in it, are transformed into conceptual and creative elements that allow the reader to reflect about temporalities and forms of freedom in an alienated society.

The conception of language as a site of political struggle in which new meanings can be imagined is one of the main singularities of the 1968 movement in Mexico. These creative and imaginative attitudes take the form of emancipatory experiments within social and sensory orders. In these experiments, the boundaries between everyday life, art and philosophy are blurred and converted into spaces of political experience.

The work and life of José Revueltas and the effects of '68 on cinema are shown as examples of the experimental character of the movement in Mexico and beyond. This experimentation allowed the survival of the movement during the state repression in Mexico.

In the afterlife of the movement, the creation of cinema played a remarkable role, acting as a bridge between places and people and opening up dialogues and discussion. The cinematic experiences are portrayed as encounters among non-equals in which the process was emphasised over the final product. Draper provides an insight into these processes to illustrate how collaborative films were created in connection with the movement.

Draper documents how the creative process of the film *History of a Document* (p. 110) lies between the inside and outside of the Lecumberri prison. The process of filming became a means to question not only the state system and its structures in Mexico -making visible the reality of political prisoners- but also the conventional norms of creating cinema. In addition, Draper connects this and other so-called militant cinema to Revueltas' concept of self-management reinforcing the philosophical discussion about freedom and participatory democracy within the movement.

Mexico 1968 analyses feminist movement in Mexico through the experiences of women who participated in the movement as a way to explore participatory democracy within the 1968 movement. The role of women is emphasised as part of multiple struggles against social patriarchal constructions; the monopolisation of movement memory by men; or the sexual division of labour. These struggles inspired the philosophical work and the political activism of Fernanda Navarro who played a key role in the theorization of the movement and its continuation. Navarro's writing embraces the struggles of the 1968 movement and of women through solid philosophical work in which language again becomes a site to discuss the authoritarian-state capture of ideas of freedom and democracy.

The notion of encounter, which spans the book and connects the reader with different situations in the movement, takes its highest conceptual complexity in Draper's consideration of Navarro's work. Navarro's expression "Today is always" (p. 152) synthetized the multifaceted nature of '68 within a constant process of becoming.

The encounters in *Mexico 1968* make and remake intersubjective experiences between people who embody multiple temporalities, requiring a constant, critical approach to the conception of a homogeneous and essential subject. This approach highlights the importance of alterity among different actors and demonstrates how alterity opens the way for social transformation.

The encounters between Roberta Abedaño and Gladys Lopéz - outside and inside prison - materialise and activate the discussion and bring to life the concepts introduced throughout the book. The memories of these two women show the prejudices they faced inside and outside of prison, but also how they had to deal with their own prejudices towards different women inside prison. This tension between equality and inequality is the force that moves the main argument of *Mexico 1968* and, at the same time, is what made the political and social struggles of '68 carry on until present.

Though Draper makes an effort to connect events in 1968 with current movement and repressive state practices in Mexico and beyond, *Mexico 1968* would have benefitted from more references and discussion on how and if ongoing Indigenous movements connect to the '68 movement. Overall this is an original and interesting book that is accessible for students and experts, making a great contribution to the study of social movements in general and to the Mexican movement of '68 in particular.

About the review author

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Book review: Amber Day (ed.), *DIY Utopia*

Review Author: Evangelos Chrysagis

Amber Day (ed.), 2017, *DIY Utopia: Cultural Imagination and the Remaking of the Possible*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. 290pp. £77 (Hb), £73 (eBook).

In describing an array of cultural activities that invite us to cast a critical eye on our present circumstances and imagine alternatives, Amber Day's new edited collection *DIY Utopia* grapples both with the concept of utopia and the notion of "Do-it-Yourself."

For Day, DIY activities contrast with the rampant consumerism of mainstream culture, infuse cultural practices with a sense of play, and present an alternative politics in-the-making. The DIY ethos of participation, sharing resources, activism and collaboration underpin a variety of projects, taking many forms such as underground music scenes, guerilla farming and artist cooperatives, to name but a few examples.

In this context, not only does DIY constitute a mode of operating but is also in itself a utopian enterprise: never perfect or complete, it continually strives to highlight how things *could* be.

In all four parts, *DIY Utopia* collects several of these "homemade strivings for utopia" (p. ix), which seek "to create miniature versions of alternate worlds" (p. xi), delineating a space within which politics, economy and culture can be re-imagined.

While at present it is indeed hard to conceive of anything beyond neoliberalism, *DIY Utopia* explicitly aims to transcend what is already there. Yet we must remember that DIY *is* part of the existing system, sometimes presenting a counterargument to dominant narratives, but in many cases emerging as a form of cultural production largely appropriated by capitalist structures. As Day writes, "[t]here is certainly nothing about the DIY aesthetic that would make it automatically resistant to reabsorption" (p. x).

Still, the intrinsic values of DIY continue to mobilise practitioners and give rise to a multitude of initiatives that privilege collective activity, ethical practice, the learning of new skills and the use of public spaces, while simultaneously presenting a case against consumption and environmental destruction. Many DIY practices achieve these objectives not through explicit resistance or oppositional politics but through embracing irony and playfulness, an indication, perhaps, of DIY's evolution and adaptation towards presenting social issues and concerns.

Different projects under the rubric of DIY may not always share the same values. For example, a distinctively political "DIY culture" (McKay 1998) could not be equated with DIY entrepreneurship and global creative trends in music and fashion (Luvaas 2012). Like utopia, DIY cannot be fixed, but it must be perceived as a floating signifier, which many cultural practitioners keep at arm's length, along with the negative connotation of amateurism normally associated with the term. And just like utopias, DIY pursuits are not meant to be taken literally but used as blueprints or, as Day puts it, as "provocations" (p. xiii) that encompass a series of prompts or questions about the reality of our current condition.

As Stephen Duncombe notes in Part I, "'What if?' is *the* Utopian question" (p. 12). Asking this very question, Duncombe argues, is simultaneously a criticism of existing conditions and an act of conjuring up an alternative. Instead of constituting mere negation, utopias seek to bring into view novel approaches and ways of thinking. Imagination is the *sine qua non* of utopias, an integral element of critical thought and action, while its absence underscores the proliferation of dystopian futures.

