

Bruno Frère • Marc Jacquemain
Editors

Everyday Resistance

French Activism in the 21st Century

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Bruno Frère
FNRS, Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Liège
Liège, Belgium

Marc Jacquemain
Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Liège
Liège, Belgium

Based on a translation from the French language edition:
Résister au quotidien ? by Bruno Frère and Marc Jacquemain
Copyright © PRESSES DE LA FONDATION NATIONALE DES SCIENCES
POLITIQUES 2013
All Rights Reserved.
Translation by Josh Booth.

ISBN 978-3-030-18986-0 ISBN 978-3-030-18987-7 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18987-7>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer
Nature Switzerland AG 2020

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the
Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of
translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on
microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval,
electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now
known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this
publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are
exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.
The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information
in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the
publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to
the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The
publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and
institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature
Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

CONTENTS

1 Introduction: Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom?	1
Marc Jacquemain and Bruno Frère	
2 Undocumented Families and Political Communities: Parents Fighting Deportations	21
Damien de Blic and Claudette Lafaye	
3 From Indicting the Law to Conquering Rights: A Case- Study of Gay Movements in Switzerland, Spain and Belgium	45
Marta Roca i Escoda	
4 Fighting for Poor People's Rights in the French Welfare State	75
Frédéric Viguiier	
5 The Plural Logics of Anti-Capitalist Economic Movements	97
Éric Dacheux	
6 The Free Software Community: A Contemporary Space for Reconfiguring Struggles?	117
Gaël Depoorter	

7	Associations for the Preservation of Small-Scale Farming and Related Organisations Fabrice Ripoll	145
8	Ordinary Resistance to Masculine Domination in a Civil Disobedience Movement Manuel Cervera-Marzal and Bruno Frère	175
9	A Zone to Defend: The Utopian Territorial Experiment of Notre Dame Des Landes Sylvaine Bulle	205
10	“Politics Without Politics”: Affordances and Limitations of the Solidarity Economy’s Libertarian Socialist Grammar Bruno Frère	229
11	Is the “New Activism” Really New? Lilian Mathieu	263
12	Conclusion Bruno Frère and Marc Jacquemain	281
	Index	299

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Sylvaine Bulle is Professor of Sociology at the National School of Paris Val de Seine. She is a member of Cresppa-LabTop (Centre de Recherche de sociologie politique de Paris, Laboratoire Théorie du Politique), part of the University of Paris 8 and Paris 10.

Manuel Cervera-Marzal has a PhD in political science. He is currently a postdoctoral researcher at Aix-Marseille Université (DICE, UMR 7318, LabexMed) and at the FNRS (University of Liège).

Éric Dacheux is Professor of Information and Communication Sciences at Université Clermont Auvergne (UCA) (Clermont Fd) where he founded the research group “Communication and Solidarity” (EA 4647). He is a member of the management committee of RIUESS (Interuniversity Network of Social and Solidarity Economy Researchers) and supervises doctoral theses on communication problems encountered by ESS actors.

Damien de Blic is Associate Professor in Political Science at University of Paris 8 (Saint-Denis) and is affiliated to the Center for Sociological and Political Research in Paris (CRESPPA-LabTop).

Gaël Depoorter has a PhD in sociology, and is a researcher at CURAPP-ESS (UMR 7319) at Picardie Jules-Verne University (Amiens, France). He is associated with GERiCO at the University of Lille (France) where he teaches in the Department of Information and Communication.

Bruno Frère is FNRS senior research associate and Professor at the University of Liège, Belgium, and at Paris I Pantheon Sorbonne, France. He is the author or editor of, among other works, *Epistémologie de la Sociologie* (with Marc Jacquemain, 2008), *Le Nouvel Esprit Solidaire* (2009), *Résister au Quotidien* (with Marc Jacquemain, 2013), *Le Tournant de la Théorie Critique* (2015) and *Repenser l'émancipation* (to be published in 2020, with Jean-Louis Laville).

Marc Jacquemain is Professor of Sociology at the University of Liège, Belgium. He is the author of *La raison névrotique* (2002) and *Le sens du juste* (2005). He is co-editor of, among others, *Epistémologie de la sociologie* (with Bruno Frère, 2008), *Résister au Quotidien* (with Bruno Frère, 2013) and *Engagements actuels, actualité des engagements* (with Pascal Delwit, 2010).

Claudette Lafaye is Associate Professor in Sociology at University of Paris 8 (Saint-Denis), and is affiliated to the Laboratoire Architecture Ville Urbanisme Environnement (LAVUE).

Lilian Mathieu is a sociologist. He is senior researcher in the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) and a member of the Centre Max Weber in the Ecole Normale Supérieure Lyon, France.

Fabrice Ripoll received his PhD in social geography from the University of Caen (France) in 2005. He is Maître de conférences (associate professor) of social geography at the Paris-Est Créteil Val-de-Marne University (France) and at the Lab'URBA. He just obtained accreditation to supervise (doctoral) research (HDR).

Marta Roca i Escoda is a sociologist, and lecturer at the Institute for Gender Studies of the University of Lausanne. After graduating in sociology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, she wrote her PhD dissertation in sociology at the University of Geneva, entitled "Mise en jeu et mise en cause du droit dans le processus de reconnaissance des couples homosexuels". She is also an associate researcher at the Research Group on Public Action (Free University of Brussels).

Frédéric Viguié is a sociologist and clinical associate professor at the Institute of French Studies, New York University. His research interests focus on inequalities in France and the Francophone world, how they are perceived and represented, and how they are addressed by social policies and policies of educational democratization.

Introduction: Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom?

