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Networked Media Actions as Hacktions: Rethinking Resistance(s) in Media Ecologies

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Abstract
This article attempts to rethink a notion of resistance for contemporary forms of dissent and opposition that are increasingly organised through digital media and networks. Applying a post-human compass on hacking, a processual reading of the hack is implied to propose a movement towards the idea of hacktions. Hacktions are networked media actions that involve an aesthetic register of de-subjective creativity, aiming towards systematic disruptions: the active resistances of a media ecological dysfunctionality.

We do not lack communication. On the contrary, we have too much of it. We lack creation. We lack resistance to the present.
Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari

0. Introduction, or the necessary movements

In contemporary societies, digital networks have increasingly become a ‘battlefield’ where, following the emergence of novel power relations, new forms of resistance have come to the fore. Domination, discipline and power-over have not disappeared, but are aligned by new patterns of anticipatory control, governmentality and machinic enslavement. These are power mechanisms that take advantage of the pervasiveness of media technologies: what might be called, following Nigel Thrift and/or Katherine Hayles, a distributed technological

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'unconsciousness' or 'nonconsciousness'.

In parallel, political dissent and opposition have been rethought and re-arranged in several ways. Many a time, this rearrangement does not follow the simple use of media as communicational tools, instead deploying them as 'weapons', moving beyond representation and exploiting the performativity of media objects and processes. An example is the forms of dissent that are organised under the 'Anonymous' moniker, which take advantage of the mass distribution and central position, in contemporary societies, of digital media and networks, to carry out a multiplicity of politically-oriented media actions. These media forms do not have communicative aims; they are processes of mediation that act on the distributed materiality of digital networks, disrupting and challenging the hyper-connectivity which contemporary forms of power, many a time, rely on.

It is not within the scope of this paper to shed light on and empirically examine such forms of political dissent that are actualised through digital media and networks. Rather, I am going to focus on some of the theoretical premises that I argue are needed to conceptualise resistance in contemporary network ecologies. The objective is to speculatively push towards the idea of hacktions, which I suggest is a key conceptual tool to think about resistance through digital media and networks, within the broader aim of advancing the study of the politics of media dissent. The starting point will be the world of hacking, and in particular 'the hack': the cornerstone of hacker culture. However, I will contend that an approach to the cultures of hacking needs to take seriously in consideration the developments of the field of post-humanities, which imply an anti-anthropocentric conception of culture. On such a line of argument, I will concentrate the understanding of hacking beyond the field of computing, addressing the hack as a material intervention capable of reaching disruptive points of abstraction. The hack possesses a creational attitude that must be acknowledged in motion: in the processes it is capable of actualising. The conceptualisation of media actions of resistance as hacktions precisely seeks to comprehend how hacking media practices can, or cannot, originate resistant disruptions by processually and relationally involving human practitioners, media objects and possible material dysfunctions amongst many – which means always implying nonlinear interactions and processes of co-emergence. Within hacktions – I propose – resistance to domination implies active forces that ethologically entangle the materiality of various bodies, having an affective aesthetics that is capable of triggering certain tendencies of media disruptiveness.

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4 See Alberto Micali, "Hacktivism and the Heterogeneity of Resistance in Digital Cultures" (PhD diss., University of Lincoln, 2016).
1. Moving from the hack: a view on post-humanities

Mythologized in an elaborate oral and written tradition, the ideal of the hack suffuses the hacker culture. It embodies shared values and passions. And, of course, it is the centerpiece of hacker rituals.

Sherry Turkle\(^6\)

To hack is to abstract. To abstract is to produce the plane upon which different things may enter into relation. It is to produce the names and numbers, the locations and trajectories of those things. It is to produce kinds of relations, and relations of relations, into which things may enter.

McKenzie Wark\(^7\)

Hacker culture has been at the centre of intellectual and militant reflections during the phase of mass expansion of the internet.\(^8\) Particularly, between the millennium turn and the emergence of commercial, social networking platforms, several scholarly publications focused on hacking as an ethical, practical and theoretical opportunity to reimagine societal relationships and reorganise the social conflict within the networking paradigm.\(^9\) Many critical accounts addressed their reflections to the political promises of digital networks, emphasising the political potential of hacking. Without entering into the details of all these various positions, their main concerns with regard to the “idea of hacker culture” have been summarised by Patrice Riemens.\(^10\) According to Riemens, hackers were often “[t]ransformed into role-models as effective resistance fighters against ‘the system’”: a leading oppositional force within so-called ‘digital resistance’.\(^11\) Nevertheless, the politics of hacking are far from homogeneous. As Gabriella Coleman points out, a wide diversity characterises

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\(^11\) Ibid., 328.
the multiple aspects, richness and oftentimes controversial politics of hacking.\textsuperscript{12} Furthermore, once the almost complete commercialisation of the internet has been reached, the influences of hacker cultures on the politics of media dissent have not extinguished their course. Nowadays, countless phenomena of resistance through digital media and networks still retain their connection to hacker culture, differentiating their forms of actualisation in a multiplicity of arrangements. An instance that I have studied thoroughly elsewhere is the digital actions such as those that are deployed under the ‘Anonymous’ moniker, which embrace hacking media practices and attitudes, bringing novel resistances to the fore.\textsuperscript{13} Despite the widespread diffusion of similar forms of media opposition, the conceptualisation of a possible notion of resistance – an analytical tool that would be constructive for studying and grasping the capability of phenomenon such as Anonymous to be politically effective – is far from being mature.

The first question that needs to be advanced revolves around the idea of hacker culture, and follows the development of post-human thought.\textsuperscript{14} ‘Post-humanities’, in fact, calls into question the same conception of ‘hacker culture’ as a standard set of social practices, community-based rituals and human habits. As maintained by post-human propositions, cultures are not strictly a human affair and, thus, it is misleading to study them as a complex of social variables that can be extracted or subtracted to reduce their complexity. Cultural expressions are not constituted via an anthropopoietic process that closes on itself and, as such, hacker culture cannot be foreclosed in specific instrumental relations that define human-technological practices, or modes of practising with computing technologies.

In his seminal study on hacker culture, Tim Jordan concludes that hacking poses a “conceptual difficulty”, which directly involves the determinisms that for long time influenced the study of culture.\textsuperscript{15} According to Jordan, hacking implies at its heart a “dynamic and mutual determination between society and technology”.\textsuperscript{16} Moving from Jordan's suggestion towards the field of post-humanities, it is key to recognise that determinisms are well rooted in humanist conceptions and, particularly, support dichotomic readings (such as the one that separates non-human animals from human ones, the latter from technologies, or nature from culture, as antinomic poles) – interpretations that intensely characterise

\begin{itemize}
  \item[13] See Micall, \textit{op. cit}.
  \item[16] \textit{Ibid}., 140.
\end{itemize}
anthropocentrised epistemologies. The two determinisms that signed the progression of media and cultural studies during the 1960s and ’70s carried on a perspective grounded on dichotomies – even though they fostered diametrically opposite positions. Whether society is conceptualised as shaping technology or – conversely – the latter as influencing and modifying the social tissue, technologies are invariably characterised as being dualistically something else: ‘separated’ technical objects, whose content can be analysed to assess their cultural impact – or, contrariwise, which instrumental prosthetic involvement can be studied as part of the progression of the human-animal. Similarly, hacker cultures have for long time been delimited to distinct social groups, which could be examined by reflecting upon instrumental relationships to computing technologies.

Proceeding with a post-human compass on hacking, I suggest that attention must first be given to the hack in order to rethink the concept of resistance for contemporary forms of digital media dissent. The hack, in fact, is a material gesture used by many scholars to approach hacking and thus stands at the core of the relations between knowledge and technics. Hence, the hack seems to express the potential of relationality of human-technological assemblages:

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17 The term ‘humanism’ delineates a long and not isolated line of thought that proceeds across the long course of Western metaphysics. This line moves from the ancient Greeks (the Sophist and Socrates in the Fifth Century BC) through the current that is more often associated with Italian Renaissance (Fourteenth Century AC) and reaches modernity, when the contrasts between applied sciences and religion arose, strengthening the tendency of considering human rational faculties as the leading source of agency. According to Roberto Marchesini, it is thus key to approach the humanist paradigm as not being merely a form of thought which emerged in the Fourteenth Century, but a “disjunctive philosophical coordinate” – which still permeates contemporary reflections. See Roberto Marchesini, Epifania Animale (Milan & Udine: Mimesis, 2014), 37.

18 The writings of two leading figures in the field of media and cultural studies can typify the two positions in question: Raymond Williams being representative of the so called ‘Society Shaping Technology’ (SST) framework, and Marshall McLuhan of the so called ‘technological determinist’ position. The former, being chronologically a theoretical response to the latter, characterises the leading trend in the discipline. Without entering into the detail of the many facets that characterise these perspectives, it is possible to distinguish that, for the SST framework, media and culture principally inheres in the social field; while, on the opposite, for the perspectives led by McLuhan, technology has its own capability to act on human society, conducing its progression via technical innovations. See Martin Lister, Jon Dovey, Seth Giddings, Iain Grant and Kieran Kelly (eds.), New Media: A Critical Introduction, 2nd edition (London & New York: Routledge, 2009), 77-82; Raymond Williams, Television: Technology and Cultural Form (London & New York: Routledge, 1974); Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media: The extensions of man (Cambridge, MA & London: MIT Press, 1994 [1964]).

19 Anthropic self-referentiality is a common trait that traverses all the literature focusing on hacker culture.

20 Many scholars uses the hack as an analytical entryway into the world of hacking; see for instance Jordan, op. cit.; Turkle, op. cit; Wark, op. cit.

21 I use the word ‘assemblage’ here as this is conceptualised by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Assemblages are always ‘machinic’, and are conceived to emphasise the set of connections that exist between heterogeneous elements (bodies, expressions, objects etc.), which momentarily come together, originating novel functions in ensemble. The use of this concept is hardly possible without referencing to the whole theoretical work of Deleuze and Guattari; however, since the
‘machinic’ relationality that, being crucial to avoid anthropocentred comprehensions of culture, posits – conversely – emphasis on conjunction and reciprocal co-constitutionality and co-emergence.

According to Sherry Turkle, the hack is the “Holy Grail” of hacker culture: a “concept that exists independently of the computer”. The ‘hack’ still retains a sort of ‘primordial’ sense in the computer underground: a creative and original attempt to approach the technological object, ‘bending’ it towards new objectives, and pushing it towards unforeseen, personal and specific-to-the-situation orientations. The ‘hack’ is characterised by the ingenuity of the exploration, aimed at shaping the use of the technological artefact, pushing it beyond its limits for novel, not-yet-thought-of applications, and for a use outside the limitations posited by existing rules. Thus, it is a material re-appropriation aimed at unconventional, ‘heretical’ uses of technological apparatuses, via an abstraction of the actual possibilities pertaining to that specific technology.

Turkle has identified the most essential features of the hack. In particular, she underlines its aesthetic qualities, which are related to a ‘magic’ allure surrounding it. This is an “aesthetics of technological transparency”, which focuses on knowledge and mastery to render what, at first glance, may be considered very complicated into a simple trick. Thus, the hack can be summarised by various, distinctive traits. It is an action that seems very simple, yet creates astonishment. Using means that are often considered ordinary in everyday life, it can be sensational, almost spectacular. It is a sophisticated act, a material gesture that requires a deep knowledge, not only of a single technological device, but also of the system in which it is actualised. This mastery originates in the application of the knowledge acquired by an accurate and devoted study of the system in all its parts. Finally, it involves unorthodox uses of

ontological movement I am following conforms to processual and relational axes, I permit myself to not specify its development. Similarly, the thematic, conceptualisation and development of the ‘machine’ is a philosophical task that moves throughout the entire work of Deleuze and Guattari. There is not here the space to fully deal with it, but it might be said that the ‘machine’ breaks with the prosthetic assumption of the subject-object relation between the human-animal and his/her tool; and it does this rupture through the recognition of the processes involving the ‘territory’ (see footnote 65 below). Within machines, materials are deterritorialised to form novel ‘matters’, but these do not enter into prosthetic relations (as tools) with a supposed subject. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, transl. B. Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987 [1980]); for critical accounts see John Phillips, "Agencement/Assemblage," Theory, Culture & Society 23 (2006) 2–3: 108–109.

22 Turkle, op. cit., 207.
23 In one of the most influential and referenced texts on hacker culture, Steven Levy narrates many anecdotes that reveal the attitude towards curiosity and material application characterising the hack. See Steven Levy, Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution (London: Penguin, 2001 [1984]).
24 Rules that are technical but, in capitalist society, obviously also legal.
25 Turkle, op. cit., 208.
26 Ibid.
the apparatuses – pointing towards unpredictable possibilities: virtual points of abstraction.