Experimenting with and building on the premises of Thomas More's book *Utopia*, Duncombe decided to open it up to collective imagination by creating a website and making *Utopia* publicly available for download. In addition to allowing multimedia contributions ranging from videos and readings of *Utopia* to utopia-related art and illustrations, Duncombe created Wikitopia, a collaborative effort to re-write and re-imagine More's book. Although *Open Utopia*, as the website was named, eventually became a media sensation, it was slow to take off. Over time, it became a vibrant nexus for the creation of overlapping alternative visions of the future. The lesson from the website's trajectory, according to Duncombe, is that utopias and radical undertakings are decidedly unfinished and open-ended, becoming a horizon of possibilities characterised by continuous struggles.

The potential of utopian ventures to form relational nodes and stir collective imagination further becomes evident in Part II of *DIY Utopia*.

Adapting Levitas' definition of utopia, Linda Doyle and Jessica Foley define "utopia as a dynamic repository of desire for better ways of being alive with others" (p. 103). In their respective capacities as an artist and an engineer, the authors examine the relationship between DIY radio and utopia, exploring how the study of and quest for utopia coalesce. In doing so, the authors eschew the conventional meaning of utopia as "wishful thinking," by stressing utopia's transformative force.

Using DIY radio as an analogy for utopian projects, they trace how radio practices culminate in the formation of subjectivities and counterpublics, thus promoting change. Both radio practices and utopias, the authors explain, derive their essence from the interplay between (or problems with) their function, form and content. The complex and heavily regulated radio landscape, however, is at odds with utopian DIY radio activities. It follows that to oppose the contemporary configuration of these elements, a novel synthesis between medium, device and message is needed. This stands as a metaphor for utopian forms of thinking and action that aspire to get their message across loud and clear.

In one of the rare studies of DIY cultural activities in Africa, Clovis Bergère opens Part III with an examination of self-organised social spaces for Guinean youth called *bureaux*. The popularity and ubiquity of these DIY youth centres contrast with their complete absence from official policy discourses on youth culture. In the context of Guinean and African cities more generally, *bureaux* emerge as alternative forms of urbanism, becoming open spaces where different modes of urban living can be rethought and worked upon.

For Bergère, in addition to providing Guinean youth with an everyday social experience and an authentic grounding within the shifting landscapes of cities in transition, these self-organised spaces are also urban institutions with political resonance, allowing young people to exercise their right to the city. One is left wondering about the cultural connotations, if any, that DIY has for Guinean youth, especially in light of the fact that *bureaux* are genuinely DIY spaces, created out of the collaborative spirit and drive of the people who make use of them. While the cross-cultural comparison of DIY urban practices can enrich the meaning and advance the significance of DIY, further attention to how the terms are used by research participants in their effort to realise their own utopias is required.

Like many subversive or emancipatory ideas and practices, utopia is not only the privilege of groups who seek to change the *status quo*. Rather, imagination can be appropriated and put in the service of capitalism, too. This is the subject matter of Lisa Daily's chapter in Part IV, in which she dismantles the "ethical capitalism" oxymoron.

The ethical dimension of capital accumulation, according to Daily, is mainly expressed in discourses of empowerment, poverty reduction and global solidarity. Ethical capitalism is meant as a form of critique towards "bad" capitalism –and indeed in many cases the intentions are noble– but the forms of activism that it supports are framed by market-oriented discourses that fail to shake the foundations of the existing system and promote the public good. The failure to go beyond the confines of a consumerist lifestyle and challenge commodity-based systems and hierarchical social relations suggests that not all utopias are worth pursuing.

There is nothing inherently virtuous in the notion of utopia. Instead, what the utopian project of so-called "ethical capitalism" demonstrates is that the real enemy is the colonisation of our imagination and the lack of mechanisms to undo the ideological work that compels us to keep reproducing structures of exploitation, leaving the promise of a truly ethical economic system unfulfilled.

DIY Utopia is a timely reminder that, if anything, we must resist the idea that "there is no alternative." The revolutionary thrust of DIY practices inheres in their capacity to bring people together, encourage them to share resources, exchange ideas and build on their common aspirations. It is life affirming and a playful endeavour, but contemplating alternatives –let alone practising them– is also hard work. DIY may be utopian by definition, but its ability to bring together art and politics, economy and ethics, and technology and grassroots sociality also offers concrete examples not only of how the world could be, but how it already is.

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About the review author

Evangelos Chrysagis holds a PhD in social anthropology from the University of Edinburgh. His research focuses on Do-it-Yourself music, art and culture. Evangelos' recent publications include an article on the value of DIY for the *Journal of Cultural Economy* (2020) and a book chapter on DIY manifestos (2020, Springer). E.chrysagis AT outlook DOT com.

Book review: Isabel Wilkerson, *Caste*

Review author: Isaac Oommen

Isabel Wilkerson, 2020, *Caste: The Origins of our Discontents*, Random House, New York. Hardcover, US $32, 440 pp.

If there are two forms of all-encompassing domination in the world, they would be those faced by Black folks in America and lower caste people in India. The former has been documented by a myriad of Black multidisciplinary artists, scholars and writers, as well as through the news media. The latter, though not as well-known internationally, has gotten increasing attention due to the work and advocacy of Dalit and other lower caste scholars and activists.

Isabel Wilkerson's *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents* takes on the ambitious task of comparing and creating solidarity between the experiences of Black people in the US and Dalits in India (and southern Asia in general).

Introducing the idea of caste to a western audience, Wilkerson is careful to note the differences between this form of oppression and racism, as well as the US and India. She is clear that "caste and race are interwoven in America" (p. 70) and states that "what some people call racism could be seen as merely one manifestation of the degree to which we have internalized the larger American caste system" (p. 71).

Key to Wilkerson's comparison are anecdotes from the history of Black and Dalit struggles. One such story is of how when he came to India, Martin Luther King was introduced by a principal to schoolchildren as "a fellow untouchable from the United States of America" (p. 22).

Wilkerson touches upon the idea of solidarity across these two struggles early in the book when she talks about the correspondence between the now-grandfather of the Dalit liberation movement, Bhimrao Ambedkar, and Black intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois. Started in 1946, the two men sought to theorise the familiarity between their experiences. In particular, Du Bois "seemed to have spoken for the marginalized in both countries as he identified the double-consciousness of their existence" (p. 26).

