

Paul Routledge, *Space Invaders: Radical Geographies of Protest*, London: Pluto Press, 2017. ISBN: 9780745336299 (cloth); ISBN: 9780745336244 (paper); ISBN: 9781786801111 (ebook)

Paul Routledge's *Space Invaders: Radical Geographies of Protest*, the first title in Pluto's new "Radical Geography" book series,¹ is a fantastic addition to the growing literature on geography and contentious politics. It provides what is perhaps the most accessible yet comprehensive overview of the importance of thinking protest spatially and will no doubt be extremely popular on reading lists (I know I'll be using it) as well as among activist circles (one of the stated aims of the book series). The book presents one of the clearest and best illustrated arguments to date as to why geography is indispensable to both understanding how and why protest emerges and also, crucially, analysing and assessing activist strategies. I challenge anyone to finish *Space Invaders* without acknowledging the centrality of geography to strategies of protest.

The book is framed around six chapters that examine interrelated "spatial strategies" of protest; these engage core academic and activist debates on the geography of social movements and bring them to life through examples from around the world, many based on first-hand experience. First, "Know Your Place" refers to the strategic importance of local geographical knowledges for creating and sustaining the conditions that make protest possible. Second, "Make Some Space" acknowledges the active role that protestors have in transforming socio-spatial relations through their actions, creating sites of resistance and creation. Third, "Stay Mobile" is a crucial strategy for many protestors that decide when to make themselves visible or invisible, when to defend and when to run, and when to use the power of numbers, popping-up often in surprising ways and in unexpected places. Fourth, "Wage Wars of Words" refers to the mediatic spaces of resistance and creation that are mobilised through protest, reframing dominant understandings of the world. Fifth, "Extend Your Reach" is a strategy of connection and networking beyond the particularities of place

¹ See <https://www.plutobooks.com/pluto-series/radical-geography/> (last accessed 4 December 2017).

and across different scales, increasingly reliant on online spaces of social media. Finally, “Feel Out of Place” is the strategic capacity of protestors to “think, feel, and act differently” in ways that can radically appropriate the meanings associated with places, in turn challenging everyday assumptions.

Each of these spatial strategies is discussed in its intersection with what Routledge terms “sites of intervention”: the material and symbolic targets of protest. These include: sites of production (e.g. factories); sites of destruction (e.g. dam-building); sites of decision (e.g. parliament); sites of social reproduction (e.g. health care); sites of circulation (e.g. roads); sites of consumption (e.g. supermarkets); sites of potential (e.g. protest camps); sites of assumption (e.g. advertising); and sites of collaboration (e.g. governments). Drawing on case studies from Occupy to the Zapatistas, and from the “Rebel Clown Army” to land occupations in Bangladesh (see also Routledge 2011, 2015a), the book is a *tour de force* on the necessity of taking seriously space and place in protests, drawing on some beautifully written ethnographic passages. For anyone concerned about transformative politics *Space Invaders* is an invaluable resource for struggle. The pedagogic value of this book spans both academic and activist worlds; it is written in a way that, unlike so much scholarly production, skilfully avoids making complex ideas unnecessarily complicated. This is a real tribute to Routledge’s life as a scholar-activist.

Indeed, *Space Invaders* is a semi-biographical account of the author’s impressive career as a geographer that has maintained a strong commitment to protest, constantly pushing academic debates forward in the context of real-world activist debates and exploring different ways of working within the “thirdspace” in-between academia and activism (Routledge 1996). At the start of his career, in the early 1990s, Routledge pioneered the geographical study of social movements and protest, best represented in his monograph *Terrains of Resistance: Nonviolent Social Movements and the Contestation of Place in India* (1993). Drawing on debates in political geography, including John Agnew’s work on the politics of place, Routledge (1992, 1994) demonstrated why geographical context matters to mobilisation and the strategic role of terrain in shaping resistance. By the turn of the millennium his

interest in the emerging alter-globalisation movements, particularly People's Global Action, shifted his attention to the strategic role of scale and networks in forging trans-local alliances and creating "convergence spaces" between different place-based protests (Routledge 2000; 2003; Routledge and Cumbers 2009). His most recent work examines strategies of territorialisation in the context of land occupation (Routledge 2015b). Across his wide-ranging research Routledge has opened up and paved the way for an ever-expanding cohort of scholars interested in the intersection of spatiality and social movements.