Marc Jacquemain and Bruno Frère

The societies of Western Europe—"Old Europe", as George W. Bush's Secretary of Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, called it—have lived for three full decades through what one might call a "crisis of social conflict". That doesn't necessarily mean that the level of conflict has become lower—even if the hypothesis seems true for a fraction of this period—but rather that the conflict has become less structured and so less easy to grasp. In a recent work on new critical thought, sociologist Razmig Keucheyan (2014: 4) summarises the situation in a formula we can easily agree with: "Today's world resembles the one in which classical Marxism emerged. In other respects, it is significantly different—above all, no doubt, in the absence of a clearly identified 'subject of emancipation'".

In both its Marxist and social-democratic tendencies, the historic workers' movement drew on a considerable symbolic resource: a *teleology* in which the proletariat, a special actor, had a "natural" calling to the

M. Jacquemain

Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Liège, Liège, Belgium
e-mail: Marc.Jacquemain@ulg.ac.be

B. Frère (✉)

FNRS, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Liège, Liège, Belgium
e-mail: bfrere@ulg.ac.be

© The Author(s) 2020

B. Frère, M. Jacquemain (eds.), *Everyday Resistance*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-18987-7_1

universal. Its emancipation was supposed to emancipate the whole of humanity, and the question of what form the resultant classless society would take could be left to future generations. To be sure, this teleology posed significant problems. What should be done, for example, about the desire for national emancipation, about the rejection of colonialism and sexism? But it nonetheless provided a compass, a “red thread” which allowed all forms of resistance to be linked at least on the level of the imagined. This vision of the world has now lost its relevance because capitalism’s “displacements” have “defeated” the historic actor with universal calling by denying it a clearly identifiable adversary (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005 [1999]), leaving only a landscape strewn with injustices that are deeply felt but difficult to identify and to denounce, and still more difficult to link together. Institutions evade responsibility for and refuse to describe the multiple injustices whose victims are the weak (Boltanski 2011 [2009]). The weak then experience an “indignation” without a target; they might even feel culpable if they accept that their lot is inscribed in the nature of things, or in the world itself, to use Luc Boltanski’s terminology again (2011 [2009]). Responsible for their own fortune, they only get what they deserve.

But the injustices persist. Even when they become difficult to theorise, even if reality tends to conceal itself, all the indicators point towards their having worsened over the last three decades. During that time, the attention of political scientists and sociologists has been drawn increasingly to situated and often monothematic practical demonstrations of resistance to injustice. These forms of resistance were not all born yesterday, as Lilian Mathieu and Bruno Frère observe in their chapters. Some of them have even been around for several decades. But they all benefit from increased visibility now that the “tide” of totalising and politicised social critique, that of the historic workers’ movement, has been partially taken out of circulation.

The social-scientific literature of the last 15 years has often described these practical forms of resistance in terms of a transformation of engagement (Ion et al. 2005; Jacquemain and Delwit 2010; Vassallo 2010; Tilly and Wood 2013). The “total activism” that developed within the traditional workers’ movement was said to have been replaced by a “distanced” engagement: activists now fought for a specific cause and for a given time; they refused to “sacrifice themselves” for the cause; selfish and altruistic motivations coexisted. This last point is, without doubt, one of the most controversial: in the classical conception of commitment as defended, for

example, by Hirschman (1982), invoking personal, selfish, reasons for commitment destroyed the value of even public engagement.¹

But we cannot even be sure that these characteristics of contemporary modes of activism are new (Kriesi 1995) or not (Pichardo 1997)—an old question that is still actively debated (Peterson et al. 2015). There is no doubt that, as Snow and Soule remind us, there are differences between, for example, the cultural struggles of LGBTQ+ and ecological movements—which want to secure procedural rights and protect lifestyles—and the “older movements” (trade unions, etc.)—which are oriented towards labour and correcting distributional inequities (2010: 236). This seems to be particularly true in the case of France, where some have no hesitation in talking about “new citizenship” or “new associativeness” in the public sphere—which differs dramatically from formalised structures such as parties and trade unions (Waters 2003: 147, 21). And this kind of distinction even inspires the thoughts of critical philosophers (Fraser and Honneth 2003). On the other hand, as Lilian Mathieu suggests, some claimed novelties may consist more in an effect of “belief”, in a displacement of the sociological gaze, than in a transformation of reality. Besides, one can easily imagine that it is not just the social sciences that are responsible for this displacement—that the activists themselves engage in *storytelling* that foregrounds those forms of activism that are socially valued at a given point in time. Thus, the existential difficulties linked to activist engagement certainly afflicted the workers’ movement of the 1920s, just as they afflicted the activist movements of the 1960s, as autobiographical memoirs attest. But today they are without a doubt easier to integrate explicitly into the canonical account of activist experience.

This is why the texts assembled here do not seek to address this question of novelty. They present a sample of experiences all of which provide evidence of forms of collective resistance to injustice in our cognitive² (Moulier-Boutang 2011) and connectionist (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005 [1999]) capitalist societies. What these texts have in common is that they all—to different degrees—privilege a *pragmatic* approach: they set out to describe this resistance through actors’ concrete practices, reconstructing the rules that these actors set themselves in order to decide on the legitimacy of their own engagement. For pragmatic sociology, the sociologist cannot claim to know the reasons for actors’ concrete practice better than the actors themselves—and this is because the sociologist does not necessarily have access to a privileged viewpoint. This work thus sees itself as very different from a sociology that “unveils”, whose ambition is

to free *hidden reality* from domination so as to better combat it (Boltanski and Thévenot [1991] 2006; Frère and Laville forthcoming; Frère and Jaster 2018). It also distances itself from a sociology that is too “generalising”—a sociology that aims to sketch a universal model of activism today. Yet, the chapters collected here are united by a common hypothesis: that committing to a cause implies a fundamental moral ability to be outraged by injustice. But this ability can be deployed at very different levels of generality. It is through the empirical analysis of practices and justificatory discourses that we must uncover the logic of each of these forms of resistance—the *moral grammar* of an indignation that although effective may struggle, even refuse, to “rise to generality”, to acquire a theoretical justification (Boltanski [2009] 2011).