It is precisely along these lines that the hack, as a material potency of abstraction, is at the centre of the Marxian media theory of McKenzie Wark, who links it to a particular conceptualisation of nature.27 “The hack expresses the nature of nature as its difference from itself – or at least its difference from its representation. The hack expresses the virtuality of nature and nature as the virtuality of expression”.28 Wark builds his understanding of contemporary culture on the hierarchical overlapping of three different natures, as well as on the continual historical realisation of their virtual abstracting capabilities. With regard to a second nature, one based on labour as a form of emancipation for survival (the material life as already posited by Marx), Wark overlaps the idea of a “third nature”. This is a space of information and communication, which creates new necessities, instead of freeing human life from the needs already created by working under the capitalist relation, in the representations created by a second ‘natural’ class society.29

Hacking, then, is central to what Wark characterises as the struggles of third nature. Hackers have, in fact, an interest “in a nature expressing the limitless multiplicity of things”.30 It is upon this multiple potential that the abstracting potency of the hack is based. The key political point for Wark is that the hack is limited via the extension of new rules imposed by a burgeoning dominant class. This is the vectoral class, which follows the capitalist and the pastoralist classes before it, originating novel exploiting conditions which lead (or can virtually lead) to class conflicts. These innovative forms of exploitation are settled by the continual expansion of the institution of property to involve information. Hence, vectoral conflicts still move around the question of property, which consolidates the monopolising class rules over new forces of production – and in particular over the hack.31

I suggest it is relevant to maintain the central position of the hack, as an applied material act that is capable of abstracting potentials. However, I put forward, the hack has to be posited less hierarchically and more ecologically within the ‘natural’ relations originated by forms of power such as those that emerge with the mass distribution of digital networks.32 For this reason, I keep to one side the

28 Wark, op. cit., 2004, 140.
30 Wark, op. cit., 2004, 152.
32 With ‘ecological’, I mean a perspective that implies scalar relationality beyond any form of anthropocentrism, along the line that connects the ideas of Félix Guattari to more recent
dialectic of class opposition (which still resonates in the proposal of Wark) in favour of a more immanent reading of political frontlines, where resistance can become an active force of media intervention. The hack is, here, pushed towards the differentiating multiplicity of hacktions, as networked media actions of resistance.\footnote{The term ‘hacktion’ comes from Alexandra Samuel, who first introduced it, albeit without conceptualising it. In her study, a hacktion is just another word for politically oriented hacking, or hacktivist media actions. Samuel’s work has the value of moving the emphasis from human subjects to the media actions of resistance. However, this emphasis vanishes by following the attempt of foreclosing, reducing and selecting ‘hacktions’, rather than letting them to express a potential multiplicity of media technological relations. See. Alexandra W. Samuel, “Hacktivism and the Future of Political Participation” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2004).}

The hack, as discussed, presents features of originality, creative invention and a certain refusal of constraint. Nevertheless, it still maintains a certain position of humanist ‘externality’ into practically approaching the technological apparatus. Its abstractive potency is surely a matter of invention, and this potency is contingent, since it emerges from the specific situation faced by its practitioner – hence, immanently, involving human and non-human bodies. However, this kind of invention frequently becomes what might be called a ‘beloved detachment’ from the technological system itself, without being entangled in planes of co-relationality. More crucially, under the material abstractions of the hack, the technical machine is often bent by following a certain ‘personal’ taste. This means that the hack reaches points of high efficiency, even if these points were not assumed to be in the system itself. In this way, the potency of creation (the active origination of new material relations, or its possibility), as well as the emergent, re-actualised instabilities, can easily give life to new stable power formations, as the reorganisation of capitalist exploitation on global networks has historically demonstrated.

My proposal is to qualify ‘hacktions’ as media actions of resistance by driving this sort of ontology, or better ‘onto-epistem-ology’ of the hack towards points of deficiency, which means avoiding the shifts that also historically allowed its reorganisation within ‘transparent’, efficient, machinic networks of cooptation. In an attempt to dispute the separation of ontology and epistemology, Karen Barad calls ‘onto-epistem-ology’ the possibility of “knowing” as “a material practice of engagement” occurring “as part of the world in its differential becoming”.\footnote{Karen Barad, Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), 89.} To avoid falling back into humanist paradigms it is, in fact, necessary to overcome the binarisms that assume the object of knowledge as
separated from the process of knowing – or, similarly, as I have argued elsewhere, theory form practice – equally acknowledging the heterogeneous plurality of becoming.35 Within her diffractive method of approaching culture beyond the limits of humanist ‘reflexivity’, the entangled materiality of producing knowledge is for Barad inseparable from its relational performativity.36 This means, correspondingly, that by pushing forward the hack, I am not presuming to be detached from such a movement. Rather, I attempt to generate a difference, attempting to avoid a hierarchisation between what the hack is and how it can be comprehended, since theorising is always an embodied and material practice; an entangled particle of differential becomings.

Going back to the hack and its prominence within contemporary forms of digital media and network politics, it does not need to be detached from its creative imagination, from the relational aesthetics that imply it. Rather, the hack needs to be appraised within a broader processual philosophical perspective; an outlook accounting for what the hack might become, that is, by reconsidering its capacity of acting as a primer: a triggering, material gesture that can be virtually capable of activating a certain set of resistant tendencies. Media actions of resistance, as hacktions, imply the hack, but differentiate by having the capability of becoming something else: a virtual set of emergent and disruptive relations. For instance, when a database is forced to gain access the hack might originate a data leak, which is not an unconditional consequence, having as well a political potential that is not acknowledgeable in advance. In certain cases – as it happened for hacktions such as the leaks that were ‘deployed’ under the Anonymous moniker against Italian police in 2012 – the hack became something different, leading to dysfunctional concatenations: novel weapons in the arsenal of digital media resistances, a throttle in always-emergent hacktivist machines that intervene in ongoing political struggles.37 The hack, as such, has to point towards a certain disruptive criticality, towards a thought of resistance that does not oppose power face-to-face, but that proliferates in continual contingencies, beyond dualist, or dualist-plus-one, dialectical positions.

2. Acts of creation | acts of resistance

Creating has always been something different from communicating. What is important will be perhaps to create

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36 Barad, op. cit.
37 Here, I am referring to a leak that occurred the 22nd of October 2012 that exposed the modalities, and the controlling mechanisms, through which Italian police (Polizia di Stato) used to destabilise local struggles such as those of the NoTav movement. A more thorough engagement with this and other examples, which can clarify the conceptualisation and application of the concept of hacktions, can be found in Micali, op. cit., 2016.
some vacuoles of non-communication, some switches, to escape
from control.

Gilles Deleuze\textsuperscript{38}

The concept of resistance does not seem to have a good reputation in
contemporary cultural theory. It is a concept that is frequently over-used and
abused, typically as the alter ego of power. In a dualistic account, where there is
power, resistance – which opposes it – can always be found. Such a conceptual
trend is oriented towards analysing and describing resistance as a reactionary
disposition. In such a perspective, resistance is a tendency that, by closing on its
own defence, keeps its position rather than affirming itself. Additionally, in
dialectical reasoning, when resistance does assert itself, launching its decisive
attack against power, it will finally fail by taking power’s place, becoming its own
‘bogeyman’: the same ‘state’ form it was challenging.

Franco Berardi provides a ‘theoretical narration’ of his encounter with the
(Deleuzo) Guattarian conceptual machine, which is more than a classic
‘handbook’ about the thought of Félix Guattari.\textsuperscript{39} His ‘tale’ begins by dealing with
depression. This is a depression brought on by an increasing impossibility for
concepts to grasp the dispersive flow of a shared reality, which is in turn
increasingly dissolving under the attacks of schizophrenic capital. Having
experienced first-hand the movement of 1977 in Bologna as the climax of the
explosion of a communitarian and subversive, proliferant desire, the 1980s and
what followed would reveal for ‘Bifo’ the impossibility of political ‘journeys’ with
an equal intensity. This is the depression of an inconceivable political resistance:

resistance is hopeless, because when you resist you are actually
defending conceptual configurations that have already lost their grip
on the world. When you resist, you replace desire with duty, and this
cannot work if we believe in a kind of creationist process. Resistance
is the opposite of creationism.\textsuperscript{40}

Berardi posits resistance as a gesture of defensive reaction. He regards this form
of resistance as the opposite of creation, the latter being engaged with an always-
active desire for new ‘encounters’. Hence, the matter here involves the
possibility of thinking a concept of resistance by being aware of a historical and
philosophical perspective that implies and/or frequently suggests the end of this
concept, endowing it only with static and retrograde (im)possibilities, negating

[1972-1990]), 175; translation modified.
\textsuperscript{39} Franco Berardi, \textit{Félix Guattari: Thought, Friendship and Visionary Cartography} (Basingstoke –
\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Ibid.}, 13.
for it any ascription of creative inventiveness. This is a resistance that is always crushed; on the one hand by a continual capture and recapture by apparatuses of power and, on the other hand, by a (hyper) critical thought which underlines – by amplifying – the reactionary nature of resistant attitudes.

With the objective of reactivating a concept of resistance with a view to employing this for digital media actions, I suggest it is necessary to outline the active character of the forces moving within hacktions. For this reason, I will proceed via a discussion of the 'continental' reading of Nietzsche. Moreover, it is on the notion of 'creativity' that I propose the revitalisation of the concept of resistance has to be based. Even though creativity nowadays is the buzzword par excellence of capitalist culture, it must be detached from the subjective, individual state chosen for it by politicians, cultural managers and entrepreneurs, who regularly inaugurate new forms of capitalist exploitation around this concept.

First of all, the conceptualisation of hacktions must consider how such emerging processes of mediation are capable of being – or better – 'becoming' resistant to, and not supportive of, contemporary forms of power. From such a viewpoint, the question of resistance has been central for a group of French theorists working in the second half of the last century on crucial questions about subjectivation and power. The concept of resistance needs, then, to be questioned, involving what has been already introduced: that is, how to practically think about it in order to revitalise this notion. In particular, the re-reading of Friedrich Nietzsche has played a central role in this branch of continental philosophy.41

Following the so-called ‘post-structuralist’ reading of Nietzsche, the concept of resistance can be read from two opposite directions.42 On the one hand, there is the notion of resistance to domination. This is an emancipatory resistance, one that directly concerns freedom, and the possibilities of liberation from a power over. On the other hand, resistance can also be the expression of this same

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41 A summary of the various positions of the many post-structuralist theorists who re-approached Nietzschean thought is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will deal here with various points of this French reading, with the aim of developing a conceptualisation of resistance that can allow the outlining of networked media actions as hacktions. In particular, I will focus on the work of Gilles Deleuze, which temporarily 'opened' the French reading of Nietzsche, and on various texts and interviews present in two collections of his (alone and with other interlocutors) writings. See Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, transl. by H. Tomlinson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983 [1962]); *Desert Island and Other Texts 1953-1974*, eds. D. Lapoujade, transl. by M. Taormina (Los Angeles & New York: Semiotext(e), 2004 [2002]); *Two Regimes of Madness: Text and Interviews 1975-1995*, eds. D. Lapoujade, transl. by A. Hodges and M. Taormina (Los Angeles & New York: Semiotext(e), 2006 [2003]).

domination. This is the resistant attempt to stop and limit any liberating efforts: this is the resistance of repression.

In the preface of the American edition of his translated book on Nietzsche, Deleuze identifies the key conceptual concern with the centrality of forces, something he links to the affective thought of Spinoza. Deleuze emphasises that Nietzsche “invented a typology of forces which distinguishes active forces from reactive forces (those which are acted on) and analyzes their various combinations”, For Deleuze, Nietzschean thought is a step forward into the affective (and unknown) capacities of bodies as introduced by Spinoza. Nietzsche’s thought recognises the presence of equally strong, but this time reacting, reactionary forces.

In these terms, the central question for resistance regards the ‘quality’, the direction of the forces living and enacting its deployment and its embodied disposition. This, using Nietzschean terminology, involves the ‘will to power’, ‘potency’ or power to, that is the differential between the forces in action. Following Deleuze, since “any given thing refers to a state of forces”, ‘potency’ is the element that qualifies this as affirmative or negative: “affirmation” or “negation”.

It is worth noting that ‘affirmation’, in Deleuze’s own take on Nietzsche, is not the opposite of negation. Implying the two as being extremes on the same spectrum would mean falling once again into dialectical thinking. Conversely, Deleuze does not define affirmation through negation or opposition, but through multiplication, the joyful playing of differences, that is heterogeneity as the potency of releasing and freeing forces. In summary, crucially for the characterisation of hacktions as media forms of resistance, affirmation does not imply acceptance but creation. It is this creative element, as an infra-subjective one, which accompanies the deployment of media actions of resistance. However, before going on to discuss this creative aspect, it is vital to stay focused on resistance in order to highlight what allows Nietzsche – according to the Deleuzian reading – to distinguish between active and reactive forces.