These two experiences provide the foundations that help build the rest of the book. After defining and going through the history of caste and anti-Black racism, Wilkerson underlines a wealth of parallels between the two experiences. From the arts to sports as well as from her own experiences as a Black journalist, Wilkerson notes the similar experiences of Black folks that show that, as noted by the scholars Raymond T. Diamond and Robert J. Cottrol, "Blacks became like a group of American untouchables, ritually separated from the rest of the population" (p. 107).

Perhaps most poignant of the parallels are those regarding resistance by respectively white society and high caste people to affirmative action in the US and reservations in India (the latter being a system by which seats in universities and workplaces are reserved for lower caste folks).

Of the saddest of the stories contained in *Caste* is one which shows the awful impacts of the racial system in the US, in which Wilkerson details how in the confusing immigration boom of the early 1900s, both Japanese and Indian people tried to claim whiteness in the US in order to escape being put in the same caste as Black folks.

In describing how the opioid overdose crisis moved from the Black population to affect white middle class America, Wilkerson signals how medical racism could have contributed to both crises. “[T]he undertreatment of the subordinate caste leaves them to suffer needlessly, and the overtreatment of the dominant caste may have contributed to the rising mortality rate for white Americans who became addicted to opioids'' (p. 188).

It is in the coverage of recent events that the biggest weakness in *Caste* shows up. Though the book covers a large portion of international race relations, including a history of the slave trade, it does not delve deeper into the symbiotic relationship between racism and classism.

Wilkerson analyses Obama’s presidency as one that freed white people of white guilt while simultaneously cutting the status of certain high-level whites. She concludes that “the caste system had handcuffed the president” (p. 320), consequently not allowing him to do as much as he had wished. This analysis is similar to what Obama himself wrote in his new memoir, particularly in terms of his voracious bombing campaign in the Middle East, which he said was meant to prove his mettle to the rest of the American governmental leadership. However, both Wilkerson and Obama’s own analyses of these events miss important aspects of class and race/caste.

Even Al Qaeda’s second-in-command Ayman al-Zawahiri had a more critical perspective of Obama’s time in office, as shown in a video released by his organisation[1] shortly after the latter’s inauguration. In the video, al-Zawahiri uses Malcolm X’s idea of the house Negro to foretell Obama’s policies.

Other than the problem of class and race, *Caste* suffers from the usual shortfall of most western analyses on the topic of caste: an American-centred perspective.

As much as *Caste* explains race relations in the US and even German Nazi influences on the current state of things, not enough time is spent on the situation in southern Asia. What is needed here is what has been called for by Dalit academics and activists based outside of the US: a subaltern analysis that looks at power critically, including that wielded by upper caste south Asians in the west in relation to their lower caste counterparts. Subaltern analysis looks at how the power dynamics present in south Asia are transported to and intensified in the west.

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[1] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/nov/19/alqaida-zawahiri-obama-white-house

A deeper analysis of these complex realities would do well to examine both south Asian caste dynamics in the US as well as the situation of Africans in India, where they also fall into a caste category that holds memories of Indian indentured labour in Africa and other historical meeting points between the continent and subcontinent.

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Book review: Brian Whitener, *Crisis Cultures*

Review author: Mathias Sosnowski Krabbe

Brian Whitener, 2019, *Crisis Cultures: The Rise of Finance in Mexico and Brazil*. Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press. hardcover, $45.00, 232 pp.

"It is difficult to find an aspect of social life that has not been touched by finance's rise" (p. 9). This becomes evident in the monograph, *Crisis Cultures: The Rise of Finance in Mexico and Brazil*, which shows how financialization since the 1970s in Latin America is articulated and analyzed in cultural artefacts such as films, TV shows, novels and poetry from the last four decades.

Brian Whitener engages with political economic thought from the general and heterodox Marxist schools of thought in order to focus on the consequences of financialization and make intelligible the consequences, responses and ramifications to finance in Latin America.

Particularly notable is Whitener's observation that as the size of surplus populations (a Marxian concept of people left under- or unemployed) increases, states will use violence in order to subordinate them. Paradoxically, surplus populations exist alongside surplus capital that is part of the rise(s) of finance in Latin America. Whereas finance and culture are foregrounded in this monograph, surplus populations, racialization and state violence operate in the background.

Two national contexts are the focus of *Crisis Cultures*: Mexico and Brazil. Both countries have been affected by financialization over the last couple of decades and which has resulted in growing inequality, violence and exploitation. Moreover, these two cases demonstrate that the impact of financialization is far from homogenous and is in fact shaped by local socio-historical contexts as well as the nation states and their political and legal frameworks. For example, Brazil and Mexico responded to falling capital accumulation and the economic downturn in the 21st century by using two different strategies: there was massive consumer credit expansion in Brazil and while the Mexican government focused on a reshaping the relationship between circulation, the sphere in which value is realized, and production, the sphere in which commodities are produced (p. 119).

The introduction elegantly situates the rise of finance historically and geographically, creates a common point of departure for the two national contexts, and presents the reader with a nuanced theoretical framework that draws on heterodox marxists scholars such as Annie McClanahan and Josua Clover. Whitener conceptualizes finance as connected with (instead of opposed to) the real economy through the form of temporal arbitrage, which is the attempt to realize future surplus value in the present (p. 28).

An example of this is Eike Batista, who became the seventh richest person in the world as the oil company OGX attracted investment through the Brazilian stock exchange because of expectations that vast amounts of oil would be discovered. However, when this projected future did not materialize, Batista became Brazil's first "negative billionaire" (p. 105). From this perspective, a financial crisis may occur whenever a claim on future value is not actualized, causing a domino effect cascading throughout the entire economy.

Aside from the introduction, *Crisis Cultures* is divided into four chapters and a coda. Two chapters each outline the historical periods of (1982-2001 and 2011-2015) in Brazil and Mexico, respectively. The first chapter deals heavily with Jorge Volpi's novel *En busca de Klingsor* and argues the novel represents a theorization of history shaped by 'ongoing catastrophe' due to the financial crisis in Mexico.