The examples taken up in this book constitute a sample of practices because they by no means include all instances of resistance to contemporary injustice. Common to all of them is their focus on France or, more accurately, the French-speaking world, following in the footsteps of existing well-known studies (Cerny 1982; Duyvendack 1995). Why focus on France? Probably for the reasons highlighted by Waters (2003: 2):

France provides a particularly rich and fascinating setting in which to observe social movements. This is after all a nation defined historically by mass popular uprising, whose values, principles and ideals have been fashioned by a deep-seated revolutionary tradition. French culture was created through dissent, through constant challenges to the status quo. From the Revolution of 1789 and the Paris Commune of 1871 to the more recent events of May 1968 or the ‘big strikes’ of 1995, the course of French history has been punctuated by moments of profound social and political upheaval. More than with any other European country, conflict lies at the heart of French political life and is woven into the very fabric of society, symbolising for many the ideals of popular resistance, democratic change and the struggle for justice.³

On the wide spectrum of social movements that can be classified as belonging to the European “new left”—which demand global justice while pointing to an almost stunning diversity of candidates for emancipation (Flesher Fominaya and Cox 2013)—those who were at the origin of the alter-globalist movement in the 1990s and 2000s are today well known and have captured the attention of all the specialists (Sommier and Fillieule 2013: 48). Thus, we no longer focus on *droits devant* or AC! (who fought for the rights of the unemployed), ATTAC (the Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions) or José Bové’s *confédération paysanne*,

who were among the era’s central actors (Morena 2013). Even if the alter-globalist tendency is no longer there to unify the movement, the fact remains that in its margins—or a short time after its decline—forms of struggle were born that are less well known and have less media presence. But it is probably they who are aiming to keep the spirit of this “new left” alive today. And it is them who we focus on in this collection.

Remaining within this geographical frame, which has no pretensions towards universality, the examples described here clearly show both the *diversity* of contemporary forms of left-wing engagement in France and their *vitality* at very different scales. All these forms of engagement are unfolding at a conjuncture which could be described, from a more macro-sociological point of view, as a phase of “resilience”: even if it has really become more difficult to think about, and *a fortiori* to organise, social contestation during the last 30 years, the “black hole” of the 1980s—during which the discourse of “triumphal” capitalism convinced even (and sometimes primarily) those who lost most from it of its truth—has nonetheless come to a close.⁴

Even if the books’ chapters do not explicitly endorse this description of the present, most of their authors seem to see in it a plausible outline of the *global context* in which current forms of engagement are situated. With the fundamental resource of a totalising narrative schema no longer at their disposal, it is logical that these instances of resistance should do two things: first, that they should look to concrete situations for resources; but second, that they should once more pose themselves—but with noticeably greater difficulty than in the past—the question of the “rise to generality”⁵—the question of how to move towards a political demand for social transformation.

Though the forms of resistance presented here may be diverse in terms of their focus and their mode of organisation, it is nonetheless possible to make connections that point towards potentially generalisable logics. By beginning with these experiments studied in their particularity, it is possible to pose questions that concern all of them. Three points, in particular, are worth mentioning, all of which seem even more striking than during the zenith of anti-globalisation.

In the absence of an immediately available “horizon of expectations”, how can indignation express itself and what role do the pressures of necessity play? How can resistance arise from the brute experience of injustice and to what extent does this experience constrain the form in which resistance expresses itself?

How do these instances of resistance position themselves in relation to institutions and in particular to the state? Is it a question of opposing the established authorities, of adapting to them, of enrolling them as allies, or some of all these things simultaneously? How can these problems be resolved in the face of a state whose boundaries have become increasingly elusive?

What resources can these forms of resistance mobilise in a period that appears hostile to them? Are there some themes that lend themselves better than others to transforming local resistance into global critique?

THE PRESSURES OF NECESSITY

The impact of necessity—and even of urgency—is a topic common to most of the engagements described here. In their study of the Réseau Éducation Sans Frontières (RESF, the Education Without Borders Network), Claudette Lafaye and Damien de Blic (Chap. 2) show how parents and teachers discover that the threat of expulsion has suddenly disrupted the “everyday and unremarkable” worlds of students and their parents. Here, moral indignation reaches its maximum; this moral register is a powerful “boost” to a highly committed type of activism that consists of regular support and presence. In the case of the RESF, it is easy to imagine that “there is no room for asking questions”: a strong activist response is almost inevitable because it is difficult to “pass by” something that happens to someone who—because they belong to a “community” (whether centred around the neighbourhood or schools)—is already completely endowed with the attributes of an individual. The example of the RESF brings this logic of necessity—which involves a commitment that almost “goes without saying”—into sharp focus. In this case, actors stick closely to moral indignation and, if they move away from this indignation (towards the more abstract register of the civic city, which questions the legitimacy of current immigration policy), the activist response loses its legitimacy. This allows the RESF’s activism to be locally effective; at this scale, weak generalisation allows allies to be enrolled more easily (in particular civil servants, who would be much more reticent if confronted with more militant language). But its critical potential is thereby diminished.

Though the RESF reveals the pressure of necessity particularly clearly, this pressure is present in many other cases. The transformation of homosexual activism under the pressure of the emergence of AIDS, described by Marta Roca i Escoda (Chap. 3), provides a paradigmatic example of this.