This distinction is decisive, since it specifically involves a possible characterisation, a posteriori, of resistance – avoiding, then, its normative presupposition. The difference between the two introduced forms of resistance resides precisely in the quality of the forces that populate them. For Deleuze, this

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43 Deleuze, op. cit., 2004.
44 Ibid., 204.
46 Deleuze, op. cit., 2004, 205.
‘ethological’ issue does not mean that the character of the form of resistance has to be questioned with regard to its essence.\textsuperscript{47} Questioning the essence of resistance would be enunciated as follow: ‘what’ is the form of resistance in question? This is a question that does not deal with the disposition of the forces at stake. On the contrary, the value of the Nietzschean ‘image’ of thought is its capacity to do “away with all ‘personalist’ references”.\textsuperscript{48} This permits to avoid any essentialist questioning of the forms of resistance focusing on a ‘de-individualised’ question of “who”.\textsuperscript{49} This means that “[w]ho does not refer to an individual or person, but to an event, to relational forces in a proposition or a phenomenon, as well as to a genetic relation that determines those forces”.\textsuperscript{50} Therefore, to distinguish between a resistance to, and a resistance of domination, it will be relevant considering the forces that populate resistant media actions, recognising when the de-individual character of such forces is an active or reactive disposition.

David Hoy proposes a definition of resistance as being ‘critical’ – critical resistance – to characterise a form of resistance that directly deals with critique.\textsuperscript{51} Critique is, in fact, the central element recognised by Deleuze in commenting on Nietzsche’s genealogical method.\textsuperscript{52} Nietzschean critique is not a reactive, negative mode of inquiry: conversely it is an action, a positive, active gesture, which is counterposed (by differentiation, and not dualistically) to reactive forms such as resentment or revenge.

Critique is not a re-action of \textit{re-sentiment} but the active expression of an active mode of existence; attack and not revenge, the natural aggression of a way of being, the divine wickedness without which perfection could not be imagined. This way of being is that of the philosopher precisely because he intends to wield the differential element as critic and creator and therefore as a hammer.\textsuperscript{53}

‘Critique’ is the crucial element for an active conceptualisation of resistance. However, I do not agree with Hoy’s shift into considering interpretation as an equally relevant matter for critique. Hoy draws together his theory of critical resistance with recourse to Derridean deconstruction, identifying a non-universal notion of interpretation in Nietzsche. Although this debate is beyond the scope of this paper, I nevertheless suggest that critique, according to Deleuze, is already far from being a rational, ‘interpretative’ matter. As regards a ‘mode of

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Ibid.}, 206.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{51} Hoy, \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{52} Deleuze, \textit{op. cit.}, 1983.
\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Ibid.}, 3; \textit{emphasis in the original}. 
existence', critique directly involves an active state of forces, which needs to be understood in affective more than rational terms – but never as an opposition. In this sense, I consider resistances (in plural) as being critical in proposing, or better 'disposing', a set of immanent relations that can be qualified as being active in the potency of the affective qualities that are, and can be, activated.

Hacktions need to be studied through their processuality, where the being materially situated of hacking practices has to be considered as parts of media resistances, which means without rigidly separating the hack from the possible disruption of hacktions: the hack has the capacity to become hacktion(s). This directly implies an 'ethological' field of study, where resistances can be approached through a de-individualised questioning of the forces at stake in media interventions. Indeed, the distinction, between active and reactive forces, permits to avoid the presumption to outlining media actions a priori, through a universalist objectivity. For this reason, the revitalisation of the concept of resistance that I suggest has to implicate critique, as an active recognition of the disposition of the forces populating hacktions. Such a critical resistance does not deal with issues of representation or interpretation, being interested in the relations that might be activated by forms of opposition and dissent on an affective register.

∞ Ethical (and aesthetical) questions: becoming-cosmic, a conclusion

It might also be better here to speak of a proto-aesthetic paradigm, to emphasise that we are not referring to institutionalised art, to its works manifested in the social field, but to a dimension of creation in a nascent state, perpetually in advance of itself, its power of emergence subsuming the contingency and hazards of activities that bring immaterial Universes into being. A residual horizon of discursive time (time marked by social clocks), a perpetual duration, escapes the alternative of remembering-forgetting and lives with a stupefying intensity, the affect of territorialised subjectivity.

Félix Guattari54

The active disposition of forces populating resistance, as it emerged from the last section, involves a field of creation. I have introduced this issue without detailing it by recognising the differentiating nature of affirmation in a context of heterogenesis. This point needs to be specified here, permitting a clearer outlining of hacktions as media actions of resistance in relation to creativity.

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Indeed, a crucial consideration regarding resistance in its critical and active definition involves ethical questions. According to both David Hoy and Todd May, the ethicity of resistance is a key element for a post-structuralist positing of this concept.\textsuperscript{55} Resistance in fact involves, and is in consonance with, a wider framework that fosters ideas such as emancipation or freedom. This problematises the fact that these notions – as empty constructs – can be critically questioned. For this reason, a discussion of the Guattarian ethico-aesthetic paradigm is vital here. In addition, Félix Guattari’s paradigmatic positing of ethical and aesthetical questions allows to move the argument in the direction of creativity, due to the emphasis he places on aesthetic ambiats in their experimental and non-individual features: territories that are open to plural processes of semiotisation, having the capacity to involve ‘cosmic’ forces.

According to a rationalist critique, it is possible to question the normative validity of a notion of resistance in accordance with other concepts, such as freedom or emancipation. From a rationalist perspective, for resistance to be valid it has to follow ideals of justice or freedom which can be recognised as universally accepted – think, for instance, about the idea of perpetual peace as suggested by Kant.\textsuperscript{56} Even though I have suggested a concept of resistance(s), this can be rationally attacked because of the fragile base of the normative content it may miss. We might call this critique as the ‘rule’ of the majority, the normative guiding principle that a minoritarian thought attempts to smooth.\textsuperscript{57} The fact is that – following Nietzsche and his readers – resistance does not invoke any universalism here. This is why it is important to regard resistance through what Guattari calls an ethico-aesthetic paradigm, one which can dismantle any fascist, humanist and universalist reasoning, inclining instead towards the idea of a sort of cosmic, post-human and ‘affecting’ creativity.

Guattarian ‘ecosophy’ is characterised by its emphasis on the necessity of paradigms oriented towards ethical and aesthetical dimensions, which can ‘care’ about singularities in their exclusive, plural, continual and processual ‘differentiation’.\textsuperscript{58} Such paradigms can in fact limit the becoming rigid of subjectivities, favouring conversely heterogeneous processes of subjectivation. An analogous paradigm is not ethical in accordance with a superior rationality; it points, on the contrary, to the necessity of virtually setting ethical coordinates.


\textsuperscript{56} Immanuel Kant, \textit{To Perpetual Peace: a Philosophical Sketch} (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003 [1795]).


\textsuperscript{58} See Guattari, \textit{op. cit.}, 2000; and Félix Guattari, “Qu’est-ce que l’écosophie?” \textit{Terminal} 56 (1991), 22-23.
frameworks that have yet to come and cannot be universally arranged. This constitutes a sort of ‘moving’ ethic of the virtual, of the potency of essence in what, following Spinoza and his readers, is an ethological framework.\textsuperscript{59} For Guattari, ethics is a question of ecological responsibility for the cosmos, with its vital affective species of corporeal and incorporeal constituents. This involves aesthetic dimensions of creation, as a capacity to prompt active forces of resistance.\textsuperscript{60}

The dimension of artistic creation possesses, in fact, for Guattari, residuals that are distinctive of societies in which the processes of subjectivation were polysemous, animist and trans-individual.\textsuperscript{61} These “societies without writing or state” were in fact characterised by what might be called ‘territorialised’, or ‘not discerning’ assemblages of various activities, such as economic, artistic, ritual, magic, religious or other activities.\textsuperscript{62} Within such social contexts, the aesthetic dimension was not a separate sphere of individual psychic formation. Art was not a specific activity, ‘separated from the context’, while forming part of the immanent acting of the socius – a constituent part of social relationships. Thus, the creative dimension of art is capable of recalling the dimensions that Guattari calls of non-structuralised, open and affective semiotisation.\textsuperscript{63} The aesthetic ambit therefore, being a field of affects, is an ambit in which foyers, nuclei or fires, of resistance endure. These are processual nuclei which can allow re-singularisations and heterogeneses, which are processes of opening towards ‘possibles’, and not of what might be called ‘calcification’, standardisation or ‘fascistisation’ as occurs under the enslavement of aesthetics to the capitalist Signifier – which for Guattari is a universal value that works as a semiotic operator over life flows.\textsuperscript{64} It is crucial that these resistant fires are traversed by what Guattari defines as an “aesthetic puissance of feeling”.\textsuperscript{65} This is, again, the creative potency as a ‘power to’ that has a privileged – in the sense of active and of possible – position, precisely due to its capability regarding virtual, open and transversal processualities.

\textsuperscript{59} Readers such as Deleuze and Guattari as well as Negri or Braidotti. See for instance Antonio Negri, \textit{L’Anomalia Selvaggia: saggio su potere e potenza in Baruch Spinoza} (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981); Braidotti, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{60} Guattari, \textit{op. cit.}, 1995; and Guattari, \textit{op. cit.}, 2000.

\textsuperscript{61} I am using the past tense here, but it is key to note that Guattari is always careful to underline nonlinear readings of history, since such processes re-emerge within different societies and never characterise a definite historical stage.


\textsuperscript{63} It must be highlighted that, by following Guattari, I am always implying a context of semiotic pluralism. See, \textit{Ibid.;} and Lazzarato, \textit{op. cit.}

\textsuperscript{64} Guattari, \textit{op. cit.}, 1995; Félix Guattari, \textit{Capitale Mondiale Integrato} (Verona: Ombre Corte, 1997).

\textsuperscript{65} Guattari, \textit{op. cit.}, 1995, 101.
This is how the ambit of creation needs to be thought within the processuality of media actions of resistance, when the hack might become a hacktion, via – what following Deleuze and Guattari might be called – its ‘deterritorialisation’ and ‘reterritorialisation’ in disruptive contingencies. The territories that relationally compose and border the material, applied gesture of the hack processually move to originate novel sets of relations, new territories, which will be disorderly and turbulent, rather than highly functional. I suggest the hack needs to be ‘reoriented’ and pointed towards ‘machinic’ disruptions, moving to hacktions. If this is not done (both in theory and practice, beyond any dualism), the abstractions capable of being originated by media hacking practices will comfortably terminate in the welcoming hands of apparatuses of capture. Hence, creation cannot be assumed to be an individual state. Creation does in fact constantly re-emerge in processes that are trans-individual, plural and open. *Creativity is not human: it is cosmological.*

To conclude, then, networked media actions as hacktions are resistant since they express the creative capability of ‘machinising’ certain affections, words, practices and/or involvements, transversally populated by active, and not reactive forces. Hacktions heretically resist the rationality of the state, which would label them as being irrational, criminal and immoral because of their distance from the liberal majoritarian way of doing politics via digital media and networks (post your profile badge, sign the petition, receive your weekly newsletter). These networked media actions are emergent and dysfunctional, they are blossoming events, and their field of intervention is what, with Deleuze and Guattari, can be called a micropolitics ‘in-becoming’: a plane of action that implies subjectivation as a non-anthropocentred relational process. Creation traverses hacktions, from media hacking as a material practice, to its abstractive potential; a resistant potency that is capable of activating lines that have yet to come, forming disruptive conditions that have not been already thought of nor imagined: a heterogeneity of resistances in media ecologies.

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66 These terms are correlative, and are conceived by Deleuze and Guattari in relation to the broader thematic of the ‘territory’, which traverses all their work. The concept of the territory is used in broader terms compared with its usage in Ethology and Ethnology. In the words of Guattari: “Territory is synonymous with appropriation, subjectification closed in on itself. A territory can also be deterritorialised, i.e. open up, to be engaged in lines of flight, and even become self-destructive. Reterritorialisation consists of an attempt to recompose a territory engaged in a process of deterritorialisation”. Félix Guattari, *The Anti-Oedipus Papers*, trans. by K. Gotman (New York: Semiotext(e), 2006), 421.
Democratic Potential of Creative Political Protest

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Abstract
From Cairo to Occupy Wall Street, from Istanbul Gezi Park to DANS protests in Sofia, in recent public sphere movements we have witnessed the emergence of a new wave of creative protest. The surge of creative forms of political action brings to the fore the question of democratic potential of creative political protest. This paper explores in what ways creative protest could deepen democracy. I argue that creative political protest nurtures democracy by generating a peaceful culture of resistance and by providing a peaceful way of responding to politics of intolerance and polarization.

