BOOK REVIEWS

P. Green and T. Ward, *State Crime and Civil Activism: On the Dialectics of Repression and Resistance*. London: Routledge, 2019, 294pp, £96.00 (hardback).

Reviewed by Dawid Stańczak

Criminological understanding of state crime is not complete without the consideration of its opposite, namely, resistance. “Where there is power, there is resistance . . .”, or more aptly, where state power breaches normative limits, there are resistance movements. As state violence engenders resistance from civil society, the latter is often confronted by repression. In a dialectical fashion, repression and resistance lock into a mutually conditioning relationship. *State Crime and Civil Activism* interrogates the unfolding of this dialectic and the constellations of civil activism it fosters. At the heart of Green and Ward’s analysis is Marxist dialectic, a process through which contradictions inherent in one mode of existence lead to the development of new ones.

This book is the culmination of eight years of research in six different countries into civil society led struggles against state repression. The study comprises 175 interviews with activists from over 30 civil society organizations (CSOs) from Turkey, Kenya, Papua New Guinea (PNG), Colombia, Tunisia and Burma. Each chapter explores and compares different aspects of the operational environments of civil activism in countries characterized by flawed democracy and totalitarianism. The analysis of the repression-resistance dialectic is presented through a complex synthesis of testimonies, offering a unique look into the world of civil activism under repressive conditions.

Green and Ward contend that “modes of oppression . . . and means of struggle are context-dependent and interact dialectically with each other” (224). CSOs studied in each country emerged from historically specific contexts shaped by state violence and oppression. The Turkish civil society considered in the study emerged in response to state repression of cultural and political expression by minority ethnic groups, particularly the Kurdish population. In Kenya, the studied CSOs developed through an ethnic-based land discord and resisted the repression of Muslims prompted by a perceived threat of Islamic terrorism, particularly Al-Shabaab. The struggles in PNG revolve around community-based civil society groups that sprouted in response to a culture of clientelism, corruption, police violence and misappropriation of communal lands. The civil society in Colombia

emerged from struggles of peasants, trade unions, indigenous and Afro-Columbian communities against paramilitary violence now operating as proto-states. In Tunisia, the Islamic civil society and the labour movement developed through resistance to Ben Ali's police state. The clandestine civil society of Myanmar relies on international CSOs to voice their clandestine work exposing state violence against ethnic minorities.

Chapter 1 begins with a theoretical qualification of civil societies that comprised this study. Green and Ward contest the assumption that democratic structures are a prerequisite for the emergence of civil society. They argue that the activities of civil society can prove crucial to building the foundations for democratization. The states subject to this study correspond to the distinction between two patterns of state—civil society relations reflected in Gramsci's conception of the "totalitarian state": flawed democracies and authoritarian states. In "flawed democracies" some opposition is tolerated and civil society is a contested space. In "authoritarian states" civil society tends to be an adjunct to the state and any opposition operates clandestinely. The character of civil society is determined by the degree of coercion and consent employed in combination by the state. Civil society plays a significant role in three respects. First, CSOs give force to diverse normative frameworks by employing them to censure illegitimate state conduct. Second, CSOs expose criminal conduct through a complex process involving gathering, corroborating and disseminating information. Third, CSOs put considerable pressure on perpetrators and pursue redress.

Chapter 2 turns the focus to the motivational drivers of resistance. Experiencing and witnessing violence has been indicated to have a profound emotional impact that sets interviewed activists on political trajectories of activism. "Religious unfreedom", family influence, suppression of basic liberties, economic injustice and human rights violations are powerful influences shaped by state criminality. Chapter 3 compares the respective environments navigated by the studied civil societies. Criminalization of activism, extreme forms of punishment and persecution conditioned the skills, strategies, spirit and organizational forms of resistance. Green and Ward contend that in a "unity of opposites" state repression "in largely unintended ways, shapes the resistance it encounters. In dialectical turn, resistance contributes to shaping the nature of repression" (63). In Turkey, Tunisia and Burma extrajudicial killings, disappearances, detentions, torture, exile and violent state security attacks served states' goals of suppressing protest but in the longer term fostered resilience, more sophisticated strategies and technical expertise within civil society. Yet, less extreme forms of repression termed "persistent invasive repression"—surveillance, harassment, administrative control and legal restrictions—posed greater challenges to civil societies in PNG, Kenya and Tunisia as the response they dictate is less clear.