Urgency forced homosexual associations to totally reorient themselves, partly by re-centring themselves around serving the community (leaving to one side the more radical critique of normalising society), and partly by committing to a policy of active collaboration with the state to promote information, support and prevention. While the epidemic took a heavy toll on the homosexual community, this dramatic moment was also paradoxically the occasion of a real victory. Every piece of research conducted during the last 30 years, in Europe as well as in the United States, has shown the progressive “social normalisation” of homosexuality: homophobia has of course not disappeared but it has ceased to be the dominant social norm. In what seemed like a struggle for its survival, the homosexual community—particularly in France and North America—gained a form of recognition, notably thanks to the construction of a “counter-expertise” which impressed even the medical world (Collins and Pinch 2001). Although driven by the pressure of the most extreme necessity, homosexual activism thus achieved a particularly effective “rise to generality” by expanding the frontiers of “common humanity”: in certain countries, in less than a lifetime, the state’s engagement with homosexuality transitioned from moralising penalisation to the promotion of a vigorous anti-discrimination policy.⁶

The solidarity economy, addressed by Éric Dacheux and then Bruno Frère (Chaps. 5 and 10), draws on the same idea of a fight for survival. What neither André Gorz (2001: 205–214) nor Holloway (2010: 69–70) seem to recognise when they criticise the solidarity economy is that it has not arisen from the theories of authors who write about it but has emerged from necessity pure and simple. The solidarity economy has emerged because without it living conditions would seriously deteriorate. This observation holds as much for self-managed cooperatives in Argentina as it does for some local exchange services in France, as well as citizen banking schemes that have developed throughout the world. Perhaps it is true that, as Marx’s *Capital* says, “the realm of freedom really begins only when labour determined by necessity and external expediency ends. It lies by its very nature beyond the sphere of material production proper” (Marx 1981 [1867]: 958–959). The realm of freedom really begins when the rule of immediate physical needs comes to an end. But here and now these needs are visible, and there is no other option but to fulfil them and to take every step possible to “get by”.

These texts clearly show how activist engagement arises or transforms itself under the impact of necessity: what can appear heroic in ordinary contexts can become ordinary in heroic contexts.⁷ But at a more “banal”

level, necessity is omnipresent as a cause of engagement: it is, again, the contact with profound poverty that allows Agir Tous pour la Dignité (ATD) Quart Monde (All Act for Dignity Fourth World), studied by Frédéric Viguier (Chap. 4), to demand that its members engage in a form of activism that verges on asceticism. As Fabrice Ripoll explains (Chap. 7), repeated food security crises provided the Associations pour le Maintien de l'Agriculture Paysanne (AMAPs, Associations for the Protection of Paysan Agriculture) with the social need that their survival depends on. And it was the desire to take control of their own professional and technical environment that led programmers to establish the free software community, according to Gaël Depoorter (Chap. 6). All these movements' critiques vary in their levels of reflexivity and radicalism; but remaining in touch with a form of immediately recognisable "need" seems to be a central element of the birth and longevity of the engagement they involve. Certain "vital" experiences retain their ability to fuel indignation, even if the transition from indignation to critique (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005 [1999]) has become more fragile for the reasons outlined above. To the question of knowing "how is one to continue believing in the feasibility of socialism, when the facts have brutally and repeatedly invalidated the idea?" (Keucheyan 2014: 30), it becomes possible to respond: resistance is possible *without reaching the threshold* of belief. For that reason this resistance remains fragile, whether it is supported by different "horizons of expectations" or unsupported by any such horizon. So it is difficult to make it permanent. But the pressure of necessity constantly reactivates it.

AN AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE

In the various types of engagement we have before us, the relation to the state (envisaged in its broadest sense as a public authority) is ambiguous, to say the least. The state is by turns an adversary and a tutelary power, depending on the circumstances, and sometimes both at the same time. The example of the homosexual movement is, without doubt, the most revealing in this regard. Immediately following the Second World War, the state was in some sense "out of the picture", doubtless because the idea of homosexuality's social normalisation seemed relatively inaccessible. The movements that emerged consequently appeared more inward-looking; they were less activist groups than "circles" of sociability within a community that saw itself as discreet. The conjuncture of the 1970s rendered the prospect of normalisation more concrete. At this point, the most

conservative states (such as Francoist Spain) appeared as clear adversaries through their preservation, and even their strengthening, of repressive laws that were losing support among the general population. Finally, at the start of the 1980s, AIDS came along and practically inverted the problematic, turning the homosexual movements into allies of a state pressured into acting against the epidemic in a manner that was preventative as well as curative. If, as seems to be the case, this (inevitable) alliance ended up benefiting the homosexual movement—at the very least by drawing attention to the issue of homosexuality's legal normalisation—this has not necessarily been the case for other forms of resistance.

Thus, anti-poverty movements such as ATD Fourth World are described by Frédéric Viguier as "an instrument for controlling the working classes"; he describes the "cause of the poor" as constituting a space "much less external to the state than it is normally represented as being". The question of who benefits from an alliance of this kind is much more problematic here. By declaring that the transformation required depends on "work on the self by the poor", movements like ATD propagate what might in a very general sense be called "the dominant ideology" of network capitalism, which extends demands for individual responsibility and "limitless activation" even to its *outsiders*. The pressure of necessity fuels resistance but, at the same time, it integrates this resistance into a type of global social policy that sustains poverty. This is why, citing Bourdieu, Frédéric Viguier refers to "the left hand of the state", which may try to offer an ultimate "safety net" but which does so by favouring aid over insurance, thus relieving capitalism of any responsibility for the least productive part of the workforce.

