



## Non-ephemeral nomads

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### review of

Feigenbaum, A., F. Frenzel and P. McCurdy (2013) *Protest camps*. London: Zed Books. (PB, pp. 272, £16.99/\$29.95, ISBN 9781780323558)

*Protest camps* is an inside look at various protest camps all over the world, from Resurrection City in Washington, DC to Greenham Common in the United Kingdom and to Horizon in Stirling, Scotland; from Tahrir Square in Cairo, Egypt to OccupyLSX in London. The book provides a detailed account on how protest camps work to achieve their goals. More specifically, it provides both inside and outside accounts of protest camps. The book thereby takes into account several theoretical approaches, such as a sociological, a political science, and a communications approach. By integrating these different approaches, the authors develop a framework capable of studying protest camps in a more robust way.

Anna Feigenbaum, Fabian Frenzel, and Patrick McCurdy argue that protest camps are spaces where people gather to create and experience an alternative world with others, while sharing a common antagonism against the state. In their 'research framework', the authors refer to Chela Sandoval's book published in 2000, *The methodology of the oppressed*, and borrow her notion of the 'concept soup' (814). The 'concept soup' is an interdisciplinary approach to research that seeks to combine concepts and ideas from different periods and perspectives which can help authors to better understand and navigate political struggles under the conditions of global capitalism. Thus, different approaches,

backgrounds and expertise on existing debates about social movements and protest camps are brought together, based on extant literature. Amongst others, spatiality and temporality, actor-network theory, affect, ecology, and autonomy are concepts that have been used in the authors' concept soup.

*Protest camp* is a compelling book, full of detailed information on several protest camps, a fact that helps the reader to understand how a protest camp works in everyday life from start to finish. It talks in much detail about the interactions among the people inside and outside of the camps. The book also discusses very specific factors that affect protest camps and their communication, such as the diversity of tactics employed (123) or the use of different signals (e.g. hand signals) in processes of consensus decision-making (150). Above all, the authors yet employ spatiality and temporality techniques, two techniques that characterise any protest camp. Notions of space have significant importance in understanding the physicality and dynamics of a protest camp, as well as its temporality. Temporality involves the question of whether a protest camp lasts for an afternoon or a decade. As the authors argue, no matter how long the protest camp lasts, the occupied places are always recognised as places where ideas and people converge.

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is another conceptual tool which informs the authors' approach throughout the book. ANT helps to understand how interdependencies among people, groups, relations and objects emerge and function. According to the authors these interdependencies are also related to the language of ecology (21), a language that tries to make sense of how people live interdependently with other living creatures, things, and environmental conditions. The relationships between human and non-human agencies (such as environmental conditions) also link the authors' ideas to those found in Guattari's (2005) work, *The three ecologies*. In addition to using concepts from ANT and ecology, theories of affect, emotion in social movements, and affective labour are, besides, taken into consideration by the authors. Moreover, the often articulated need to discuss the notion of autonomy in the context of social movement analyses has been seized by the authors and their 'concept soup'. Feigenbaum et al. argue that autonomy plays an increasingly important role in the practices of social movements and has thus moved to the centre of political theory explaining social movements.

As the authors are researcher activists, they are at the same time insiders and outsiders of the protest camps explored. They are insiders because they have participated in some protest camps. They are simultaneously outsiders because they have not participated in all the protests discussed in the book. Generally the authors have a very rich empirical data basis consisting of interview data,