Introduction

When criticizing Milosevic had a high cost in Serbia, the student movement Otpor – meaning resistance – developed nonviolent resistance strategies that kept humor and satire at their core. They used creative nonviolent methods to spread their message and to help the public overcome their fear of the authoritarian regime. Otpor’s most famous prank was ‘the smiling barrel.’ Recognizing that laughter could trump fear, Otpor members drew Milosevic’s portrait on a barrel and took the barrel to the main pedestrian boulevard in Belgrade. Next to the barrel they put a sign that read “smash his face for just a dinar”\(^1\). Many passersby took the opportunity to smash Milosevic’s face with a bat and formed a line to take their own swings. People laughed even more when the police, upon failing to find the organizers of the protest, decided to arrest the barrel. The smiling barrel stunt received widespread media coverage and appeared on the cover of two opposition newspapers. Otpor’s creative political protests have been immensely influential in encouraging the public to show their opposition to the oppressive government in Serbia.\(^2\)

It was the creativity of the ‘smiling barrel’ that made Otpor’s protest possible under conditions of the authoritarian rule. Many political groups have used creative forms of protest to express their dissent and to contest the political

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\(^2\) Popovic, *Blueprint for Revolution*, 100–102.
order, especially when the cost of contestation was too high.\textsuperscript{3} It is not clear, however, what we should expect from creative political protest under democratic conditions. Do creative methods of political protest have any democratic value? How does creativity change the nature of democratic political protest? Should democratic theorists take seriously creative methods of political protest? The surge of creative forms of protest brings to the fore the question of the democratic potential of creative political protest. These methods are present in the actions of the ‘Indignados’ in different European cities, various Occupy protests in the United States, Istanbul Gezi Park protests in Turkey, DANS protests in Bulgaria, and various other protest movements in Brazil, Canada, Greece, Ukraine, and Venezuela. Despite their differences, these recent political movements have staged a new form of political action that has at its core creativity. The use of humor, irony, artistic activism, and aesthetic political performances has become widespread and changed activists’ routinized repertoire of political action.

What we have witnessed in the recent protest movements is an outburst of creativity and the emergence of a new wave of creative politics. Unlike the violent political protests against institutions of global capitalism in the last decade such as the Seattle Protests in 1999, in the new political movements protesters have turned to peaceful creative methods such as humor and political art to stage novel forms of protest. These creative political performances express protesters’ political message and vent their anger against the political and economic order. For instance, a thousand protestors in Hamburg staged a massive pillow fight to contest the declaration of parts of Hamburg “danger zones” that gave the police arbitrary stop and search powers in the danger zones.\textsuperscript{4} In Ferguson, Missouri residents protested police violence against African-Americans by silently confronting the police officers with their hands up in air. ‘Hands up, Don’t Shoot’ has become both a slogan and a symbolic gesture of the Black Lives Matter movement. During pro-EU demonstrations in Kiev a protester installed a piano painted in the colors of the Ukrainian flag in front of a police line and played Chopin to the police to convey the peaceful intentions of the protesters.\textsuperscript{5}

In light of these growing creative methods of protests, I ask what the surge of creative politics means for democracy. I argue that creative political protest can play an important role in fostering democratic culture and nurturing democracy.


In section 1, I suggest that creativity in political protest enables democratic politics by encouraging non-violence. By preventing the degeneration of space of democratic politics to a space of violent confrontation, creative political actions create the space necessary for democracy to function. In section 2, I argue that creative forms of protest help adversaries overcome communicative barriers which undermine democratic engagement. In section 3, I explore whether creative protest could ease the political tension between contending parties under conditions of polarized politics.

I. Creativity and Violence

Hannah Arendt describes the space of political action as ‘the space of appearance’ where one can be seen and heard. Whenever people act through speech and action before an audience to bring out a change in the world peacefully, they transform the public space to a space of democratic politics. Viewed democratically, public spaces ought to provide stages for all social groups – particularly the powerless and those without institutionalized power – where they can peacefully voice political claims and render visible issues ignored by the mass media and the society. A healthy democracy, Iris Young notes, encourages different social groups to express their political concerns in public and views contestatory and agonistic political actions with positive, or least non-negative, lens. Existing democracies, however, are seldom hospitable to public political protest. Despite the widespread recognition of the right to freedom of assembly and protest as a fundamental human right, even in societies with a long tradition of liberal democracy there are untenable restrictions on the public space and political groups are discouraged from exercising their democratic right to peacefully protest in public. As Larry Bogad rightly observes, in Western democracies public spaces are increasingly privatized and regulated. Protesters are intimidated and “harassed with preemptive arrest, surveillance, and infiltrations.” This widespread phenomenon has steadily weakened the democratic potential of public spaces.

Characterizing citizens as passive political consumers, who should express their views at the ballot box and let the political elite use political power, and democratic protesters as a potential threat to security and order, the dominant
political culture too easily warrants the use of violence against protestors. In most demonstrations, the police look for excuses to intervene and disperse the protest. To contain protesters, the police regularly use intimidating tactics and aggressive practices which only make violent confrontation more likely. Overly authoritarian attitude of the police against non-violent protesters bring about a feeling of injustice and a sense of unfairness. Donatella Della Porta argues that what makes violent confrontation even more likely and protest more intense is the perceived external aggression “described by protesters as an act of war against a peaceful community”; she claims this feeling forces "the community to join the front-line." When protesters resist and insist on exercising their democratic right to protest peacefully, the police use even more aggressive methods such as firing smoke gas, tear gas, stun grenades, rubber bullets, and water cannons at protesters to disperse the demonstration. The police’s use of force – and even excessive force – against democratic protesters is characterized as ‘defensive’ as the police enforce order whereas protesters’ resistance tends to be depicted as aggressive transgression of the public space. The result is the degeneration of the site of democratic expression and contestation into a site of violent confrontation.

As Srdja Popovic, the leader of Serbian student movement Otpor, notes: “as soon as protests turn into a violent conflict, it is a kind of defeat. It is like challenging [Mike] Tyson to a boxing match.” However, Popovic continues, “why not play chess with him instead? Our playing field is called creativity.” Following Otpor’s advice, Tahrir Square protesters communicated their commitment to nonviolence by performing various creative peaceful actions such as shouting positive slogans, carrying roses, sweeping the square clean, and protecting the shops from looters. When Coptic Christians celebrated Mass, the Muslims formed a circle around them; while the Muslims prayed, the Christians joined hand in a circle around the Muslims to protect them. In Sofia, refusing to see the police as an enemy the protesters have attempted to communicate with them by reading poetry, playing music, and offering water. People gathered in large numbers after work during weekdays and on weekends to join the protests and to talk and socialize. Families came with their babies and strollers, others brought their dogs, and others bikes and flowers. In both Sofia and Cairo, and in many other

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11 This is how the elite model of democracy, which is the dominant model of democracy today, characterizes democratic citizens and political protesters. See Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1942).
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
recent political movements, the emergence of a peaceful and playful culture of protest served as a new source of democratic inspiration. The creative performances of the protesters fostered a festival-like atmosphere and formed the language of peaceful resistance. This ethos of democratic protest transformed the nature of protest while creating new political agencies who are committed to peaceful political protest.

As recent political protests illustrate, when creativity undergirds a political movement, it generates a peaceful culture of resistance. Bogad suggests that such innovative, playful, and artful responses “make protest more joyous for participants facing intimidation from the police.”\(^\text{18}\) The protesters’ perception of themselves – itself shaped by the peaceful culture of protest – encourages them to keep the protest non-violent. Creative political performances allow political protesters to reclaim the democratic meaning of the public space by encouraging them to express their views in a non-violent way even in the face of police violence. The public space remains a peaceful site for democratic performance, contestation, and expression. In that sense, creative political protest makes possible democratic political action.

II. Negative Reactions to Protest

In an ideal democracy, the concerns and claims of protesters should be part of the democratic exchange and taken seriously by the public. Democratic engagement entails confrontation of competing positions accompanied by a willingness to listen and to make a good faith effort to understand the other side.\(^\text{19}\) However, in existing democracies those who exercise their right to protest peacefully in public are too often and too easily dismissed due to the negative characterization of protest movements.\(^\text{20}\) When challenged, those in positions of power turn to tactics of delegitimization by invoking existing stereotypes about protest and protesters. This in turn results in the media reproducing derogatory perspectives on protesters. For instance, Occupy Wall Street protesters have been described as an “unruly self-destructive mass,”\(^\text{21}\) and Tahrir Square protesters have been called “thugs, vandals, looters, and

\(^\text{18}\) Bogad, Tactical Performance, 167.
\(^\text{19}\) There are various accounts of democratic engagement advanced by different normative models of democracy (deliberative, participatory, agonistic, radical), but even the agonistic approach, which understands democratic engagement in terms of a non-violent confrontation between contending parties, endorses the principle that one should always listen to the other side. See, for instance, Andrew Schaap, “Agonism in Divided Societies,” Philosophy and Social Criticism 32(2006): 269.
\(^\text{20}\) A similar view of protest and contestation also persists in contemporary democratic theory. Prioritizing consensus and unity, many democratic theorists view contestation and agonism as divisive and threatening. See Iris Young, Inclusion and Democracy, chapters 2 and 3.
terrorists.”22 Many people reject the claims of protesters without listening and trying to understand their message simply because they do not like the way protesters voice their concerns and press their claims.23 Proponents of the contested view tend to take a defensive attitude and dismiss the other's perspective when challenged by political groups viewed as ‘anarchists,’ ‘nihilists,’ ‘troublemakers,’ and so on. This widespread negative attitude toward political protest and protesters hinders democratic engagement.

To be sure, from an Arendtian perspective, one can argue that the public perception of protest does not matter since the experience of acting politically, and not the outcome of political action, is the real reward of political action as the act of protest is an exercise of freedom.24 Indeed, it is important to recognize the expressive value of political action and avoid reducing the value of political action to its possible consequences. However, it is also important to recognize that when the aim is to contest an unjust policy, a hegemonic norm or identity, or 'the common sense,' the outcome of the political protest matters. Although it is difficult to trace the concrete effects of each political protest, it is reasonable to claim that the negative characterization of a protest is an effective way of undermining the credibility of a political movement and excluding the claims of the protesters from the political public sphere. As Mark Wenman points out, the "narration and coverage of particular events are never value-free and the judgments are already built into the narration."25 Depending on the framing of a protest, protesters could be viewed as a destructive unruly mob or a group of political activists fighting for a worthy cause.26 If the former narrative prevails, it marginalizes the movement, which diminishes the democratic power of the protest. Thus, the protesters would struggle to get their views heard and influence the public debate. The issue is not that the public fails to see the protesters, but it is that the protest is narrated in such a way that it is difficult for the public to view them as a legitimate group deserving a fair hearing. The protesters are seen, but they are not heard due to the way dominant political narratives characterize them.

How a political protest is characterized is especially important when the issue at stake is ‘politics of becoming.’ In the ‘politics of becoming’, as William Connolly

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24 See Arendt, The Human Condition, chapter 5.
describes, new and unforeseen things come about and disturb the existing cultural and political terrain. This new thing may be a new cultural identity that disturbs the constellation of existing identities, a new religious faith or a source of moral inspiration, or a new right waiting to be placed on the list of rights.\textsuperscript{27} Struggles to challenge and modify the existing cultural and political terrain tend to generate unease since they disturb existing codes of identity, legitimacy, justice, goodness, or right. When challenged dominant identities feel threatened. Fear, resentment and hostility are typical reactions to the emergence of new social identities and the attempts to unsettle the existing cultural and political terrain. The new political movements encounter resistance and are judged by the old cultural codes that marginalize them.\textsuperscript{28} Thus, the tendency to characterize political protesters in a derogatory fashion to undermine their legitimacy is already strong in the case of politics of becoming.

It is important to recognize that the use of creativity in political protest can make a more democratic engagement possible by challenging the negative narratives of protest; this encourages the public to view peaceful protesters as legitimate political actors. For instance, the protesters in Hamburg turned staged a mass pillow fight in order to respond to the police’s characterization of them as ‘violent radicals.’ By “using the softest object” to protest they undermined the credibility of the police’s portrayal of the protest.\textsuperscript{29} Such creative strategies played a major role in providing a positive view of the protest and drawing the attention of the public to the creation of danger zones in the city.\textsuperscript{30} Similarly, Gezi Park protesters turned to humor and satire to respond to their government’s attempts to characterize them as ‘marauders,’ ‘looters,’ and ‘drunkards.’ When the prime minister of Turkey called Gezi protestors a bunch of marauders (‘çapulcu’ in Turkish), they responded by redefining ‘çapulcu’ as one who fights for her rights and resists injustice in a peaceful and humorous manner.\textsuperscript{31} The protesters adopted ‘çapulcu’ as their nickname: they greeted each other as ‘çapulcu’; ‘çapulcus are coming’ and ‘everyday I’m chapulling’ have become the slogans of the movement. The creative redefinition of this politicized word together with many other creative and playful political performances have

\textsuperscript{27}William Connolly, \textit{Why I Am Not a Secularist} (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 57.
\textsuperscript{28}William Connolly, \textit{Ethos of Pluralization} (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xv.
provided a positive narrative of the protest. Recognizing the legitimacy of the Gezi movement many citizens have paid attention to the message of the protest. This is one of the reasons why a protest started by a small group of environmental activists have snowballed into a nationwide movement and generated international solidarity movements in several cities around the globe.