The relation to the state is therefore very problematic. For most activist associations, no matter what their cause, it would be untenable to refuse to collaborate with the authorities—but forming such an alliance comes at a heavy cost because it hampers the development of critical thought. In particular, these associations tend to block "civic" tests⁸ centred on the model of making political demands in the public sphere, as demonstrated by their hostility to the idea of occupying the banks of the Canal Saint-Martin in Paris.

This refusal to "rise to political generality" is common to various forms of resistance, including those that confront the power of the state head-on: it is seen in both the solidarity economy and the RESF, whose activists dismiss any critical reflection on immigration policy as this would in some sense "pollute" their existential commitment to serve real flesh-and-blood

people. This raises the risk of a “Sisyphean effect”, whereby any partial victories are achieved only at the price of refusing to interrogate systemic effects.

This dilemma is not new. The entire history of the 20th century workers’ movement can be read along the same lines: that of the dialectic between the mobilising and demobilising effects of partial victories. The workers’ movement at least proposed a theorisation of the state’s role.⁹ But this theorisation has become difficult today, while the state itself has become evanescent: on the one hand, it ceaselessly reaffirms itself through symbols and its repressive authority,¹⁰ but on the other, it constantly weakens the distinction between the public and the private, borrowing its managerial forms of control from capitalism. On the one hand, it reminds actors of their “sovereignty”, while on the other, it partly incorporates these social actors to make them into its subcontractors: the state thus becomes, according to Zaki Laïdi’s neat formulation (2007), a “fractal state” that must negotiate with parts of itself.

What results is really a “game with the rules” (Boltanski 2011 [2009]): actors find themselves in a system full of blurred lines where the state appears as much as an ally as it does as an adversary, and sometimes, as mentioned before, both at the same time, depending on the circumstances. Perhaps this situation is impossible to clarify today in France given the plasticity of institutions, which are both increasingly fragile and quick to claim their “sovereign power” over the weakest actors. But this lack of clarification appears, on the whole, as a weakness, liable to lead activist engagements to a kind of recurrent impotence.¹¹ Like Sisyphus pushing his boulder, critique, in this case, must always be begun again.

A CAPACITY FOR SUBVERSION?

Contrary to the engagements we have just been talking about (deportations, poverty, etc.), which have struggled to “rise to generality”, in other cases a similar phenomenon has come to light that gives more reason for optimism: forms of engagement that are not a priori anti-capitalist, even behaviours that are not experienced a priori as forms of activist engagement, can produce what we will call “non-intentional critical effects”.

We have in mind, first, the AMAPs analysed by Fabrice Ripoll. As his chapter clearly shows, their success is partly due to the plurality of registers of commitment they have mobilised. One can join an AMAP either because of solidarity with rural communities or because of a more general

desire for an environmentally-friendly form of production. But also because of motivations that are more easily accessible to “ordinary people”, that is, a desire to eat food that conforms to one’s own dietary preferences, whether this desire is generated by fear of certain foods “contaminated” by chemicals (fertiliser and other pesticides), or by a taste for certain flavours. “Moral and political” commitment can thus be minimal, to begin with. This plurality of registers can of course serve to weaken associations (e.g. when a minority of “activists” carry out collective tasks for a majority of “consumers”). But it is also a strength that allows people with commitments that are very different in nature and intensity to come together. The “consumer” who primarily acts according to a “selfish” logic (for their health or to save money) nonetheless provides support for the group by increasing its critical mass. Thus, one can commit oneself without really claiming to perform an *act of commitment* in the traditional sense. The logic of the AMAPs acts as a “transmission mechanism” between the initial investment and the collective result.

The same mechanism is at work, in an even more explicit way, in the “free software community” analysed by Gaël Depoorter. The “founding narrative” of Richard Stallman (Stallman and Williams 2010) appeals to an “existential experience of frustration”: seeing yourself excluded from projects to which you yourself have contributed. The justification for free software may rest on a critique of capitalism (the rejection of the private appropriation of collective intellectual work), but this justification does not a priori presuppose a higher level of critical engagement. It rests on “an improbable hybrid of an academic ethos and primitive communism” and above all involves itself in practical activity: the resolution of problems and the sharing of knowledge. Christophe Lejeune (2009) has clearly shown how “the spirit of engagement” among digital communities invokes mutual technical support and not “abstract” critical distance with regard to the internet’s commercialisation. This spirit is translated by the imperative “*Do it yourself!*” It is particularly well illustrated by the use of the term *troll*, a (dis)qualifier used to ridicule disputes judged nonessential (not linked to the resolution of problems) in dedicated forums. On reading these interactions, any taste for polemic—which is very common in certain spheres of critical engagement—must be pushed aside in favour of a “virtuous practical register pacified by a weaker level of reflexivity”.

By concretising this practical register, “viral” tools such as the GNU General Public License enable these communities to mobilise resistance even more robustly through the “transmission mechanism” effect

mentioned above in relation to the AMAPs: “All software using all or part of a development protected by this licence must *de facto* apply its rules, thus enabling the construction and permanence of an alternative praxis”.

Free software communities are at the heart of what Yann Moulier-Boutang (2011) calls the “cognitive” productive mechanism of capitalism. Without appearing to affect this mechanism, free software is thus a practice with “high subversive potential” due to the very nature of its object. Moulier-Boutang summarises the problem very simply:

At the very moment when the market seems to have consolidated its position, historically eliminating socialism as an alternative to the production of material goods outside the market, the quantity of goods, of information and of knowledge which present all the characteristics of collective goods becomes so significant that the basic justification of private appropriation becomes increasingly acrobatic and largely inoperative.