The second chapter is on the post-debt crisis Brazil in which the author works with cultural and popular texts such as Zuenir Ventura's *Cidade partida*, Paulo Lins's *Cidade de Deus* and the film *A cidade é uma só?* to demonstrate how *favelas* (informal settlements) are part of a wider discourse of divided urban space, which is marked by the absence of the state in all but the performance of racialized state violence.

The second half of the book investigates financial para-corporatism in Brazil, and how the nation state of Mexico fails to provide adequate 'lifeworlds' that are inhabitable for its citizens due to a turn towards circulation.

The third chapter deals with the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT) government expansion of personal credit and the fragility of finance. It is this chapter that particularly spoke to me as the author proposes the term "anti-subject" (p. 11). Whitener pushes Foucault's analysis from Discipline and Punish regarding the effects of disciplinary procedures further by arguing that in Brazil there is a shift away from the focus on the 'interiority' of a subject and towards the anti-subject, who is in fact a gateway for creditors to seize future income and assets. This shift is enabled by the state granting creditors the authority and legal right to claim not just a debtor's assets but also their future wages (p. 111-113).

The final chapter is about Mexico after 2001 and its turn towards circulation, and in the process away from production towards state violence as well as the forms of nonstate collectivity that are produced. It engages with films such as *El Infierno*, *Norteado*, *La jaula de oro* and *Heli* as well as the poetry of Dolores Dorantes in order to capture the relations between individuals and the collective within surplus populations.

Readers who are not familiar with the cultural texts may have a difficult time following the author's argumentation and analysis, but the *Crisis Cultures* does provide a summary that enables readers not familiar with the cultural work analyzed to get caught up enough to follow along.

Besides the introduction and the coda, the two national contexts are kept relatively separate, which leaves the reader without any conclusion that summarizes and elevates the empirical discussions and analysis presented across four chapters. In fact, the breadth and depth of the analysis across the four chapters may have been better used to provide a more theoretical contribution to the study of financialization in "peripheral" contexts, especially given the author's insightful discussions of, and within, political economy.

Nevertheless, this book provides scholars of cultural studies - as well as activists - with tools to better grasp the process of financialization as well as the role that the state and capital has played in the exploitation and repression of (surplus) populations in Latin America, as well as the need for class alliances to challenge far right projects (p. 151).

About the review author

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Book Review: Touré Reed, *Toward Freedom*

Review Author: Jay Arena

Touré Reed, 2020, *Toward Freedom: The Case Against Race Reductionism*. New York: Verso. £11.99, 202 pp.

I write this review in the midst of the unprecedented mass protests that have broken out across the United States, from large, diverse metropolises to small, mostly white, cities and towns in revulsion to the gruesome police murder of George Floyd and so many others, disproportionally black, who are killed every year by the police. As with all movements, the latest mobilizations, while unified in their opposition to police violence, have also been, as the late sociologist Colin Barker argued, "fields of argument." In a 2014 essay, Barker asked:

> What is the movement's meaning and purpose? What is it seeking to defend and change? How are its boundaries defined? Who are its opponents? How should it define… and pursue its objectives? What strategies, tactics, repertories of collective activity should it deploy? How should it respond to specific events and crises?

"All these and other matters," Barker emphasized, "are open to ongoing contestation among a movement's varied adherents" (2014, p. 48).

A June 11th *New York Times* article on the protests in Seattle honed in on these intra-movement questions, pointing out that "some people here in recent days have pushed for a wider focus" beyond the racial inequities of police violence. This included the Socialist city councilperson Kshama Sawant, who used the upsurge to rally support behind her tax Amazon initiative. A Black Lives Matter activist objected to Sawant's call, arguing "black men are dying and this is the thing we should be focusing on" (Baker 2020).

A race-centric focus was also advocated by renowned intersectional theorist and legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. She argued the protests highlighted how the narrow, "colorblind" class-agenda promoted by Bernie Sanders' presidential campaigns was unable to address structural racism and anti-Blackness. "Class," she argued, "cannot help you see the specific contours of race disparity." In contrast, while dismissing Sanders, Crenshaw lauded the responses of corporations to the protests, which have been centered on initiatives mending racial disparities (Ember 2020).

The relationship between racial inequality and political economy is central for social movements, particularly in the US, and is at the heart of historian Touré Reed's timely new book, *Toward Freedom: The Case against Race Reductionism*. Reed argues throughout that to effectively combat racial disparities and oppressions we must have a social movement fighting to transform the capitalist political economy that produces them. In contrast, a competing "race reductionist" politics, which Reed notes increasingly gained strength in the post-war era in the US, though periodically faced challenges, denied and obscured "the political-economic roots of racial disparities" (p. 12).

Toward Freedom delves into how the battle between those two positions has played out in US social science, public policy, and social movements between the 1930s and the two Sanders campaigns. During the militant labor struggles of the 1930s and 1940s, there was broad consensus among liberals and leftists, black and white, that black advancement was tied to a labor movement working for a social democratic or in some cases a socialist transformation of US capitalism. In that period, even relatively conservative, middle class-led, black advocacy groups, such as the NAACP and the National Urban League, increasingly focused on supporting inter-racial labor organizing. They recognized that advancing the interests of black Americans was intimately tied to the success of the labor movement, while also still challenging *de-jure* forms of racial discrimination.

To further underscore how intertwined the fate of African American and labor rights have been, Reed points out that while major civil rights victories would not come until the 1950s and 1960s, New Deal labor legislation—a product of the labor militancy of the era—laid the juridical and institutional basis for affirmative action and challenging employment and other forms of discrimination that courts had previously considered a private matter. Further highlighting the link between New Deal legislation, the labor movement, and the fight against racial discrimination, was the change in the framing of the "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" movement in the 1930s. Exemplifying "a new class-inflected militancy among African American civil rights activists," movement leaders, Reed argues, "came to frame their employment demands in accordance with New Deal labor law" (p. 26).

Of particular relevance for current social movement struggles, including growing demands for a mass, green public works and services program, is Reed's critique of the argument that "ontological race/racism ensures that universal redistributive programs are incapable of redressing racial disparities" (p.19). Reed disputes the claims of authors such as Ira Katznelson, who see the New Deal as essentially an affirmative action program for whites. In contrast, Reed argues that African Americans, overwhelmingly working class, garnered real material gains and benefits from the New Deal, ranging from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to the Wagner Act. Indeed, as Reed notes, in some cases, such as relief rolls, black people received benefits in greater proportion to their representation in the population, though underrepresented in relation to their need.