Despite the already existing negative connotations associated with public political protest and the deliberate use of these negative connotations by powerful political actors to delegitimize protest movements, creative methods of protest make it clear that there is a significant difference between irrational dangerous extremists and peaceful activists who want to voice their concerns, press their claims, and bring about a change. When protesters communicate their message by playing music, creating humorous slogans, reading books to the police, throwing flowers at a phalanx of officers advancing towards them, and painting sidewalks steps in rainbow colors, they generate a positive narrative of the protest. Creative, humorous acts and artistic performances can interrupt well-established scripts about political protest and open up room for positive characterization of political movements. Positive characterization of protest shifts the attention of the public to the political message of the protesters. When perceived not as ‘violent radicals’, ‘anarchists’ or ‘trouble-makers’ but as ‘concerned citizens’, protesters are more likely to be taken seriously by the public. As such, by offering an alternative narrative of political protest and correcting the public’s perception of the protesters, creative political performances can open up a space for democratic engagement.

III. Politics of Polarization

One of the main problems of contemporary democracies is the polarized form of politics that “split the political arena into factional and inimical groups.”32 To be sure, adversarial struggle is always part of the democratic space given the conflictual and pluralistic nature of democratic politics. As Chantal Mouffe rightly indicates, a healthy dose of conflict and opposition is required for a vibrant democracy.33 Mouffe argues that a conflictual view of the world, characterized by opposed political positions that people can identify with, allows contestation and political struggle to remain within the boundaries of liberal democracy. When political outlets are provided for the expression of dissent and contestation, Mouffe claims, this leads to identification with forms of identities that will not construct the opponent as an enemy.34 However, in the absence of a democratic

34 Chantal Mouffe, Democratic Paradox (London: Verso, 200), 102-105, and Agonistics, 5-9.
ethos of engagement that contains agonistic confrontation politics may deteriorate into a fight between factional loyalties and radicalized identities. Reactionary positions and a politics of intolerance could take over the space of democratic politics. When a ‘rally around the flag’ effect dominates the political landscape, there is less room for respect, mutual understanding, and compromise. Politics is reduced to a zero-sum struggle between like-minded homogenous militant groups who do not engage democratically. Within this context, political protest might seem to escalate conflict and sharpen existing divisions. Political protest can have an effect on the public if the public is receptive and truly listening to the protesters. However, under conditions of polarization this receptivity is precisely what is lacking\(^\text{35}\) and a political protest may be seen as a demonstration of power in the street, which can exacerbate the polarization of the political discourse. Given the already deeply polarized political landscape, political protest could antagonize those who are opposed to the protesters’ views and could even encourage those who are sitting on the fence to support the opposite side.

Despite its oppositional nature, creative forms of protest can open up a positive political space for democratic engagement and make democratic engagement possible even in the face of deep partisanship and polarization. Creative political protest can be an effective means for contesting a political position without inducing negative emotional responses in the proponents of the contested view. One form of creative protest that can tell a story without provoking the adversary is the use of humor and irony. Humorous protest – or ‘laughtivism’ as Popovic terms it – both makes people laugh and encourages them to think.\(^\text{36}\) Bogad also emphasizes the role of humor and irony in getting people to listen rather than outright rejecting the protesters’ views. For instance, recognizing the democratic power of humor and irony, hundreds of thousand of protesters in Tahrir Square chanted together “where is my Kentucky Fried Chicken?” to express the absurdity of the claims advanced by the government controlled mainstream media that the protestors were all paid by foreign agents and offered free meals from KFC.\(^\text{37}\) In Gezi Park, the protestors used the stencil of a penguin wearing a gas mask to voice their criticism of the self-censorship of the local media. This was a reference to CNN Turkey – a major news channel in Turkey and a franchise of CNN international – broadcasting a documentary about penguins during police attacks on protesters while CNN International covered the protest live. Some protesters have responded by wearing “we are all penguins” inscribed t-shirts. They painted the stencils of a penguin wearing a gas mask on walls and streets of the city. In both Cairo and Istanbul, the use of


\(^\text{36}\) Popovic, Blueprint for Revolution, 110-111.

\(^\text{37}\) Bogad, Tactical Performance, 280.
humor and irony helped protesters convey their message in a positive way without antagonizing the other side.

In addition to humor and irony, emotionally charged storytelling and performance can be an effective means of communicating across differently situated groups. This mode of political communication has the capacity to reach the adversary at the affective level, thereby loosening the grip of the dominant narratives on one's perception of the other. In doing so, it can overcome the affective barriers that prevent the adversary from engaging with the other's position. For instance, to protest the murder of a protester, Egyptian activists staged a silent event in various cities where they stood at arms-length from each other in order not to violate the Egyptian emergency law that severely limits 'gathering.'

During 2014 protests in Venezuela, protesters planted mock crosses, gravestones, and coffins on prominent avenues, which symbolize the country's homicide victims. In response to the death of a 15 year old boy who was shot in the head by a police tear-gas canister on his way to buy bread during the Gezi Park protests, the protesters staged a sit-in demonstration laying his portraits on the ground besides loaves of bread. The aim of these protests was to reach the political adversary at an affective level and to evoke empathy in those who are neutral. Eliciting an emotional response from the public softens the cultural terrain, which can transform the political climate in a way that makes possible listening and understanding the concerns of the other side.

Consider, for instance, the performance of the 'Standing Man.' The Gezi Park protests ended when the police forcibly cleared the park of the protesters, removed the tent city, and re-opened the park to the public. The country was deeply polarized. Under these conditions, a protester staged a creative political performance, which opened a little crack in the wall that separated the two sides. The Standing Man, as the popular media dubbed him, stood still in the middle of the Taksim Square – the busiest square in Istanbul – for more than six hours. He moved only once to unbutton his pants in case the police wanted to strip search him. The performance of the Standing Man created an ambiguous situation, which revealed the limits of the dominant narrative about the Gezi protest. The

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38 Armando Salvatore, “New Media, the “Arab Spring,” and the Metamorphosis of the Public Sphere: Beyond Western Assumptions on Collective Agency and Democratic Politics,” Constellations 20(2013): 222.


Standing Man was not violating any law since he was simply standing in the square, but his performance counted as political demonstration in a public space which requires a permit. The democratic power of the Standing Man's protest springs from his creativity to explore this ambiguity: a peaceful protester who cannot be defined by the dominant narrative generated by the state to delegitimize the movement. The Standing Man was a protester contesting the power of the state, but he was clearly not an extremist, looter or marauder as the dominant narrative portrayed the Gezi movement. From the perspective of those who were against the Gezi movement he was yet another Gezi protester who should be ignored and yet his protest did not fit in any of the official scripts. Not only were those against the Gezi protests confused, but also the police did not know whether they should arrest him or simply let him stand in the square. Moreover, once passersby recognized the political nature of the performance, several of them joined the protest. Within a couple of hours, the number of people standing at Taksim Square went up to hundreds. The silent performance of the Standing Man has inspired similar protests across Turkey and around the world. It was a creative and peaceful response to police violence, the politics of intolerance and polarization. The Standing Man has gained the sympathy of the public and his creative political performance opened up a new space for democratic engagement.

Even under conditions of polarization, creative political performances can help one come to terms with the fact that their political position may appear contestable to others. By loosening the grip of the dominant narratives on the public's political consciousness, creative methods of protest can allow one to see the other's position from a different perspective, thereby making understanding possible. In that sense, creative political protest can help people to relate to the other's concerns and reveal one the validity of others’ particular perspectives. Recognizing that the other may have a valid view when seen from their perspective may encourage one to question and examine her view of the political opponent. One may begin to see the other not as an enemy who should be destroyed, but as a legitimate adversary who should be tolerated. Creative political performances can make it possible to transcend the boundaries of political camps and closed identities and bridge the gap between “us” and “them.” This does not mean that two sides reconcile, rather they perceive each other as legitimate political opponents. The transformation of political antagonism into agonism – a peaceful struggle between adversaries – is crucial since the latter introduces the possibility of negotiation and compromise on democratic terms.

42 Mouffe, Democratic Paradox, 102.
IV. Conclusion

Several political groups in various countries have shifted their protest methods away from anger and resentment toward a new form of creative and playful political activism. These groups have discovered the effectiveness of creative political protest in drawing the attention of the public and conveying their arguments. The creative methods employed in various recent protest movements have showed that by performing democracy creatively, it is possible to challenge dominant views without exacerbating conflict despite the police violence against protesters, the dominance of politics of intolerance, and the confrontational nature of protest. To be sure, the recognition of the effectiveness of creative methods of political protest may lead to the proliferation of such methods. To gain visibility and vocality, political groups may have to come up with even more creative political acts. It is important to recognize the democratic potential of creative protest and to understand in what ways such performances can deepen democracy. Creative political protest can defuse the violent potential of protest. It is a means for responding to politics of intolerance and polarization that haunt democracies. These creative responses provide an alternative mode of political engagement, which are both peaceful and politically resonant.

43 See Popovic's *Blueprint for Revolution* and Bogad's *Tactical Performance* for several examples of creative activism from around the world.
South-South Cooperation: Resistance or Continuity?

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Abstract
Alongside the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, the resultant restructuring of the traditional cooperation scheme was challenged by alternative mechanisms. These new relations offered new possibilities to previously relegated actors, enhancing however certain inequalities and reproducing certain logics of domination. This was shown in the new geopolitics of development posed by emerging countries, and the role of global player emulated by Brazil since 2003. To this end, this paper examines Brazil’s foreign policy, paying attention to its South-South Cooperation with Angola. This analysis is aimed at opening the theoretical debate about whether or not these new mechanisms are tools of resistance to liberal hegemony.

Introduction

After the Second World War, the pursuit to legitimise the establishment of a new world order led to the emergence of mechanisms aimed at eliminating structural differences between countries. Notably, the strengthening of the idea of development as a cognitive, discursive and political construction gave rise to a vertical mechanism of assistance between donor/developed/rich countries on the one side and receivers/undeveloped/poor countries on the other, where the latter followed the path laid by the former to reach development.

With the advent of the 21st century, the complexity of political, economic, social and financial processes led to a multi-polarisation of international relations hand in hand with the expansion of neoliberal globalisation. The growth of inequalities arising both at a political and economic level facilitated the emergence of relationships outside traditional institutions. In the architecture of international cooperation, the internal contradictions of the development discourse marked certain limits to the prevailing institutions, against which new ideas raised the need for alternative mechanisms of cooperation.

Thus, South-South (SSC), Triangular (TC) and Decentralised Cooperation (DC) expressed a qualitative interest in a broader and horizontal cooperation, which
aimed to leave aside the contradictions of the traditional system. As a consequence, a growing optimism arose from the academies of the Global South, increasing the number of works analysing the emergence of those processes as a path to redistribute international power. The strengthening of “Southern” actors, the consolidation of a Global South identity and the emergence of mechanisms of SSC as an overcoming antithesis of the north-south cooperation effectively led to a qualitative expansion of traditional cooperation. However, these new structures also reproduced certain relations of verticality and inequality. This was shown in the new geopolitics of development posed by emerging countries.

On this basis, the challenge has become to unravel the current south-south relations models, understanding their mechanisms on the gear of the international system, as a break to the hegemonic and traditional donor-recipient binomial. To this end, I will integrate decolonial and poststructuralist theories in order to analyse Brazil’s foreign policy, paying special attention to its promotion of SSC policies in Lusophone countries of Africa, specifically Angola. This analysis, while not exhaustive, is aimed at opening the theoretical debate about whether or not these new participation mechanisms are tools of resistance to (neo)liberal hegemony.

The construction of hierarchies within the international cooperation scheme

Over the past decades, inside the discipline of International Relations there has been a rejuvenation from a set of critical perspectives assembled behind the discussion about produced by non-European epistemologies,1 pursuing this way to repress the construction of alternative institutional structures to handle political, social and economic mechanism of power.

The formation and expansion of these narratives in the institutional international arena served the strengthening of a binarisation of international relations, hierarchised around categories of countries according to their level of development or underdevelopment, charting a unique path to reach this condition—traced, of course, by the former. The foundation in 1960 of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the establishment of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) inside it aimed to monitor and evaluate development policies for member countries, analysing and delivering recommendations for assistance programs to each land. The DAC was thereby shaped into a legitimation mechanism for the formulation of policies imposed by the previous colonial powers to their ex-colonies, in the

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1 Santiago Castro Gomez, La poscolonialidad explicada a los niños (Bogotá: Pontificia Universidad del Cauca, 2005), 26-27.
context of post-World War II political decolonisation. Social sciences were therefore crystallised as a strong legitimising mechanism for these policies in the African, Asian and Latin American States.

