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Extinction Rebellion and Climate Change Activism

Breaking the Law to Change the World

Oscar Berglund
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To all those fighting for a sustainable and just world

Contents

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract The introduction sets out four creative tensions that activists should reflect upon. (1) Are XR campaigning to put pressure on the government to address climate change OR are they campaigning to replace the state as we know it with something different? (2) Is it tenable for XR to be solution agnostic and leave the solutions to the climate emergency to a future Citizen's Assembly. (3) Can XR continue to have a model of change that they claim is based on social science although it is based on evidence which does not relate to the struggle for equitable climate action? (4) Can climate change activists afford to wilfully ignore the political economy?

Keywords Extinction Rebellion · Climate change · Climate emergency · Political economy · Social movements · Protest

In 2019, climate change went from being an issue that many people were concerned about to one which many are alarmed by and demand swifter government action on. Politicians on both sides of the Atlantic started to talk about a Green New Deal and a multitude of institutions at different levels declared climate emergencies. There are several reasons for that increased salience of climate change in public debate. The hot summers of 2018 and 2019 along with other extreme weather patterns may have made it feel more real and immediate. The school strikes that

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have grown and grown from a one-girl protest by Greta Thunberg in August 2018 to 1.8 million students striking in 120 countries in June 2019 have been both a cause and an effect of this heightened interest in the climate. Another cause/effect has undoubtedly been the growth of Extinction Rebellion (XR) and not least their large-scale civil disobedience protest in London in April 2019 where over 1000 people were voluntarily arrested. It was in the aftermath of this protest that the UK Parliament declared a climate emergency (Reuters 2019); a largely symbolic act since it was not linked to specific policies.

XR and their April protest took many commentators by surprise and was remarkable in many ways. For two weeks, XR and climate change were headline news as they occupied Oxford Circus, Marble Arch, Parliament Square and Waterloo Bridge. The authorities seemed confused in how to deal with this unusual kind of protest that was disruptive, organised, nonviolent and welcoming of arrests. The protest was disruptive in that it closed off important parts of central London for traffic. It was organised in that it did so with thousands of people who seemingly knew where they had to be and what they had to do. Most importantly perhaps, it was evidently nonviolent and peaceful, which made the policing of it all the more difficult. The most unusual aspect of the protests was the willingness of the protestors to be arrested. That is, arrests were not just an inevitable result of disruption, but an end in itself. The demands of this new social movement were in their own words to 'tell the truth', 'act now' and go 'beyond politics' (XR 2019a). Telling the truth means that the government and the media should be honest about the severity of climate change and take responsibility for informing people about what it may mean for society and individual citizens. Acting now means that radical action has to be taken sooner and more drastically than anything that had been seriously discussed by policymakers. Lastly, by going beyond politics, XR claimed that climate change is best addressed by reinventing democracy and establishing a Citizen's Assembly. This body would be selected through sortition and tasked with coming up with solutions to climate change after a process of consulting experts in all relevant fields. Along with the radical and seemingly efficient tactics and the broad demands came a discourse about strategy; a vision for how this form of disruptive nonviolent protest could lead to real change where others before had failed (XR 2019b).

In this book we engage with the tactics and strategy of Extinction Rebellion. We ask what XR are and what lessons can be drawn from them. We do so through exploring a number of tensions, contradictions or issues regarding XR as political actors. These tensions are woven through the chapters that follow and concern what XR do, how they present themselves, what their demands are, how they are portrayed by the media and how they see themselves as political actors. We explore different sets of academic literature that address these tensions in different ways. Some of these literatures have been essential to develop XR's strategy and discourses. Others are implicitly drawn upon whilst others still are wilfully ignored by XR and the academic literature that directly informs them. The book is based on research carried out in 2019 and early 2020. We have participated in XR in Bristol and interviewed both local and national level activists. The tensions that we have identified within and around XR are necessary for XR activists and other climate activists and potential activists to reflect upon. Indeed, many already do so and we hope that this analysis will aid those reflections.