In the case of Social Security, the exclusion of farm and domestic workers from coverage disproportionally excluded black workers, due to their concentration in these sectors. But, as Reed points out, the overwhelming majority of workers in these two occupations were still white—11.4 million white workers, compared to 3.5 million black workers.

Among all the categories of workers excluded from Social Security coverage at the time of its passage in the mid-1930s, black workers made up 23 per cent, more than double their representation in the population. Nonetheless 74 per cent of excluded workers were white, with many excluded occupations employing few African Americans.

In *Toward Freedom,* Reed emphasizes these statistics to push back against the argument that an all-encompassing, transhistorical racism makes unattainable truly universalistic programs that would benefit black Americans. In the case of Social Security, the opposition of plantation owners, who excluded white and black workers alike, was the crucial explanatory variable. While they most likely held racist views, "their motives owed less to the 'original sin of racism' than a desire to keep their labor costs down and to retain control over the operation of their farms" (p. 107). This case underscores how movements have to go to political economy to understand—and effectively combat—the roots of racial inequality.

In the post-war era, as the Cold War and McCarthyism took hold, the labor orientation of civil rights activism faded as the focus shifted to combatting race prejudice uncoupled from the larger context of capitalist labor and social relations (p. 54). *Toward Freedom* charts this change in the academy by documenting the rise of "ethnic pluralism"—its most influential exponent being anti-communist historian Oscar Handlin— which jettisoned, on the right and left respectively, biological racist and class-based theories of inequality. For Handlin, ethnic groups, understood as reified, undifferentiated cultural formations defined by values and norms that transcend material circumstances, were the basic unit of society. Thus, crucially, the theory separated the trajectory of ethnic groups from the larger political economy, and instead attributed "success" or "failure" to the group's values—a boot strap, "groupist worldview" (p. 56).

This led, on one side, to the post-war advances of white, earlier racialized southern and eastern European immigrants, being attributed to superior cultural attributes. Excised from this idealized history was the hand-up provided in their ascent by the federal government's New Deal and combined with the timing of their arrival to the US, just as low skilled industrial jobs were expanding.

In contrast, while Handlin recognized the burden of at least *de jure* forms of discrimination faced by African Americans, he also diagnosed a culture of poverty as the primary cause of high levels of poverty and other social ills afflicting black Americans. According to Handlin, this debilitating culture took hold due to the lack of voluntary associations that could have, per the Chicago School of Sociology assimilationists, provided tutelage to millions of urban black migrants during the Great Migration.

In his critique, Reed points out that Handlin not only ignored the variety of institutions northern African Americans had forged, but most problematically disregarded how the larger political-economic context impacted their fortunes.

In particular, the discriminatory real estate industry and New Deal housing policies, combined with automation and deindustrialization that were destroying low skilled jobs that earlier waves of European immigrants had benefited from, were determining factors on the material fortunes of African Americans.

Toward Freedom goes on to place the controversy over the 1965 Moynihan report—authored by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then a Department of Labor official in the Johnson administration—within the historical context of the civil rights victories of the mid-1960s. Moynihan argued the key obstacles for black Americans achieving "equal results" were not only continuing racial discrimination but the social pathologies and a culture of poverty produced by slavery and Jim Crow's disorganization of the black family (pp. 82-83). In contrast to Moynihan and others Reed calls "institutional structuralists," there were also "economic structuralists," such as economist Charles Killingsworth, and labor and civil rights activists Bayard Rustin and A. Phillip Randolph, who rooted black poverty in political economy, in particular with automation and the flight of industry from cities. The prescription of the "economic structuralists" was a social democratic, federally funded public works and services program that was open to all races and that would generate the good jobs and services that American capitalism could not and would not provide.

In the end, conservative forces, centered in the Council of Economic Advisors of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, defeated the redistributive agenda advocated by the "economic structuralists." In its place, a "race reductionist" War on Poverty, which refused to situate African American poverty within its broader political-economic context, and focused instead on trickle-down tax cuts, anti-discrimination measures, expanded means tested programs, and various "empowerment" initiatives, won the day.

Toward Freedom posits that the 1960s War on Poverty did not fail because of a refusal by the federal government to recognize and address the distinctiveness of black poverty. Rather, according to Reed, the source of the problem was race reductionism: the failure of the initiative to attack the fundamental political and economic roots of poverty that disproportionately (but not exclusively) affected poor and working class black families.

Reed's analysis of Moynihan and the War on Poverty serves as the springboard for his critique of Ta-Nehisi Coates and the famed author's fellow "black emissary of neoliberalism," Barack Obama. Coates' ascendancy as a public intellectual emerges with, indeed was in great part a product of, growing disillusionment with Obama's post-racial politics following his 2012 reelection as President. Deepening racial disparities under the first black president, protests over the police and vigilante murders of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown and Eric Garner, and the rise of the white-nationalist-infused Tea Party and later Trumpism, all highlighted that in fact "racial prejudice was still alive and kicking" (p. 102).

Obama's race reductionist post-racial politics was exemplified by his insistence, delivered in various heralded speeches, including his breakthrough 2004 address at the Democratic National Convention and his 2008 Father Day's speech, that black poverty was primarily a result of social dysfunction–the black poor's self-inflicted wounds. In *Toward Freedom,* Reed perceptively points out that Obama also promoted the "divorce of racial inequality from class inequality" by concocting a biographical Blackness that conformed with popular perceptions (p. 136). Despite being reared in relative affluence, including attending an elite private school in Hawaii, he projected himself as someone that could have been a "statistic" when he dabbled in drugs and questioned the value of education, and built a personal narrative about how through perseverance and discipline, he avoided the pathologies that have ensnared so many of his fellow "brothers."

Coates, in contrast to Obama, has eloquently and forcefully critiqued the blame the victim, personal responsibility trope that Obama and African American elites from Bill Cosby to Oprah Winfrey have trafficked in to explain away black poverty. But, like those he critiques, Coates also engages in "tales of black pathology", though he blames an eternal white racism abstracted from political economy, not poor black people, for inflicting the damage. By focusing on a transhistorical, pervasive white racism, disconnected from the larger political economy, Reed points out that Coates reinforces "the underclass framework," wielded by those he critiques, "that has contributed to liberals' and conservatives' failure to redress structural sources of inequality" (p. 153).