Moreover, the political, social and economic life of the recipients became the target of an unlimited set of programs and interventions evaluated and scientifically calculated by the sciences developed for this purpose. These initiatives were ratified thereafter by many United Nations summits, creating a system of international cooperation through which it would subsequently come to settle the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). But soon, the redirection of funds for development programs from many middle-income countries to low-income countries determined by the MDG started to face a sharp criticism from the countries hit hardest.

Nevertheless, as a consequence of the neoliberal crisis in Latin America, a series of processes have emerged that transcended the paradigm of modernity in two different senses. From the epistemological perspective, on the one hand, it has led to a decrease in the mastery of modern science, prompting an opening inside Social Sciences towards alternative forms of knowledge. From the socio-political perspective, on the other hand, the emergence of new milestones in contemporary social movements has allowed historically invisible sectors of the society to access to the circles of power. Meanwhile, the above-referred marginalisation of alternative forms of construction of power and knowledge also prompted a set of new processes of identity construction, encompassed by the idea of the Global South. This new multidimensional identity made reference to a phenomenon of creation and delimitation against the rules imposed by the Global North, not only denouncing the presence of unequal and inequitable institutional structures, but also seeking to build alternative mechanisms of international relations, based on a shared and diverse structural reality, and not on the promise of moving towards a linear evolutionary path. It was defined thus as a concept that started from the negativity in opposition to modern and colonial construction mechanisms of power; but above all, it had its foundations in the positive recognition of the subaltern constructions of power based on its creative skills to build a new world order.

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This deconstructive theorisation enabled, in turn, a revision of the official readings about international cooperation, making it possible to denounce the presence of a legitimising development discourse inside the official readings. It enabled us from a political perspective to acknowledge how the international arena had limited the state’s possible paths, but it also showed from an epistemological point of view how academia had been limited to suitable epistemologies, creating a concept of development that legitimised the expansion of unequal and vertical cooperation instruments and mechanisms.

As a result, Global South countries postulated the foundation of new mechanisms of cooperation. Through these, they tried to alter the principles on which the development aid industry had settled as a vehicle for promoting a development model. This new counter-hegemonic political challenge thus became a propitious space to foster the articulation of joint actions between the members of the South. It looked forward to promote horizontal, equitable, consensual mechanisms of mutual benefit, respecting independence and national sovereignty. Thereby it sought to achieve greater bargaining power and to promote self-reliance and preservation of diversity and cultural identity, denouncing in turn its eternal marginalisation.6

**Unravelling the liberal discourse of an unambiguous development path**

If the contributions of decolonial theorists enable us to acknowledge the presence of legitimating narratives around the concept of development, the ones of poststructuralist theorists open the door to understand “the ways in which Asia, Africa and Latin America became defined as ‘underdeveloped’ and therefore in need of development”.7 To answer the question, we have to inquire how the established legal structures enabled the construction and reproduction of the current international relations.

Now as I previously expressed, the modelling of the narrative of development was possible not only through the establishment of a system of international organisations linked to an international common legal body that ensured its reproduction, but also through its epistemological legitimation. The social and economic life of “underdeveloped” countries became the target of unavoidable intervention by technical specialists that were meant to ensure their transformation into “developed” countries, guaranteeing by doing so their voluntary monitoring. Equally important, however, was the production and circulation of legitimating discourses.

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Moreover, as Foucault expressed, power is everywhere: diffused and embodied in discourse, knowledge and regimes of truth.\(^8\) This theorisation provides an opportunity for understanding how these discursive legitimations, formal institutions and coercive laws hide behind rights and duties the establishment of a normal social behaviour. The mechanisms of international socialisation promote, this way, the disciplining of states and supranational institutions. In this sense, development policies have always been linked to the requirement of good-governance, whereby international organisations generate "performance techniques to assess, reward, or punish the behaviors of governments with regard to fields that were previously considered to fall within their sovereign jurisdiction".\(^9\) But of course, this good-governance conception has only meant to be dictated and justified from the “developed” countries, where Northern dominated institutions have had the right to define it and dictate the path towards it, while non-Northern States have been forced to take responsibility for its never perfect implementation.\(^10\)

Furthermore, the production and circulation of this development discourse was carried out through a double mechanism of professionalization (generation, diffusion and validation of knowledge) and institutionalisation (by using the knowledge produced to generate an institutional framework).\(^11\) Through the establishment of this international network, discourses and techniques were produced and put into operation for exercising power within the international arena. But to complete the puzzle, the Foucaultian conception of a micro-physical power broadens our understanding of how it is also the same subject who, in his actions, reproduces these relationships of domination, normalising and monitoring himself in his interest to defend his rights and duties.

Further, the expansion of values held by the development discourse enabled the normalisation of a political and institutional behaviour through a network of partnerships that included intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, government authorities, sub-national agencies, and the civil society. Moreover, its molecular form of power enabled the configuration of a scale of development-underdevelopment, whereby different tasks were allocated to governments and societies according to their place on this scale. In this regard, international socialisation not only served the interest of creating and implementing institutions, but formed a sort of international government, which

\(^8\) Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2008), 33-34.
\(^9\) Laura Zanotti, “Governmentalizing the Post–Cold War International Regime: The UN Debate on Democratization and Good Governance”, *Alternatives* 30 (2005), 467.
\(^11\) Escobar, “Power and Visibility”.
aimed to induce supranational institutions, governments and populations to behave in a certain way.\textsuperscript{12}

Following this line, Michael Merlingen mentions four distinct socialisation mechanisms\textsuperscript{13} or policies that could actually be quite useful in order to analyse the development scheme. The first one mentioned by the author is teaching, where socialisees act in accordance with the expectations of the socialiser because they think it is the right thing to do. This situation can be observed through the hegemonic crisis of the Brazilian agroexport model in 1930. This background gave rise to the embracing of national-developmentalism ideas, the central axis of which remained on the transformation of the state for the modernisation of the national industry, along with a triangulation between foreign capital, national private initiative and state control of commodities. However, these (later-called) dependency theories engendered in the UN’s Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), still relied on a teleological path to reach (economic) development based on the European experience, and were therefore very closely linked to the contextual needs of developed countries.

The second mechanism, intermediation, refers to socialisation as a cooperative process in which no participant claims a monopoly on correct interpretations and everything is based on establishing consensus. The structuration in 1945 of the United Nations’ General Assembly claimed this ideal on the one hand, while on the other hand the Security Council’s five permanent members had (and still have) the right to veto any resolution. This is closely related to Merlingen’s third mechanism, social influence, where socialisees choose to act in accordance with the expectations of the socialiser to gain certain non-material benefits. For example, Brazil’s entrance to the Second World War helped to stop the pressures coming from the U.S. government towards all of the Latin American dictatorships, which also led the postwar new world order to recognise Brazil as a regional leader.

And finally, through material induction, intergovernmental organisations use material incentives to induct states into its ways of behaviour, leading them to act according to opportunities or threats that alter their political relations. This is probably the most visible example of north-south cooperation, where political and economic cooperation has always been tied to several conditions.

In brief, this institutionalisation perpetuated the traditional hegemonic forms of power, through mechanisms that promoted hierarchical and linear relationships

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\textsuperscript{12} Michael Merlingen, “Governmentality: Towards a Foucauldian Framework for the Study of IGOs”, \textit{Cooperation and Conflict} 38 (2003), 4: 363-364
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
between states. The development discourse gave legitimacy to the establishment of common international standards to qualify, measure and prioritise states, correcting all possible deviations. Hence, development became

the grand strategy through which the transformation of the not-yet-too-rational Latin American/Third World subjectivity [was] to be achieved. (...) Thus the effect of the introduction of development has to be seen not only in terms of its social and economic impact, but also, and perhaps more importantly, in relation to the cultural meanings and practices they upset or modify.14

But of course, resistance is co-extensive with power, namely as soon as there is a power relation, there is a possibility of resistance.15 According to this logic, resisting the constructions would require not only a creative process paying attention to alternative forms of development but also a deconstruction of the existing epistemic constructions.

The woken giant: Lula’s Brazil

The ideological shift in Latin American politics during the first years of the twenty-first century, with the rise to power of “new left” governments, was embraced by most of the leaders of the region as the “Twenty First Century Socialism”. These new political currents were not isolated cases, but were strongly mutually linked, acquiring a marked inter- and transnational dimension.

It was within this process that the union leader Luis Inacio Lula da Silva won the presidency of the Brazilian Republic in 2003. Now, while the main objective during his government was to deepen social policies against worsening living conditions of Brazilian popular classes, Lula maintained a conservative economic policy, continuing the liberal hegemonic cycle inaugurated by his predecessor. This way, the governmental rhetoric raised the advantages of economic stability to achieve sustainable growth, while emphasizing the benefits that this represented for popular sectors through the democratisation of the access to resources and the opening of channels for upward mobility. This promoted greater adherence to the competitive order by the hand of the state, allowing the sociocultural inclusion of the middle strata and the absorption of popular leaders.16

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15 Foucault, Discipline and Punish, 33-34.
From the perspective of productivity, the government took advantage of the international boom in commodity prices and boosted its global insertion as a major supplier of agrifood settling the country’s growth over the surplus in the trade balance. With this macroeconomic stability, confidence in the international market led to a sharp increase in foreign direct investment, transforming the country into the first receiver at regional level and the fourth in the world. Now, from the point of view of development, the Growth Acceleration Plan 2007 gave a major role to public investment through the legal concept of ‘partnership’ as a coordinating mechanism between the public and private sectors. The intention was to restore the productivity of state-owned companies hand in hand with private companies, improving their competitiveness within the country and abroad. Consequently, investments in infrastructure doubled between 2003 and 2010 encouraging greater productivity and reducing regional and social inequalities.¹⁷

Moreover, it was precisely this economic policy which allowed the formulation of a series of social policies that, in addition to generating a redistribution of wealth, gave access to the economic circles to large contingents of the population. Thus, from the social point of view it was intended to address poor equitable distribution of the benefits of growth from the previous decade through the implementation of a set of universal programs to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. These policies also included a large increase in budget expenditure devoted to education, where the investment in Social Sciences’ research programmes was essential to promote critical mass to encourage Brazil’s own deconstruction of development structures.

All these factors enabled the country to start earning greater international relevance, challenging the northern institutional structures within the state framework from a subaltern and resistant southern identity. Its regional leadership, the diversification of its trade through the promotion of bilateral relations, the formation of trading blocs with countries from the Global South, and its role as a promoter of South-South Cooperation mechanisms, led it to exert an increasing role both in Latin America and globally. In addition to that, its push into ancient trade alliances such as MERCOSUR, and its fundamental role as a member of new political / economic conformations intended to serve as a counterbalance to the institutions of the global north in a multipolar world – as BRICS, IBSA and UNASUR – led Brazil to exert an unprecedented power of influence. Its challenge was therefore to encourage transformations in the international system, and at the same time, to open up spaces to alternative political subjects.

The global player’s workhorse: Brazilian South-South Cooperation

And so, contrary to models of minimum state which had advocated international financial institutions and developed powers over the previous decades, Lula’s actions led Brazil to gain credibility on the international scene within the good-government structure, cultivating a well-founded reputation in pacifism, international law and responsibility in fulfilling its obligations. These factors were chased from a combative discursive character showing an explicit will to change the relations between developing countries and traditional powers. In this sense, the government focused on the diversification of the recipients of Brazilian foreign policy, promoting a change in the geography of trade and the formation of coalitions among emerging countries.18

From the perception that the orthodox economic policies of the previous period had been deeply harmful to the societies in a world arranged around asymmetrical rules that favored wealthy countries, South-South Cooperation was rescued as part of a promising future scenario. Based on this, the Brazilian goal became the pursuit of greater autonomy, prompting in turn a multipolar international system and preserving or increasing an independence that would guarantee growth and development. This rhetoric was essential in south-south relations, positioning Brazil as one of the leaders of the Global South in order to challenge the rules of global governance. Brazilian foreign policy ran as a producer and disseminator of an alternative model of cooperation for development, intended to lead the reduction of asymmetries in the international system, and allowing a change of status in the countries of the South from receivers to suppliers. Moreover, this construction sought to strengthen the character of horizontal unconditional cooperation, not only differentiating South-South cooperation from traditional, but also postulating it as an effective source, emphasising the ties of solidarity among developing countries.19

As a consequence, their first step in this direction was to demonstrate a deep commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), emphasising that they could only be guaranteed through the eighth objective: the formation of a global alliance. These proposals were adopted hand in hand with the seeking of political alliances, strategic investments and the transfer of knowledge in a variety of basic sectors that were not limited to the political and the economic areas. Following this line, throughout Lula’s administration, numerous

cooperation initiatives were carried out under the coordination of the Brazilian Cooperation Agency, focused on increasing national capacities with a social and economic impact.