This analysis seems to echo the Marxist idea that the development of the “collective intellectual worker” will end up rendering the relations of capitalist production suboptimal.

Of course, this development is in no way necessary. Capitalism has amply demonstrated its ability to incorporate critique and turn its weaknesses into instruments of its own transformation (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005 [1999]). But the fact remains that there is a decisive ongoing battle around the private appropriation of the means of intellectual production—in particular, on the internet—and that, ten years after Moulier-Boutang was writing, the struggle continues. The practice of free software thus contests the global logic of capitalism almost “by default”—that is, without the need for a higher level of reflexivity. Free software actors cannot be suspected of naivety: they know very well the level at which the game is being played. But it is important to note that they do *not need to know this* for the critique to be effective: *Do it yourself!* is itself a radical questioning of capitalism because it weakens its hold on a sector that is crucial to the future development of productive activity.

Saying this is not to promote the possibility of “bringing about the revolution without knowing it”. Nonetheless, practices of resistance that enjoy this privilege, which is usually reserved for capitalism itself, are developing: we are seeing the emergence of a capacity for subverting capitalism through the simple effect of contagion. Even if we will not be able to dispense with reflexive self-transformation within this process of transformation, certain slopes will be easier to climb than others. Both the AMAP and free software experiments give us examples of the relevance of practices that in a sense “spontaneously” access a higher level of generality.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF “PRACTICAL UTOPIA”

Across the different experiences examined, one theme regularly recurs: the difficulty of translating the transformational aims of those involved in acts of “ordinary” resistance into a “coherent praxis”.

Thus, Manuel Cervera-Marzal and Bruno Frère (Chap. 8) provide a detailed analysis of the relationships that arise in an activist collective based on general civil disobedience, *Les refuseurs*. This group of around 50 members, which surrounds a “hard core” of around 20 people, organises acts of disobedience on a wide range of themes. Its members are mostly students or young activists with high cultural capital, but who have relatively precarious lives.

On the basis of participant observation and discussion with the members, Cervera-Marzal and Frère demonstrate the “omnipresence” of a latent sexism that is translated in multiple different ways. To begin with, there is what one could call a “differentiated reward” from activism: in a way that is not made explicit, the women are regularly given “execution” tasks and much less often the task of coming up with actions. “Differentiated” reward thus doubly disadvantages them: the tasks are materially less pleasant (cleaning, cooking and purchasing materials) but are also the least symbolically rewarding. Thus it is the male members of the group who take charge of “mediatising” the group’s actions, both through contacts with the media and by publishing on social networks.

To this sharing of tasks, which is implicitly but clearly gendered, can be added the domination of women in the group’s “discursive space”. Cervera-Marzal and Frère thus use examples often not perceived by the group (at least by the men) to show how speech is systematically unbalanced to the detriment of the women, who are either not heard or are even “snubbed”. A female activist explained at length how she experiences this “gendered” way of addressing women, who are subjected to palpably harsher treatment than men.

These observations are not new: since the start of the 1970s, sexism has been summarily denounced by the female members of revolutionary groups and the issue has accompanied the success and then the decline of these groups throughout history. The “resistance” of the 2010s is still struggling to come to terms with this contradiction and, from this point of view, it is firmly “ideologically embedded” in “mainstream” society.

Elsewhere, the “Zone à Défendre” (ZAD: ‘Zone to Defend’) studied by Sylvaine Bulle (Chap. 9) is a success but struggles to accommodate very

different forms of “occupation”. The ZAD occupies the site of a proposed airport at Notre Dame des Landes near Nantes in western France. Its occupants might be divided into three principal groups: the few farmers who were there from the beginning; the “activists”, young politicised intellectuals who are often influenced by situationist ideas; to whom have been added a number of young people who have radically broken with their previous lives and are running away from the “normality” of capitalist work and consumption. The cohabitation of these three groups takes place largely informally: though each agrees to the rejection of capitalism and the need to “defend the zone”, no organisation has really come along to “head” the occupation and give it a common strategy. The occupants interviewed all stress the principle that “no-one can tell anyone else what they should do”. For all the residents, the ZAD is both a place of *retreat* and a place of *attack*: it is both a question of “fleeing” from capitalism and fighting it, even if the predominant tendency differs from person to person.

More than just a “cause” in the classical sense, the Zone à Défendre is thus an attempt to construct a practical or a real utopia (Wright 2010) that provides a great deal of room for individual autonomy and for non-institutionalised ways of resolving conflicts. In place of the model and the constraints of a largely urban capitalism, the Zone substitutes the paradigm of “inhabitation” in a way that cultivates and protects the place inhabited.

So has the ZAD been victorious in the end? At the time of writing, the government of Emmanuel Macron has just announced the abandonment of the airport project. It is not known what the “territory”—which has been designated as such for decades—will become. Doubtless, the French state would like to reassert its authority by evicting the occupants. But the symbol remains strong.

Finally to the third aporia of “practical utopia”: the question of the *actors’ legitimacy*. This is highlighted in Bruno Frère’s chapter on the solidarity economy (Chap. 10), “politics without politics”. The notion of “representativeness” is always leaving by the door (since the political ethos of new forms of resistance is a priori distrustful of *delegation*) only to re-enter through the window: since as soon as someone speaks, they must necessarily speak *in the name of* (a group, a cause, an association, etc.). The dispute about legitimate representation is thus both inextinguishable and insoluble, as was again experienced by activists of the still-born movement Nuits Debout.¹² How can all speak with the same voice when all voices must be able to express themselves? How can several voices speak without this resulting in an unproductive and unpleasant cacophony?