Race reductionism is also deployed by Coates in his critiques of the racial disparities of New Deal policies, and contemporary mass incarceration. Due to his commitment to a "racial ontology," it appears that all Coates can see, from black farmworkers and domestics excluded from social security, to redlining and white flight, to the war on drugs, are further examples of "whites' 'plunder' of 'black bodies.'" The problem with this worldview is that it obscures the complex "political economic underpinnings" of racial disparities and the contingent character of racist attitudes and discriminatory behavior (p. 109).

With regard to mass incarceration, Reed argues the focus on racial disparities in much of the social science literature and among activists obscures the role that political economy, particularly social class and neoliberal retrenchment, have played. For example, citing the work of political scientist Marie Gottchalk, Reed points out that a perpetrator's class background appears to exert greater influence over incarceration rates than race. In addition, cuts to the state public defender budget have further contributed to incarceration disparities since "African Americans are overrepresented among the poor", in part due to the racially disproportionate impact of deindustrialization and public sector retrenchment (p. 120).

What lessons can we draw from *Toward Freedom: The Case against Race Reductionism* that could help in building a movement that can surmount race reductionism and address the political and economic roots of racial inequality?

That is, is it useful movement theory that "[helps] us think about what to do?" (Nilsen and Cox 2013, p. 64).

Maybe the most important insight in *Toward Freedom* on how to best affect change in the US is regarding the question of the relationship of movements to the Democratic party, historically a contentious issue within intra-movement "fields of argument."

While looking back favorably at the New Deal, Reed also recognized FDR and the Democrats' fundamental agenda was to salvage capitalism, itself the primary obstacle to seriously addressing racial inequality. Later attempts by Rustin and Randolph, and more recently Bernie Sanders, to use the Democratic Party as a political vehicle for achieving sweeping social democratic reforms ended in utter defeat.

The key lesson to be drawn from *Toward Freedom's* impressive historical account is that to achieve what Reed calls the "public-good-oriented" agenda championed by Sanders, much less the socialism the author prefers, the labor movement must break free from the suffocating embrace of the race-reductionist Democratic Party.

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About the review author

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Book Review: Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring, *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective*

Review Author: Tomás Mac Sheoin

Stefan Berger and Holger Nehring (eds.) *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective: A Survey.* Palgrave Macmillan. Paperback, £24.00, 720pp.

The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective is an ambitious undertaking, attempting to survey social movements in a global historical perspective. The editors summarise their approach in the book as one that "does not seek to provide a coherent explanation or even line of enquiry. Instead, we wish to highlight the 'multiplicity of the world's pasts'" (p. 4-5). After a long introduction, the book is divided in three parts, containing three theoretical papers, eight regional overviews and eleven papers on specific movements. The theoretical section includes articles on subaltern studies, the women's movement and an essay on theories of social movements by Dieter Rucht.

The main conclusion that can be drawn from *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective* is that social movement theories will need to become more flexible in order to encompass the wide variety of social movements the book recounts. Having surveyed a wide variety of social movements, the populations that they mobilised in Latin America and the wide variety of situations to which they responded, Claudia Wasserman writes "This variety of situations does not allow us to classify social movements as new, classical, traditional, old or innovative" (p. 118).

From the US, Felicia Kornbluth notes "Beyond questions about tactics, the major challenge for Rucht's model in terms of North American history is the most basic. It is anachronistic to apply the language of social movements to most campaigns for social change in North American history" (p. 149).

"If European social movement theory suggests a sharp division between 'new' and 'old', Australian experience discloses a mixture of collaboration, conflict and family resemblance much more than any epochal change. The mobilization of Indigenous peoples further frustrates theoretical distinctions between the 'old' and the 'new,'" writes Sean Scalmer (p. 45).

In an article on labour, Berger notes "Political parties, trade unions and co-operatives, which form the three columns of the labour movement in the West, are all separate from social movements in that they are far more tightly organised and structured and do not resemble the loose 'network of networks' that is characteristic of social movements, according to Dieter Rucht" (p. 386). These comments show the problems involved in the attempted application of theories formulated in specific geographical and historical circumstances to other areas and times.

Berger and Nehring stress the need for their history of social movements to be global. On the most obvious of criteria, that of including writers from around the globe, of the 23 writers who participated in the project, nine are women, and four are located in the periphery (three in South Korea and one in Brazil). The majority of the book is written by academics based in core countries, three in the USA, one in Australia and fifteen in Europe. This indicates one immediate future priority for this research programme: to contact, involve and mobilise researchers from peripheral nations to avoid the problem of Euro-centrism they identify. One advantage of including analysts from the periphery is demonstrated by the Korean contribution, where the writers frame their work not through core models but through Korean thought, thus adding to the richness of available theoretical frames.

Another way of looking at this issue is to see what attention is given to which countries' movements: a simple analysis of the number of page references in the index to countries and continents as shown in the following table.

Table 1. Countries' representation in The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective *as shown by index references*

Country/ies	**Number of references in index**
France	113
Germany	107
India	93
England	88
Italy	68
Egypt	43
Japan	39
Australia	37
Russia	35
Spain	32
Korea, China	30
Algeria, Brazil	25
Iran, Palestine	20
Morocco, Syria	18
Hungary	17

Austria, Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia	16
Mexico	15
Libya, Vietnam	14
Netherlands	13
Canada, South Africa	12
Ireland, Poland, Portugal	10
Belgium, Cuba, Sweden	9
Afghanistan, Bolivia, Greece, Saudi Arabia, Uruguay, Yemen, Yugoslavia	8
Bahrain, Czechoslovakia, Romania	6
Balkans, Chile, Jordan, North Korea, Switzerland	5
Bulgaria, Ecuador, New Zealand, Pakistan, Qatar, South Korea, Taiwan, USA, Venezuela	4
Ghana, Haiti, Indonesia, Kenya, Nicaragua, Norway, Philippines, Senegal, Slovakia, Sudan	3
Cameroon, Columbia, El Salvador, Zambia	2
Abyssinia, Angola, Congo, Dubai, East Timor, Guatemala, Guinea, Hong Kong, Moldavia, Mozambique, Somalia, Thailand, Togo, Ukraine	1

The ten most mentioned countries include six European nations, three Asian nations and one African nation. India's high score is explained by being the subject of two articles. Continental totals are as follows: Europe (587), Asia (239), Africa (151), Middle East (131), Latin America (68), Australasia (61) and North America (16), showing the difficulties of avoiding Eurocentrism and a bias towards core rather than peripheral movements.