Routledge's reflections on the opportunities and challenges of doing scholar-activism have been equally inspiring for academics working on issues of protest. From issues of ethics and modes of collaboration (Routledge 2004a, 2004b) and the resources needed for scholar-activism (Derickson and Routledge 2015), his work has not only been immensely useful, but it has also "made some space" within the neoliberal university for politically engaged praxis (see, for example, PyGyRG 2012), for which scholars such as myself owe an immense debt. *Space Invaders* presents the reader with the totality of the author's immense experience as a scholar-activist, including his original empirical work with diverse social movements in the UK and Asia. In celebrating the book we are also celebrating the career of a pioneering radical geographer.

Thankfully, Routledge has left a few loose ends and unexplored lines of enquiry for those of us attempting to follow in his footsteps, some of which he flags in the book. As he states on the first page: "[p]rotests form part of a broader set of interactions, repertoires and processes" that involve diverse political actors. A question emerging from the book is thus how protest relates to other forms and actors of contentious politics and how such relations may shape and inform the spatial strategies described in the book. Although many external actors and processes that support and seek to undermine protest are clearly present through the text, represented via his "sites of intervention", going into detail on any particular interaction is beyond its remit. Some external spheres of interaction with protest have received sustained attention, such as the relationship with policing (e.g. Della Porta et al. 2006; Scholl

2012), and others are beginning to receive closer attention, such as the relationship between protest and urban space (Nicholls and Uitermark 2017; Uitermark and Nicholls 2014). Routledge's work on networking is particularly helpful for thinking through the unequal relationship between global justice networks and particular instances of protest (Chatterton et al. 2013; Routledge et al. 2007). Yet there remains more scope for analysing the unfolding dialectical relationship between protest strategy and external political structures and the subsequent tensions posed for activists, particularly from a geographical perspective (see Halvorsen 2015, 2017).

Most urgent today, in my opinion, is the need to update and reassess the relationship between spatial strategies of protest and institutional forms of politics, something Routledge begins to elaborate in the closing chapter. If we accept, as he does, that building institutions and engaging with the state and dominant forms of politics is a necessary element, or outcome, of protest, then this raises a number of subsequent questions over spatial strategy that demand critical reflection. Although debates over the role of the state and institutions in transformative politics are not new, and periodically form the subject of heated debate (e.g. Hardt and Negri 2004; Holloway 2002), from a geographical perspective there remains much to contribute (see Gill 2010; McGuirk and O'Neill 2012).

A geographical analysis of the relationship between protest and state-based institutions can help us make sense, for example, of how and why many of the intense urban mobilisations of 2011 have since re-territorialised at the scale of the state and in the form of the political party. In turn, this raises intriguing questions over the geography of political parties, spaces that are intimately linked to protest and mobilisation in 2017. Despite years of research on electoral geography, political parties have, in my opinion, become too marginalised within radical geography and there is need to consider in more depth the relationship between activism and electoral politics, a theme that is relatively new to social movement studies more broadly (Goldstone 2003). From a strategic perspective, there remains much to explore about what happens when protest movements gain institutional power and how this modifies spatial strategies. This is currently central to debates within much of the UK Left in

the context of a revitalised Labour Party and has been taken up in more detail by activists in Spain. Taking forward the inspiring work of Routledge and others, radical geographers will have much to add.

In sum, *Space Invaders* is testimony to years of scholarly analysis on the strategies of protest and demonstrates the breadth and depth of Routledge's work as a scholar-activist. It is a book that will speak to academics, students and activists, encouraging critical reflection about how and why space and place are mobilised in attempts to transform the world. Well, what are you waiting for? Grab a copy, slip it in your jacket pocket and become a space invader!

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