These activities had as their target Africa (48% of the initiatives in 36 beneficiary countries), Latin America and the Caribbean (41%) and Asia and the Middle East (11%); and were carried out in the areas where Brazilian institutions had developed technical expertise. Besides, the Brazilian action was also supported by actions within the framework of TC initiatives with OECD countries and multilateral organisations. But above all, the implementation and deepening of South-South Cooperation was raised as the Brazilian workhorse, opening its experiences and knowledge to other developing countries. In this sense, the axis of Brazilian foreign action was based on its claim as a regional leader and a global player, hoping that this could in turn be translated into an opening of new markets (as well as new opportunities for the Brazilian private sector).

In this sense, the growing importance of the PALOP (the interstate organisation between African Countries of Portuguese Official Language), within the background of the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries (CPSC), was the first step in its expansion towards the rest of Africa. Its strategic nature served as a guiding framework for the priorities of the Brazilian action in SSC, leading these countries to receive 74% of Brazilian technical, scientific and technological cooperation in Africa between 2005 and 2009. This way, the PALOP became the main beneficiaries of Brazilian cooperation in Africa, with Angola one of the most favored (4% of the total).

A model of South-South Cooperation as resistance against traditional hierarchies?

Once the jewels of the Portuguese Empire on the two continents where it had spread its colonial expansion, Angola and Brazil maintained bilateral relations throughout their whole history based on this common colonial and lusophone identity, becoming a fundamental pillar for the construction of the CPSC. In addition, since 2003 this common identity was enhanced through their common peripheral identification as members of the Global South. In this regard, supported by Brazilian international power and Angolan institutional restructuring after a 40-years civil war, the leaders of both countries opted for a redefinition of their bilateral and multilateral relations backed by the options opened by new cooperation mechanisms.

This deepening of their relations provoked an unprecedented increase of their bilateral cooperation agreements, negotiations and actions in multilateral forums, leading in turn to a sharp increase of their projects over the period
2003-2010. As a result, the consolidation of a broad set of bilateral and multilateral agreements was carried out. Among the first, it is important to highlight the technical cooperation protocols on public and local administration, environment, agriculture and livestock, oil, government finances; as well as the cooperation programs on environmental education and culture and the projects for sustainable rural development. From a multilateral point of view, the most important initiatives in which the two countries interacted were the ones related to the PALOP: the Brazil-Africa Politics, Cooperation and Trade Forum 2003; the Africa-South America Summits 2006 and 2009; and the Brazil-Africa Dialogue on Food Security, Famine Fighting and Rural Development 2010.

This broad range of bi- and multilateral agreements were reached thanks to the interest shown by the governments of both countries, expressed through Lula’s official visits to Angola in 2003 and 2007, and Santos’ official visit to Brazil in 2010. The declared objective of these meetings was always the will to expand and diversify political dialogue, demonstrating a strong commitment to deepen cooperation between both countries.

In commercial terms, these agreements led to an exponential increase in relations between the two countries multiplying by six their trading relations between 2002 and 2008. Already in 2007, annual Angolan exports to Brazil reached 460 million dollars, becoming the third African country with more exports to the South American country and the fourth largest importer of its products in Africa. The trade between the two countries resulted in US $ 1.47 billion in 2009, whereby US $ 1.30 billion were Brazilian exports. On the other hand, after Lula’s trip to Angola in 2007, the South American country established a policy of credit lines that led to the signing of seven financial agreements registered in the areas of R & D, health, education, housing and energy. Three years later, the Angolan president’s trip to Brazil allowed the increase of these lines of credit from 2 to 10 billion dollars. This growing exchange between two historical partners was seen as a clear example to follow in the field of bilateral relations of SSC, challenging the vertical relations of traditional cooperation and proposing instead an alternative path to cooperate in terms of equality.

However, it is interesting to notice how the trade flows between Brazil and Angola were marked during the period by a strong asymmetry of the trade balance favorable to the first one, whose action was characterised by its exporter status of manufactured products (71.3 % of the balance sheet total), and an importer status of commodities (71.3%, mainly oil and natural gas). This Brazilian surplus remained unchanged all over this period, with the exception of 2008, when imports of Angolan oil into Brazil (and the sustained growth of

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20Ibid., 99.
international commodity prices) reversed the balance without altering its status as an exporter of manufactured products and a commodities importer.

**South-South Cooperation, resistance with continuities or continuity with resistances?**

Brazil is assuming its greatness, its condition of a country that, throughout life has been a recipient, and is now a donor. We want to help others to get developed.

Lula da Silva, weekly program, ‘Breakfast with the President’ (July 2010)

Beyond the readings made by the governments and intellectuals committed to the cause of the SSC, it is essential to examine the presence of continuities of North-South cooperation within these new mechanisms. From Lula’s arrival to power, Brazilian official rhetoric was critical of the lucrative mechanisms and interests of traditional cooperation, positioning itself as a *partner of the South* through the reinforcement of a ‘horizontal/of-mutual-interest/without-hierarchies’ system of cooperation. Socialisation was this way guaranteed by a theoretically egalitarian and cooperative process, where none of the participants claimed a monopoly and everything was based on consensus (*intermediation*). This combative rhetoric committed to alternative mechanisms of cooperation was shared by all emerging countries (SSC leaders), and in this way institutionalised within the multilateral arena through several international forums.

Nevertheless, the resulting dialectical positioning between a traditional, hierarchical and continuitist cooperation of colonial ties, and an emancipatory, horizontal and resistant cooperation; led to the formulation of a misleading debate that hid the presence of certain continuities legitimised by this rhetoric. As expressed, Brazil sought in the period 2003-2010 to differentiate its proposals on international cooperation against traditional mechanisms, showing a deep commitment to the MDGs (*teaching*) as a path towards a necessary reform of traditional cooperation. Through its political priorities, Lula established a broad set of actions aimed at pushing for the renewal of multiple international institutions (mostly the UN and IMF), heading for an international balance of power where Brazil claimed a role of regional leader and global player (*social influence*). This way, Lula’s administration pursued the creation of a symbolic capital that would allow Brazil to be perceived as a partner concerned with the welfare of the societies of the Global South States, thus facilitating not only its international insertion, but also its access to new markets and the internationalisation of Brazilian companies (*material induction*). This symbolic capital was in turn supported by historical, social and cultural ties, which
explains why Brazilian’s SSC was focused on its relations within the South American region and the PALOP.

Thus, the official Brazilian discourse had its correlation in conceptual terms, in the sense that while the OECD countries considered Official Development Assistance to all flows that had 25% concessionality (which means that only a quarter of the funds should be nonrefundable), the Brazilian Cooperation Agency interpreted that in Brazilian SSC, the flows had to be destined in 100% without concessionalities (total nonreimbursable). Therefore, credits (even those granted through official financial institutions) could not be characterised as such. This posed problems around the dichotomy between a narrow budget and a large variety of bi and multilateral projects to be carried out. This was achieved through two channels: (a) the formulation of low-cost projects; and (b) the search for cooperating partners (TC).

In this sense, while technical cooperation was manifested as an effective and inexpensive instrument, the search for partners confronted the government with new contradictions. On the one hand, the articulation of the country with Global North countries jeopardised its identity as a cooperating country of the South. But on the other hand, this TC allowed the association with a traditional donor (responsible for the financial aid), yielding to Brazil the contribution with human and technical capital. Finally, one of the biggest shortcomings of Brazilian SSC was administrative decentralisation. The Brazilian Cooperation Agency was created in 1987 as coordinator of the reception of official development aid flows. This meant that it lacked the stable regulatory framework needed to coordinate the policy formulation of a cooperating country, and the creation of ad-hoc processes were always necessary. This situation contributed strongly to the presence of large gaps in the scope of private activity.21

In relation to the latter, the path taken by the official discourse regarding the action of private capital was to remain silent, discretely promoting the internationalisation of Brazilian multinational companies through foreign policy. So, since the private sector was not part of the Brazilian State, its actions were not tied to the principles of the SSC, unleashing its own interests. Thus, through the expansion of their internationalisation opportunities, Brazilian companies sought to consolidate their presence in new foreign markets, reproducing the traditional multinationals’ practices within the traditional mechanisms of cooperation.

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As a result, Brazilian SSC discourse has contributed to the restriction of an already present lecture in traditional cooperation mechanisms: the idea that the state was the only recognisable actor responsible for the decision-making process concerning cooperation policies. Against this perspective, a strong deconstructive critic of SSC should analyse the multiplicity of actors trying with all the means at its disposal to influence the foreign policies decision making process. A decolonial theorisation should head towards a reading where the national interest should no longer be seen as a single area defined by a homogeneous state, but as a result of a complex set of interactions between the interests of multiple actors that converge in the formulation of foreign policies.22

This theoretical widening might be a way to start deconstructing the still hierarchical and linear state-centered concept of development. The understanding reached through this multidimensionality of the phenomenon enables us to analyse the multiplicity of logics involved in SSC, warning over the necessity to deepen the discussion on its study away from the Manichean rhetorical conceptions between SSC and traditional cooperation.

Conclusions

It is possible to confirm that the diversification of actors in the Global South and the emergence of mechanisms of South-South cooperation have effectively led to a qualitative expansion of traditional cooperation in multidimensional terms. Hand in hand with the official rhetoric of countries in the Global South, the resulting processes have certainly transformed traditional cooperation and widened it towards different actors. Nevertheless, there have also remained serious continuities, reproducing the previous relationships of domination. Against this, dealing with the still state-centred lecture of international relations and its teleological development path should be one of the priorities of SSC theorists in order to overcome its limits. Thus, the acknowledgment of national interest understood as a result of a complex set of interactions between the interests of multiple actors that come together in the formulation of foreign policies is the first step to epistemologically deconstruct traditional cooperation mechanisms in particular, and international relations in general. To this end, the integration of the two theoretical perspectives analysed could be useful, leading to the acknowledgement of legitimating narratives hand in hand with the reproduction of the current power relations within the international arena.

This situation has been reflected in the geopolitics of development raised by Brazil in its role as a global player. In this sense, while promoting new fundamental projects, the enlargement process of Brazilian cooperation in Africa

also resulted in the increase of the Brazilian private sector, linked to its lucrative interests. This situation created huge contradictions among the conception and objectives of South-South Cooperation and the Brazilian goals of international integration. In this sense, despite focusing on a wider conception of development based on a common identity and intended to transcend the teleological and vertical lecture of traditional mechanisms, this rhetoric may have helped to open the scheme to legitimate new mechanisms of economic subordination within the Global South. Added to that, the recent institutional blow suffered by the government of Dilma Rousseff and the accession to power of most conservative political sectors have questioned the fragility of the Brazilian institutional system, changing as well the focus of its foreign policy. The continuity of the policies for Brazilian cooperation in Africa is, therefore, a puzzle to be solved.

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In this impassioned and eloquent book, Clare Woodford focuses in a distinctively political way on the question of order. Order and ordering are central categories of contemporary political theory, and theorists like Michel Foucault and Judith Butler have made them central by way of the concepts governmentality and subjectification. Fair or not, one of the criticisms that is often raised against both of these thinkers is that they present too totalizing a view of power.

Woodford intervenes at precisely this point of criticism by focusing not principally on the question of how order functions in politics but on how it can be disrupted. She asks, “how orders become more and less restrictive,” and proposes to consider “features of order that may make it more possible for dissent to be articulated and responded to without the need for mass unrest, violence and loss of life” (6). These questions are resolutely political because she asks about action and resistance in the midst of order, and because she asks specifically about action not violence.

Jacques Rancière is both companion and muse to Woodford in this task. Rather than offer another interpretation of his work, she undertakes to elaborate Rancière’s notion of “dis-identification” into a full-blown politics of democratic action. This elaboration begins conceptually, with Woodford clarifying what makes dis-identification distinctive, and then by elucidating – again, conceptually at first – the two practices that it entails: “appropriation” and “subjectification.” Once having established this conceptual framework, Woodford undertakes the important political theoretic project to give specificity to the practice of dissensus – a richly suggestive term that Rancière himself does not fully redeem. She enlists the work of Stanley Cavell, Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler to develop the different modes in which dissensus might be enacted as a way to “disrupt ways of being” (15).

Dis-identification is the moment where a person stops seeing themselves in the terms of the dominant order. If this seems easy, it is not. Terms of the dominant order give our lives purpose and meaning even as we are subordinated to them.
In *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago, 2005) Linda Zerilli makes a powerful argument against the “gender skepticism” of Judith Butler and the French materialist feminists, whose critical denaturalization of sexual difference she reads as a failed political project precisely because it calls for dis-identification. Zerilli cautions that however theoretically powerful gender skepticism may be, it is politically tone deaf to the ways in which so many women – even those who might be critics of sexual domination – identify as women and need to be hailed as women.