The editors note continental divisions are problematic, an example being the annexation of North Africa to the Middle East, and the resulting partition of Africa is manifested in the poverty of Eckert's article on sub-Saharan Africa. There is no regional article on Asia; rather there are chapters on India and post-colonial Korea. The article on North America consists of coverage only of the USA. In his chapter, Van der Linden covers Europe from over a one thousand year span; an object lesson that is worth the price of the book. However Van der Linden's motor of history splutters to a halt in the 1960s in western Europe and after 1989 in eastern Europe.

The surveys on Latin America, North Africa and the Middle East are excellent.

For specific movements, the editors admit omissions, such as anarchism, religious movements, nationalism and revolution; all the while including an article on terrorism, which is not a movement but a tactic. Missing are articles on agrarian, Indigenous, landless or peasant movements, while the specific movements covered by individual articles are moral movements, labour, environmental, women and peace movements, 1968, fascism, post-fascist right wing movements, the anti-globalisation movement and the Arab Spring.

Particularly illuminating are two articles on movements of the right, a blind spot in much social movement research, especially useful is Kevin Passmore's superb essay on fascism. In the chapter by Britta Baumgarten, the anti-globalisation movement is depicted as conservative, noted for holding meetings rather than street confrontations, an institutional focus that fails to reflect the historical importance of the activist wing of the movement.

Frank Uekotter provides a highly critical view of the environmental movement, casting doubt on whether environmentalism as a movement exists: "strictly speaking, there is no such thing as global environmentalism: we merely have a huge number of environmentalisms around the globe" (p. 442). Even worse, Uekotter writes, "There is no common denominator, no common foe, and not even a widely accepted philosophy that holds the environmental movement together" (p. 443). Where he sees failure and confusion, others would see disparate types of environmental movements emerging locally, nationally, regionally and transnationally at different times in response to different cultural, economic and social contexts and histories. The article on the Arab Spring is informative, and attributes its spread to historic urban modes of mobilisation, not mobile phones.

The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective concludes with the editors writing that they "hope to inspire more work in the history of social movements by showing what a fascinating and exciting field of research this currently is" (p.16-17). The more successful sections of this book, especially the excellent introductions provided by some of the continental overviews, indicate how fascinating and exciting this research could be.

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Book review: Miguel A. Martinez, *Squatters in the Capitalist City*

Review author: Ben Duke

Miguel A. Martinez, 2020, *Squatters in the Capitalist City: Housing, Justice, and Urban Politics*. London: Routledge. paperback, £27.99, 278 pp.

Squatters in the Capitalist City looks at multiple aspects of squatting, which resonate with feminist, functionalist, historical, public, rational choice and socio-spatial perspectives. Due to the transnational nature of squatting social movements, the definition of squatting is contested. New aspects of differences between squatting for immediate need, as compared to strategic or tactical purposes are discussed (p. 49).

Martinez highlights how squatting can be for housing purposes, but also for social development uses ranging from community crèche to panopticism. The book intervenes in the migration debate, a significant policy discussion in many countries. Squatting is often used for kinship and protection by migrants, and as a housing outcome by the state. Many people who for any number of reasons fall through social welfare cracks turn to squatting as the source of shelter of last resort. Some observers feel the state tacitly supports squatting for people who they can't house, due to qualifying criteria and for surveillance purposes (Watts, 23 September 2019). While there are multiple definitions of squatting,[2] in essence Martinez informs us that "...by definition squatters only target properties which are vacant" (p. 7).

Squatters in the Capitalist City provides a history of squatters' social movements, the section called 'Squatting and the Radical Left in Berlin' (p. 86) is particularly revealing. Martinez provides us with an early introduction of a variety of state responses implemented to reduce the effect of squatting. State interventions range from criminalising squatting to mass demolition followed by urban renewal (occasionally a change in policy success for the squatter's social movement) and legalisation (p. 88).

The first section of *Squatters in the Capitalist City* explains that there are multiple justifications for squatting, including agenda setting, hegemony, paradigmatic thought and power relationships (p. 16). There is also the simple need for people to access temporary accommodation, who do not qualify for any statutory agency support.

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[2] See RTE Archives (2020) https://www.rte.ie/archives/2020/0109/1105318-squatting-in-dublin/ ; Also Elaine Dobson (2011) "UK: Abolition of Squatters Rights Depends Upon Definition of 'Squatter' says Property Lawyer." https://www.mondaq.com/uk/Government-Public-Sector/127454/Abolition-Of-Squatters-Rights-Depends-Upon-Definition-Of-Squatter-Says-Property-Lawyer ; Also Raymundo Larrain Nesbitt (2012) "Squatters in Spain and how to evict them from a Spanish property." https://www.spanishpropertyinsight.com/2012/06/08/squatters-in-spain-and-how-to-evict-them-from-a-spanish-property/

Geographically the book is based on squatters' movements in Europe. The location of study has relevance due to the global credit crisis in the noughties. Policy responses from the IMF and the EU affected housing supply in Africa, Asia and Latin America and European countries quite differently. *Squatters in the Capitalist City* goes on to detail how the autonomist approach to direct action has been replicated by other social movements e.g. workerism (p. 67; see also Angelbeck and Jones 2019).[3] Examples cited by the author include: the squatted Ex Hotel Commercio in Italy, which was considered to be the largest urban commune in Europe (p. 68); the 2001 anti-G8 mobilisation in Genoa (p. 72); and the 2009 referendum against water privatisation in Paris (p. 72).

Martínez goes on to examine some psychosocial aspects of squatting. He informs us that the squatting movement is influenced by structural opportunities and constraints which evolve over time. Societal responses to squatting are discussed, including gentrification, legalisation, change of use and surrounding social spatial awareness.[4]

How social movements should be recognised underpins the book's description of the five main socio-spatial and historical causal factors which engender squatting. In *precis* these are: housing shortages; urban renewal regimes; applicable legislation and law enforcement; activist networks; and mass media coverage of squatting (p. 99).