documentary analysis and visual analysis. In order to make sense of their data, they developed a so-called theory and practice of ‘infrastructural analysis’ (27). Feigenbaum et al. use the term infrastructure to capture how protest campers build interrelated, operational structures for their daily living – whereby structures, and the practices attached to them, function together and create miniature societies able to disseminate information and provide services (27). Basically this theory and practice of infrastructural analysis establishes a set of material criteria as well as some general modes of operation shared among all camps. ‘Infrastructural analysis’ include the following components: media and communication infrastructure and practice (e.g. media strategies, distribution networks, production techniques); action infrastructure and practices (e.g. direct action tactics, police negotiations, legal aid, medical support, transportation networks); governance infrastructures and practice (e.g. formal and informal decision-making processes); and re-creation infrastructures and practices (e.g. food supply, shelter, sanitation, maintenance of communal and private space). The authors argue that when these four organisational dimensions interact, they enable and hinder one another and, while doing so, create the distinct architecture of each protest camp. The authors, besides, claim that looking at these infrastructures *across* camps facilitates an analysis of how organisational designs, ideas, and material practices travel and spread in multiple directions. Thus, the four organisational dimensions also allow the authors to compare and contrast different protest camps.

The book is divided into six chapters, each of which represents one of the infrastructures mentioned above. The ‘media infrastructures’ chapter demonstrates and analyses protest campers’ efforts to manage mainstream media and illustrates their persistent endeavours to create their own media representations of camp life, e.g. through the use of documentary video and live-streaming technology. The ‘action infrastructures’ chapter focuses on direct action and on how the camps’ direct actions are normalised. It, besides, elaborates on the diversity of tactics (122) that are used in protest camps and, in particular, on how protest campers reorient their tactics in response to collective reflections and interactions with the police. In this chapter, the authors also introduce the idea of ‘protest action ecology’ (125), i.e. the idea of moving away from the binary oppositions that plague the ‘diversity of tactics’ debate. The idea of protest action ecology can also provide room for understanding the complexities of both people and objects involved in protest camp infrastructures. This allows the reader to imagine the spaces, objects, and feelings that such tactics involve in actual protest camps.

Horizontal decision-making is the object of the next chapter, a chapter dedicated to ‘governance infrastructures’. The main argument of this chapter relies on the

procedural and spatial practices of protest camps and on how these influence decision-making in protest camps. The 'recreation infrastructures' of protest camps is the next chapter of the book. This chapter discusses the use of space and shelter, food, mobile kitchens, toilets, barricades, childcare, and the like. It is noteworthy to state that the authors seek to uncover more than just how these mobile facilities work; they also point to the bio-political nature of protest camps, and to how their facilities may become political expressions of autonomy, often against the status quo, where campers actively seek to produce an alternative and 'better' world (30).

Protest camps have massive impacts on most countries in the world, whether political or environmental. The sad news of Ukraine's protest campers' deaths is the latest news from protest camps all over the world. Hopefully, these protests will lead to a better life for Ukrainians. However, this example, along with other great examples mentioned in the book, demonstrate the need to have a comprehensive insight into protest camps in order to better get to know those occupied places. The authors of the book have managed to achieve this. *Protest Camps* is a detailed work on the different types of infrastructures that protest camps use in their work and organisation. It will definitely help researchers and others interested in protest camps to study these occupied spaces from a variety of different perspectives.

A point of criticism is, however, that the theoretical framework of this book does not fully engage with the rich data set that the authors have collected. Besides, the introduction is, in my view, a little bit too long. Another issue that might have been worth exploring refers to the question of leadership within and among the protest camps. For instance, there are two protest camps that are claimed and dubbed to be leaderless, the Tahrir Square and OccupyLSX, and it might have been interesting, for researchers but also the wider public, to hear a bit more about their (non)leadership practices and styles. One well-known example, illustrating what happens in place of (non)leadership in social movements, is the 'Tyranny of structurlessness' (Freeman, 1972) where both the media and the public were struggling to find leader(s). Generally, questions of leadership could have been covered in the 'governance infrastructures' chapter where horizontal decision making was the object of study. Nevertheless and as aforementioned, the book provides a valuable and insightful window into the life in protest camps – not least because the authors are insiders as well as outsiders of some of the camps explored. This hands-on and observational experience makes the book an excellent resource to refer to while researching the organisation of social movements and concomitant debates.

## references

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