The accusations of “illegitimacy” levelled against each other by the MES (Movement for the Solidarity Economy) and “Les Pénélopes” (a group seeking to combine feminist solidarity economy initiatives) expose the impasse: each contests the other’s pretension to legitimacy *in the name of symmetrical arguments drawn from the same political “grammar”*.

This difficulty is linked, as Bruno Frère shows, to an inability to address the issue of power head-on. One might thus ask whether this demonstrates a problem with the very concept of “practical utopia”, whose two terms are to some extent inherently antagonistic.

These three chapters clearly show that even though concrete resistance to capitalism has not disappeared—far from it—perspectives on how to leave capitalism behind remain extremely vague. Many characteristics are shared by the “old” and the “new” social movements (we must insist on the quotation marks) as Mathieu points out (Chap. 11). And this remains true even when it comes to the difficulties they experience in concretely defining the post-capitalist utopia that they aspire to.

EVERYDAY RESISTANCE?

If we take the utopian hopes (in the non-pejorative sense) historically prompted by the workers’ movement as a reference, then the past three or even four decades appear quite naturally as a period in which social critique was defeated. Those whose intellectual and activist socialisation began in the period that followed the post-May 1968 turmoil share the same experience of a constantly reiterated disillusion. But the fact that it is difficult to identify critical thought that is both effective and “totalising” does not signify that the page of activist engagement has been turned. To convince ourselves of this, we must no doubt change our perspective and seek out less the “grail” of a possible new utopia than daily forms of struggle against injustice.

Doubtless, not all paradigms in the social sciences are equally capable of “changing our perspective” in this way. By bringing our attention to the concrete experiments taking place today, as imperfect as they may be, and to the immanent conditions of their legitimacy, the pragmatic approach in sociology and political science shows that—at a globally unfavourable conjuncture—there is resistance everywhere, all the time and in various different forms; sometimes this resistance even achieves victories.

In sum, even if the notion of “everyday resistance” is not new (see e.g. Scott 1987), it takes on a reconfigured meaning today. As it appears in the different chapters of this book, it comes close to the definition given by

Stella Vinthagen and Anna Johansson (2013) in their impressive review of the literature:

(1) Everyday resistance is a practice (not a certain consciousness, intent, recognition or outcome); (2) It is historically entangled with (everyday) power (not separated, dichotomous or independent); (3) Everyday resistance needs to be understood as [just as] intersectional as the powers it engages with (not one single power relation); and as a consequence (4) It is heterogen[eous] and contingent due to changing contexts and situations (not a universal strategy or coherent action form).

As these two authors also note, everyday resistance is not necessarily explicitly conceptualised as resistance by the actors themselves. It may be seen first of all as a “survival” or “emergency” practice. This is true of the Education Without Borders Network and the AMAPs, as well as ATD Quart Monde. Everyday resistance is thus really a *practice* before it is an intention or a strategy. This is also how the free software community can be defined. But whatever it is, resistance is always engaged in a relation with “power” in one form or another—where “power” is understood in Foucault’s sense as immanent and relational: power and resistance define and are intertwined with each other. This is why resistance is really “intersectional”: as Vinthagen and Johansson again stress, the criteria of domination are multiple and the same actors can occupy dominant or dominated positions depending on the criterion chosen. The analysis of sexist practices within activist groups conducted by Manuel Cervera-Marzal and Bruno Frère clearly illustrates this ambiguity of positions. And as a consequence, everyday resistance is truly heterogeneous and contingent.

So again, we can only agree with Vinthagen and Johansson (2013):

Everyday resistance is a type of act available to all subaltern subjects, all the time, in some form or another. But not all will resist. And even those who do resist only do so sometimes and in relation to some system of domination, while they might utilize other positions of dominance available to them. When they resist they will not always affect power; sometimes they will even strengthen power or create new forms of power techniques.

All the texts presented here help us to better grasp the strengths and weaknesses of the forms of resistance at work—as well as their grips on the reality of unremitting injustice. It is not a question of renouncing global constructions, but of recalling that such constructions will not be able to

develop in empirical ignorance of effective forms of resistance: if it really is life that determines consciousness, then theorisation can only be emergent and the efficacy of local forms of resistance will clear the path towards less dismal horizons of expectations.

This empirical work of identifying “grips” is more indispensable than ever. It is the necessary condition for rearming an effective critique, that is, a critique that dares to be radical but does not mistake its dreams for realities.

NOTES

1. Hirschman notably gives the example of the person who, during a war, allows fugitives to pass to the free zone. He pointed out that it would make no sense to justify their commitment by claiming both that they acted out of patriotism and that their action also brought them financial gain.
2. In the sense that knowledge (distributed) becomes the principal means of production, which, as Marx anticipated, makes the individual appropriation of the means of production into a brake on the development of the productive forces.
3. “Despite recent prophecies to the contrary, instances of protest continue to occur with greater frequency and intensity in France than almost anywhere else. There are more demonstrations, strikes, occupations, marches and petition movements in France today than in most other European societies and conflict is widely accepted by French citizens as a normal, almost banal, occurrence” (*id.*).
4. We should note that all these texts were written, for the most part, before the 15th of May movement in Spain and its “aftershocks” in several countries.
5. Following the tradition that has spread within pragmatic sociology, “rise to generality” denotes the process whereby arguments are universalised, through which actors seek to construct agreement or to extend their alliances.
6. The example of Belgium illustrates this transition particularly well.
7. The inverse is obviously true, as all revolutionary experiences demonstrate.
8. By “civic test” we mean a confrontation with political authorities in the public sphere (see Boltanski and Thévenot [1991] 2006).
9. Or, more precisely, several theorisations, since it was often on this question that the movement was divided. These theorisations described the state as either the dominant classes’ instrument of oppression or the expression of the popular will (via universal suffrage)—or both.