Chapter 4 examines the processes of collecting, analysing and disseminating information of state crime, and the roles it serves with respect to exposing, challenging and countering state repression. A contrast is drawn between the highly repressive environment in Burma where small volunteer groups collect data for international advocacy, and large, openly conducted projects in Turkey and Colombia. The chapter explores the differences in the rigour with which information of state crimes is corroborated and the variations in the balance between outward- and inward-facing activities. Collecting and disseminating information of state crime was important for displaying international solidarity and generating international pressure on governments in Colombia, Burma, Tunisia and Turkey. Information was also used in the Freirean, dialogic space “to develop political and legal consciousness within the communities the organisations serve” (123).

In Chapter 5, Green and Ward observe a dialectic interplay between diverse normative frameworks used by CSOs to denounce state crime. CSOs construct understandings of state conduct in normatively charged terms through shared conceptions of right and wrong. Limitations of domestic law are identified in all six countries, as repressive states exempt themselves from following the rule of law. Such contradictions are addressed through appeals to international law, human rights, universal principles, constitutional law, “natural law” or a legal pluralist synthesis referred to as “subaltern cosmopolitanism” documented by B. D. S. Santos in *Toward a New Legal Common Sense*: (Cambridge University Press 2002). Cosmopolitan resistance takes local experience as the starting point and then articulates it through a legal and moral vocabulary that establishes the legitimacy of resistance, builds national and international alliances and brings about the “boomerang effect”.

Chapter 5 explores the role of religion and spirituality. In Tunisia, Turkey and Kenya, where Muslim communities are targeted by their governments, religion is a source of inspiration and ideas about law and order. In Colombia, contribution of faith-groups through “accompaniment” played a strategic role for communities at risk of violence and displacement. In Burma, Christian associations supplied medical aid. Many CSOs in the study invoked indigenous spiritual traditions, particularly in Colombia and PNG. Religion has also taken on less benign significance in Myanmar where Buddhist nationalism represented a dangerous political force responsible for the genocide of the Rohingya. However, not all civil activists need religion or spirituality—devotion to human rights and a political cause can also foster commitment to values that “transcend the self”. Further to this, not all activists expressed the need for transcendence. Simple commitment to a chosen project or “doing one’s job” may be enough to sustain motivation in the face of oppression.

Chapter 6 interrogates the terrains of resistance created by dispossession and displacement. Differentiating between development and conflict-induced displacement, Green and Ward discuss how land-grabbing mediated by conflict and

development in combination with kleptocracy, violence and “primitive accumulation” influence resistance. Inward-facing activities of CSOs were identified as particularly significant in helping displaced communities to develop legal consciousness of their condition. Chapter 7 explores the relationship between charity and civil activism. Charity may be a way-in to civil activism, a façade for CSO operations or a genuine component of militant civil society. Charitable work of civil activists is motivated by a moral sense of the “significant value of others”. Charity is combined with resistance and politics to advance broader social change. When charitable demands were ignored by the government, political activism was often the direct consequence.

Chapter 8 analyses civil society’s engagement with violence. CSOs that operate in repressive environments rarely have a binary choice between violence and non-violence. Green and Ward stress that state violence was the catalyst for the formation of many CSOs they studied. Violent resistance was an inevitable and sometimes necessary means of engaging with state violence, particularly in Turkey, Burma, PNG and Tunisia. However, violent activism is qualified by context, history and temporality. The experiences of civil activists reflect Walter Benjamin’s observation that violent resistance is morally fraught. Green and Ward differentiate between “principled” and “strategic” violence. Activists expressing “principled” non-violence raised concerns about control of violent resistance and eschew violence to underscore the legitimacy of civil activism. However, in many cases non-violence is an ethical rather than strategic choice and proves futile when confronted by repression.

As specified in the final chapter, the contribution of this volume is threefold. First, it is criminologically pertinent to understand how state violence and corruption are countered. Green and Ward found that, even under the most repressive conditions, communities of resistance emerge to investigate, expose and censure state crime. Second, the study advances a pluralistic view of law, reflecting “sub-altern cosmopolitanism” through which civil societies formulate their claim to rights and assign “blameworthiness” to illegitimate conduct. Lastly, the volume affirms that self-constitution and mobilization of civil society can exist outside of its legal institutionalization, though in flawed democracies and authoritarian states the means of organizing are influenced by the degree of repression and violence.

At the core of Green and Ward’s contribution is a detailed empirical account of the dialectical imperative created by state repression, the reproduction of its greatest adversary, a resilient civil society. This compendium is informed by the practice of people who live this dialectical imperative of state repression, often risking their safety, liberty and life. In the true Marxist spirit, the volume documents a living and breathing praxis as it unfolds through resistance to state crime and violence.

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