Woodford is well aware of just how much dis-identification potentially costs those who practice it, recognizing it as a “challenge to the existing community” that “momentarily leaves those who dis-identify without a place” (33). The central task of this book is to identify such moments, which Woodford certainly does not expect to manifest in grand gestures and dramatic transformations. This is the power of her account. She offers a language in which to capture practices of dis-identification on the scale of the everyday. She finds these, first, in “appropriation”, which can involve taking a space, taking a view when you should be working on and looking at a floor, taking up a term that would not be used to refer to you. Appropriation in this sense is not “simply a material taking but the taking of a ‘way’” (31). If identity orients us in a way of being, then dis-identification cannot proceed by denying that way. If it is to be political (and not merely skeptical), it must indicate another way to be, if only momentarily. Acts of appropriation open onto the second practice, subjectivation, which is the moment of emergence of a new political subject who no longer relates “to the dominant order as a subordinate,” but acts “as an equal who, in that moment, is in charge of his/her own actions” (32).

Woodford puts this careful conceptual work to use as a theoretical frame for thinking about occupation, which despite being much celebrated has been little interrogated as to how it works to “enact democracy” (50). Woodford uses her tripartite conceptual scheme to more precisely theorize occupation, as “effect[ing] politics through bringing together appropriation, dis-identification and subjectivation,” and also to criticize it. Whereas occupation has tended to focus on taking space, Woodford suggests that it need not. She points to Argentinian “barter clubs” and debt cancellations schemes as practices that “appropriate the behaviour of creditors and brokers” but, as they occur without taking over the physical institutional space of those actors, they may not register as disruptive (52). Drawing on her careful elucidation of appropriation, Woodford argues that highly visible and publicized disruptions that take over space (like Occupy Wall Street and its spin-offs) may shut “down activity” but are “less able to demonstrate alternative ways of being, doing and saying than disruption that produces or creates” (52).
By exploring Rancière’s relationship to both Stanley Cavell and Jacques Derrida, Woodford elaborates practices that “could help to weaken our attachment to ways of doing and saying” (151). In her final chapter, she brings Rancière into dialogue with Judith Butler to recover the political aspects of Butler’s notion of subversion, which Butler may well have let fall in her turn to theorize the psychic life of power and to elaborate an ethical project. Dissatisfied with Butler’s own responses to such critics as Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib, who have argued that Butler cannot account for the possibility of transformative political agency “without having to commit to an untenable notion of a volitional subject,” Woodford charges back onto this field of battle bearing Rancièrian reinforcements (165). Woodford astutely argues that with her theorization of unintelligibility, Butler makes her conceptualization of subject-formation a closed circle. Seemingly like Rancière, Butler “sketch[es] the sensory domain as one of intelligibility versus unintelligibility, real versus unreal” (169). Yet, by mapping this distinction onto that which “structures whether or not one is compelled to live a liveable or an unliveable life,” Butler closes the circle. Butler’s “unintelligibility” is not unintelligible in Rancière’s sense of that “which cannot be identified on a scale of either sense or nonsense”; it is “intelligible as lesser, lacking, non-human, derisory or subordinated” (169). Put simply, Butler’s unintelligibility “is intelligible” after all and this is what makes her unable to elaborate the possibility of performativity to do precisely what Rancière so powerfully offers: “force open the sensory order and create the possibility for reconfiguration” (170).

As Woodford rightly notes, her post-2008 project was launched at a time of “a growing sense of optimism and anticipation” (4). That it finds publication at an unquiet moment, where political theorists and political actors struggle to understand and respond to right-wing authoritarianism around the globe, makes it no less pertinent. This time, our time, lends to the words of her title – “disorienting democracy” – a dual meaning: they name at once the practices of hope that she so eloquently theorizes and the state of questioning in which many of us find ourselves as events test our faith that democracy breeds freedom rather than its opposite.

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The disappointments of contemporary political institutions are perhaps best captured in the seeming emptiness of concepts such as “democracy” and “rights.” However, along with a loss of faith in these concepts, there is an emerging understanding that alternative politics will have to be borne out of place-based struggles. The discontents of both national democracies and international organizations have led to a “re-localization” of resistance – not only in the practice of politics, but also in efforts to give these stories of struggle a place in academic research. Hence even International Relations is now being repopulated with subjects experimenting with radical politics – we are told that democracy and rights have to be practiced, and studied, bottom-up, for them to have any meaning. This is a more than welcome development for a discipline that has long operated on levels of analysis devoid of individual struggle. Robin Dunford’s *The Politics of Transnational Peasant Struggle: Resistance, Rights and Democracy* offers a valuable contribution to this project: it deals with theoretical debates on resistance, democracy, and human rights by engaging with one particular struggle, that of the transnational peasant resistance. By setting to learn from specific struggles without engaging in ethnographic fieldwork, the book goes beyond its explicit goals and challenges the scales of both political and academic practice.

While the book is organized around the concepts of resistance, democracy, and rights, it also offers a much needed introduction to the contemporary industrial, export-oriented model of food and agriculture as a site of both oppression and struggle in international politics. These politics of food are best captured in the eight vignettes that open Chapter Two and take us on a world tour of dispossession, local resistance, global governance negotiations, and elite investment meetings. The vignettes capture the multiscalar nature of international politics: they empirically track the dramas of food politics that
range from MST\textsuperscript{1} activists shot at in Brazil in 1996, to UN negotiations on the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure. It is through being attuned to these issues of scale that the book makes a twofold contribution: it empirically tracks the intersections of scales through making visible specific struggles that are both particular and demand universality, and it challenges researchers to do the same through informing theoretical debates with place-based practices.

With Chapter Two having set the stage by providing a background on the contemporary industrial food system, Chapters Three through Six rework the concepts that make the book: resistance, rights, and democracy. Since the aim of the book is to use transnational peasant resistance to inform abstract debates surrounding resistance, rights, and democracy, each chapter is thus organized around a theoretical debate in the opening section, and a discussion of peasant resistance that transcends what seem to be opposing views in these theoretical debates.

Chapter Three shows how this agro-industrial capitalist food system is challenged through local practices of peasant resistance that call for food sovereignty. The chapter is situated within the debate around the possibilities of revolutionary change after the breakdown of the ‘traditional’ left politics (44). Dunford looks at transnational peasant resistance as an example of what he calls the “left arts of government” that provide a solution between competing calls for the restoration of a hierarchical party on the one hand, and anarchist celebrations of pluralist, place-based alternatives on the other. It tracks the MST’s land occupations to see how they incite and facilitate local spaces of resistance, how these practices have extended resistance transnationally to other grassroots groups, and how they have thus enabled the groups to engage with international institutions that are usually devoid of such voices (43-44). It is this inciting, facilitating, and engaging that explains how “particular, place-based alternatives go beyond providing isolated pockets of resistance [and] give rise to a broader, counter-hegemonic movement demanding a global alternative.” (43)

Chapters Four and Five use peasant resistance as “a site from which to reflect on the politics of human rights.” (77) Specifically, they focus on three critiques of human rights, emphasizing that there is nothing inherently emancipatory or dominatory about rights, but that this character of human rights depends on the context in which they are used. This leads Dunford to claim that “the politics of human rights is itself a terrain of struggle.” (78) And it is these politics that navigate the narrow road between two opposing views of human rights: one that

\textsuperscript{1} Brazilian Landless Workers Movement – Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra.
advocates stripping them to a supposedly universal core and spreading them around the world, and the other advocating leaving them completely behind.

Chapters Four and Five deal with – indeed, criticize and go beyond – three contemporary critiques of human rights. Chapter Four shows how the MST’s land occupations and Via Campesina’s transnational demands for food sovereignty go beyond seeing human rights as anti-politics and the subjects invoking them as abjected victims. These two critiques are challenged by highlighting practices in which peasants themselves politically demanded their rights. Chapter Five in turn shows how the meaning of food sovereignty is made by grassroots actors and counterpoises the literature on the global diffusion of human rights ‘norms’ that focuses on elite agency and reads human rights as having some pre-existing universality. This addresses the third critique of human rights as West-centric and shows how their meaning does not always emerge from Western experience but can be made through exchange and dialogue.

Finally, Chapter Six reflects upon the concept of global democracy. Here, Dunford criticizes the idea of cosmopolitan democracy by pointing out how it reproduces coloniality by universalizing a particular worldview, and imagining the global elites who benefit from unequal structures as agents of change (143). The chapter thereby shows how the contemporary democratic deficit cannot be resolved either by returning to the ideal of strong national government nor by strengthening the power of international organizations (155). By focusing on “practices of collective emancipation and transnational connection” of the peasant movement, the chapter demonstrates how grassroots actors can become agents of democratic change (162). This acting on multiple scales allows the globality of democracy practiced by the peasant movement to emerge “through processes of transnational and intercultural dialogue” which are inevitably place-based, instead of being presupposed and then “elevate[d] to a global scale.” (164)

The book engages the scalarity of politics that oscillates between place-based struggles and their universal demands directly, claiming that “the local and transnational are not opposed.” (132) Food sovereignty presents an ideal case study for this exploration because the struggle for it is at the same time particular and universal: it is inevitably based in specific locales that experiment with land use and growing food, but its contemporary imagination is inescapably global as it understands that food sovereignty cannot exist alongside the agro-industrial food regime that constantly undermines it ecologically and economically, but must replace it globally. Such a struggle, concerned with the micro while maintaining its global vision, “operates simultaneously as a form of place-based resistance and as a form of transnational and global resistance,” and
its protagonists act on multiple scales simultaneously. It is this empirical unpacking of scale that Dunford’s book excels in, from the vignettes that open it to its conclusion on the potentials of global democracy.

Yet the book also challenges the constitution of scales in academic research. It explicitly contests epistemic coloniality by refusing to treat peasant actors as having only “‘local’ or ‘vernacular’ forms of knowledge and understanding.” (118) To do so, Dunford engages with peasants’ struggle through secondary literature and publications of peasant organizations themselves. The positive reading of transnational peasant struggles as offering a way out of multiple theoretical debates might seem overly optimistic. And surely, the first critique that might be raised against such an account is that it is a case of Ortner’s “ethnographic refusal” so common in ethnographically thin resistance studies. The charge against such studies is that they are sanitizing politics of resistance by focusing only on the relationship between the dominant and the subordinate (in this case, the industrial food regime and the peasants) and erasing the politics among the subaltern and the many hierarchies they operate within. Moreover, such ethnographic refusal results in thinning culture and subjectivity by presupposing authenticity and coherence where there is complexity of “intentions, desires, fears, projects.”

While the book does not address the complexity of intentions and projects of peasant activists, what sets it apart from other accounts of resistance and moves it beyond the above critique is its explicit goal. Instances of ethnographic refusal are acknowledged in the book: the efforts to include voices of women, and youth are glanced over, the indigenous attachment to land is seen as something culturally essential, and the multiplicity of subjectivities is recognized in footnotes that provide the caveat that the book’s reading is selective. What makes this permissible is the explicit positioning of the book: it is not an attempt to “give a definitive account of practice of peasant resistance,” nor to provide “a richer, more theoretically informed account [...] that should then inform, from the vantage point of the theorist downward, their struggles” – its goal is to take peasant resistance seriously and learn from it to inform debates around democracy, rights, and resistance – debates that are not of immediate concern to peasants themselves (9-10). And in stating and doing this explicitly, the book also challenges the scales of academic research.

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3 Ibid., 180, 190.
4 For a different account of attachments to land, see Tania Li, Land’s End: Capitalist Relations on an Indigenous Frontier (Durham; London: Duke University Press, 2014).
Without doing fieldwork, Dunford seriously engages with peasant transnational struggles through accounts of organizations like MST and ethnographic literature, and thus transcends the bounds of ‘theory’ and ‘field’ that we are used to. The book shows that meaningful engagement is possible without subscribing to the myth of the anthropological field\(^5\) – not just through paying attention to the world of political practice, but also by making a conscious effort to learn from it. While concerned with informing theoretical debates, the book showcases the importance of particular local struggles. Namely, they are productive in two ways. Firstly, if there is to be a global emancipatory project, its globality has to emerge through local politics instead of being presumed and bound up with an epistemic coloniality that gives particular values a universalist veneer. And secondly, the local should also be productive of our theories, regardless of how much we (do not) engage in fieldwork. To make these two crucial arguments, the transnational peasant movement is used strategically: Dunford’s book is politically aligned with the peasant struggle without the hubris of trying to advise it, and it is politically concerned with introducing existing politics into abstract debates on the promises of resistance, rights, and democracy.

Dunford is aware the book might be of “little concern to peasants” and that any attempts to provide “more sophisticated readings of their struggle” or recommendations, would go against the spirit of the book. As such, the book is reflective of its position and its relation to its object of study. Yet, it is its position in academic debates on resistance, rights, and democracy that brings out its most important points: the productive power of place-based struggles, which works to challenge the scales of both contemporary atomized political practice and neoliberal academia.

\(^5\) For a discussion on ‘the field,’ see Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, eds., *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field Science* (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1997), especially chapter 1.