10. In this respect, the “truth tests” spoken of by Luc Boltanski (2011 [2009])—solemn and ritualised reaffirmations of the legitimacy of institutions, which are tending to lose their influence—could experience a second youth as capitalism’s legitimacy weakens: the return to the foreground of the topic of “national identity” in many European countries is evidence of this happening.
11. In the context of the United States, Nina Eliasoph’s very good book (2010) can serve as a theoretical counterpoint to most of the experiences presented here.
12. Nuits Debout was a major contestatory social movement that sprang up in the outdoor public spaces of most big cities in France. It began on 31 March 2016 following a protest against the “loi travail”. This law aimed to revise the Labour Code to give businesses greater room for manoeuvre in recruiting and, above all, laying off workers. The movement quickly came to involve groups working on many different kinds of issue and so a “convergence of struggles” was suggested. Its focus consequently expanded to the general contestation of political, cultural and economic institutions. In the absence of any leader or spokesperson, Nuits Debout was organised through self-managed thematic groups. Decisions were made by reaching consensus during general assemblies, following the Ancient Greek model of direct participatory democracy. The movement occasionally even stretched beyond French borders, but it subsequently waned until its eventual demise in summer 2016—at least in its initial form of mass gatherings and debates in public spaces (see Wikipedia). For more on Nuits Debout, see Gaël Brustier, 2016, *Nuit debout: que penser?*, Paris: Le Cerf.

REFERENCES

- Boltanski, L. (2011) [2009] *On Critique, a Sociology of Emancipation* (G. Elliott, Trans.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Boltanski, L., & Chiapello, E. (2005) [1999]. *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (G. Elliott, Trans.). London/New York: Verso.
- Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006) [1991]. *On Justification, Economies of Worth* (C. Porter, Trans.). Princeton/Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Cerny, P. (1982). *Social Movements and Protest in France*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Collins, H., & Pinch, T. (2001). *Les Nouveaux Frankenstein. Quand la science nous trahit*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Duyvendak, J. W. (1995). *The Power of Politics: New Social Movements in France*. London: Routledge.
- Flesher Fominaya, C., & Cox, L. (2013). Rethinking European Movements and Theory. In C. Flesher Fominaya & L. Cox (Eds.), *Understanding European Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest* (pp. 1–5). London: Routledge.
- Fraser, N., & Honneth, A. (2003). *Redistribution or Recognition?* London: Verso.
- Frère, B., & Jaster, D. (2018). French Sociological Pragmatism: Inheritor and Innovator in the American Pragmatic and Sociological Phenomenological Traditions. *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 19(2), 185–208.
- Frère, B., & Laville, J. L. (forthcoming). *Repenser l'émancipation*. Paris: Desclée de Brouwer.
- Gorz, A. (2001). Tous entrepreneurs? dans Dreuille, A. dir., *Les Aventuriers de l'économie solidaire*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Hirschman A. O. (1982). *Shifting Involvements: Private Interests and Public Action*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Holloway, J. (2010). *Crack Capitalism*. London: Pluto Press.
- Ion, J., et al. (2005). *Militer aujourd'hui*. Paris: Autrement.
- Jacquemain, M., & Delwit, P. (2010). *Engagements actuels, actualité des engagements*. Louvain-La-Neuve: Bruylant Academia.
- Keucheyan, R. (2014). *Left Hemisphere: Mapping Contemporary Theory*. London: Verso.
- Kriesi, H., et al. (1995). *New Social Movements in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Laïdi, Z. (2007). *The Great Disruption*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lejeune C. (2009). *Démocratie 2.0*. Bruxelles: Labor.
- Marx, K. (1981) [1867]. *Capital, Volume III*. London: Penguin Classics.
- Morena, E. (2013). Constructing a New Collective Identity for the Alterglobalization Movement. The French Confédération Paysanne (CP) as Anti-capitalist ‘Peasant’ Movement. In *Understanding European Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest* (pp. 94–108). London: Routledge.
- Moulier-Boutang, Y. (2011). *Cognitive Capitalism*. London: Polity Press.
- Peterson, A., Wahlström, M., & Wennerhag, M. (2015). European Anti-Austerity Protests – Beyond “Old” and “New” Social Movements? *Acta Sociologica*, 58(4), 293–310.
- Pichardo, N. A. (1997). New Social Movements: A Critical Review. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 23, 411–430.
- Scott, J. C. (1987). *Weapons of the Weak – Everyday forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Snow, D., & Soule, S. A. (2010). *A Primer on Social Movements*. New York: Norton & Company.
- Sommier, I., & Fillieule, O. (2013). The Emergence and Development of the ‘No-global’ Movement in France: A Genealogical Approach. In C. Flesher Fominaya & L. Cox (Eds.), *Understanding European Social Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protests* (pp. 47–60). London: Routledge.
- Stallman, R. M., & Williams, S. (2010). *Free as in Freedom (2.0): Richard Stallman and the Free Software Revolution*. Boston: Free Software Foundation.

- Tilly, C., & Wood, L. (2013). *Social Movements, 1768–2012*. New York: Routledge.
- Vassallo, F. (2010). *France, Social Capital and Political Activism*. New York: Palgrave. Vassal.
- Vinthagen, S., & Johansson, A. (2013). 'Everyday Resistance': Exploration of a Concept and Its theories. *Resistance Studies Magazine*, 1.
- Waters, S. (2003). *Social Movements in France, Towards a New Citizenship*. London: Palgrave.
- Wright, E. O. (2010). *Envisioning Real Utopias*. New York: Verso.