"Social movements, in my view, are better understood by accounting for the articulations between agency and structure" (p. 97). The prevailing urban political economy of location is a key determinant in the extent and sustainability of squatting. For example, an abundance of empty properties, high unemployment rates and cuts in welfare spending, can all result in the emergence and rise of squatting (p. 100). In addition, market forces, letting practices, urban renewal (p. 105) and vacancy rates, can occasionally enable squatter's social movements. In some countries, private landlords can claim loss of rent income from their personal tax liability (p. 104).

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[3] Angelbeck and Jones' (2019) article is about direct action taken by indigenous people to protect their archaeological sites, cultural heritage and environment.

[4] See World Bank (2015) 'Managing the Potential Undesirable Impacts of Urban Generation: Gentrification and Loss of Social Capital.' https://urban-regeneration.worldbank.org/node/45;

Also Steve Holland (2016) 'Gentrification: Causes and Consequences.' https://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/1135;

Also Publius (2017) 'Understanding Gentrification and the Government's Response.' https://thelibertarianrepublic.com/understanding-gentrification-and-governments-response/

The process of urban regeneration can create multiple opportunities for collaboration between squatters, tenants, business and private property owners. This often occurs during city renewal projects, when the state buys property for renovations (p. 92).

Squatters in the Capitalist City then moves into a historical exploration of the 'Motivations and Outcomes' of various squatters' social movement experiences in post-modern Europe (p. 148). Social movement goals of housing, free spaces and preservation are highlighted as motivations (Garcia 2019). Some activists participated in "demonstrative squatting," the outcome of which often resulted in temporary political coalitions being formed. This could be to provide alternative voices to reopen public buildings e.g. hospitals, libraries or schools which have closed (Deutsche Welle, 20 May 2018; Abbit, 13 March 2019).[5]

Martinez (p. 148) suggests a new classification of squatting when it is motivated by wanting to raise awareness of policy fields which exacerbate social problems. The outcomes of this particular strand of the squatters' social movement are increased social capital, mutual aid and learning for all, including migrants (p. 151; see also Roufos 2020, 12).[6]

In the fifth section 'Anomalous Institutions' (p. 190) *Squatters in the Capitalist City* expands on how the act of squatting as a social movement is a means and a goal. "The concept of 'anomalous institutions' is introduced as a way to understand squatter resistance to state assimilation despite the occurrence of some forms of legislation" (p. 190). What this means, is that the squatters' movement in a particular location has been subsumed, consolidated and become socially accepted. However the motivation and possible outcome of challenging power relationships in housing remain in place. An anomalous institution can be defined as a squatting social movement's resistance to an institutionalised outcome, or state assimilation (Polanska 2014, 327).

Martinez informs us that squatter's institutionalisation varies between "terminal," where the squatting group totally disappears; or "flexible," where activists participate in "formal and bureaucratic planning procedures" (pp. 204). Terminal institutionalisation takes place when a local squatters group either gets evicted, or buys the property they were squatting. Flexible squatting institutionalisation comes into being by the autonomist route previously discussed, where squatters reach agreements resulting in state assimilation. However there is often a by-product of state assimilation, manifest in the form of representation of new political groups. These are political partnerships which have formed, who are perceived to have a wider consensus than an apparent single issue of squatting (p. 216).

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[5] These two media articles reinforce the legitimacy of the squatter's social movement. People are squatting in disused public buildings, which should be being put to good use.

[6] Roufos' (2020) article covers migration and refugee policy, alongside community concerns regarding the poor treatment of migrants. Along the way, additional capacity has been acquired by migrant people, their support workers and the community after campaign project work. The article is included due to the overlaps between the issues migrant support groups address, which harmonise with the ethos of squatter's social movements.

In the final section, Martinez indicates how squatters are presented in the media, producing negative and stigmatised stereotypes. The discourse used in mainstream settings, replicates the power relationships controlled by private property owners, and/or local and national state housing officials. Media manipulation and Bourdieu's "symbolic violence" come to the fore (1991, 5).

Discussion in media outlets rarely includes consideration of the social or urban contexts motivating people to squat. Instead, "Spectacular Narrations" inform selective discussion of "mass consumption, political disenfranchisement and homeownership" by the mainstream media, dumbing down "alternative narration" (p. 236). Politicians throughout Europe have been all too ready to "disassociate homelessness from squatting" (p. 249). Martinez provides examples from several European countries of how the media demonises squatting. European neoliberal urbanism legislative responses have criminalised squatting, partially underpinned by negative stereotypical images of squatters (Mayer 2016, 59). The media have also highlighted the "soft gentrifiers" (p. 244) aspect of squatting, which encourages a neoliberal housing agenda (Mould, 26 September 2019).[7]

Martinez's analysis provides a counter-hegemonic narrative with two broad classifications: "Reversive Responses" (p. 256) and "Subversive Alternatives" (p. 257). The ethos of these "counter tactics" is to provide a "positive image of squatting" and a "refusal to engage with the media" (p. 254).

Squatters in the Capitalist City demonstrates that the "criminalisation of squatters invigorates class domination" (p. 262), as power relationships are underpinned by stigmatisation of squatters in the media. The book's conclusion articulates how bourgeoisie state responses against squatting are neoliberal housing policies reinforcing the class divide. "…The criminalisation process is articulated with economic crises and neoliberal policies so squatters are targeted not only as deviated or dangerous groups, but mainly as symbols and practitioners of subversive threats to the capitalists' rule in the housing and labour markets" (p. 264).

Squatters in the Capitalist City is a treat for multiple audiences, providing an up to date overview for researchers, students and tutors. The book provides new insights on various social dynamics, like neoliberal housing market manipulation, which perpetuate the need for squatters' movements. The role of collective action by urban stakeholders is particularly important here, as constructive allegiances can be formed between unlikely partners. Martinez's text acts to remind us of the importance of squatters' social movements, an issue given added resonance by the welcomed, but obviously transient COVID-19 policy response of temporary accommodation provision for homeless people and squatters.

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[7] Mould's (2019) article details how media manipulation takes place by a process of 'artwashing', manifested in the form of 'squat-washing' by property developers.

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