1. Are XR a reformist or a revolutionary movement? That is, are XR activists campaigning to put pressure on the government to address climate change OR are they campaigning to replace the state as we know it with something different. The answer to this question is not obvious and different aspects of XR's discourse offer contradicting answers to this question. This tension runs through their lawbreaking protests, their demands and their broader political strategy. We also get different answers to this question depending on who we ask within XR.
2. Is it tenable for XR to be solution agnostic? XR do currently not offer answers to how to address climate change. Instead they leave these solutions to a future Citizen's Assembly. At the same time, XR claim to be committed to climate justice. As climate change politics develop, ecofascism and neo-Malthusian thought are also gathering strength. Such perspectives promote solutions to climate change that involve deeply unequal adaptation rather than mitigation and tend to focus on controlling populations rather than controlling production and consumption. This tests XR's solution agnostic stance. It may push XR to become more explicit advocates for climate justice and more directly political than they would like to be perceived. The other risk is that the movement ends up justifying neo-Malthusian

or ecofascist ideas on the basis that it would all be up to the Citizen's Assembly to decide, thereby making each solution equally valid.

3. Can XR continue to have a model of change that they claim is based on social science? XR make bold claims about how radical political change happens and claim to have a model based on evidence. We and others show that the evidence that they draw upon does not relate to the struggle for equitable climate action. At the same time, having a model, even if flawed, has seemingly helped XR to gain support and pull in new activists. The model will also be tested by how events pan out. Will increased state repression be followed by increased support from a growing number of activists as the model predicts? Unlike XR, we argue that the history of struggles for social justice does not provide the answer to this question. In fact, the fall of actually existing socialism 30 years ago effectively ended the search for silver bullets on behalf of left-wing activists after that search had already been declining for some decades. Blueprints for change and revolution became unfashionable. In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis and the movement of the squares which included Occupy, this has changed somewhat, and more activists are asking the question that Lenin once posed: 'What is to be done?'. In XR, this has been driven by Roger Hallam, one of XR's co-founders.
4. Can climate change activists afford to wilfully ignore the political economy? XR's model of change is based on research that is focused on state power as devoid from the political economy and global capitalism. Moreover, XR shun discussions about capitalism as 'lefty language'. Whilst fully appreciating the necessity of this in order to appeal to a broader public, we ask if it removes too much capacity of XR to effectively engage with climate politics. We argue that in practice, the struggle for climate action and climate justice is a struggle against capital (fossil fuels; finance; agroindustry) and against fundamental aspects of capitalism (the profit motive of capital; economic growth on a finite planet; the right of one small group of people to own the land and what is beneath and above it). These anti-capitalist aspects of the climate change movement, although highly inconsistently expressed, are discernible in the discourses of many activists and groups including both XR and the Youth Climate Strikers. That does not mean that social movements should declare themselves anti-capitalist. Indeed, that would be unwise. It does mean that climate change activists should study, explore and understand that

which they are struggling against. Based on that understanding, they can device political tactics and strategies accordingly. To be sure, XR have already intensified their targeting of corporate drivers of climate change and therefore deviated from their original strategy of merely focusing on the state, government and the capital city as the location of political power.

We are not suggesting that these four questions are new to XR or the broader climate change movement. They are all discussed in virtual and physical spaces in one way or another already. Nor are we saying that any of these questions can, or necessarily should, be resolved. They are, in many ways, creative tensions, indicative of a movement that seeks to be a mass movement. We do, however, hope that some of the analysis carried out in this book regarding these tensions help XR and other climate activists to make these tensions creative rather than destructive. In this brief contribution we organise these thoughts in five short chapters followed by a conclusion.

The two following chapters address the specific tactic of lawbreaking protest in relation to the two theoretical perspectives and political traditions that have most seriously engaged with such protest. In Chapter 2, we explore XR in relation to anarchism. XR have often been linked to anarchism, generally in an attempt to discredit the movement. At the same time, anarchists have a rich history of taking direct action, which often involves lawbreaking. The chapter argues that although XR's lawbreaking often does not conform to anarchist notions of direct action and XR want to distance themselves from anarchism, there are lessons to be learnt from the anarchist tradition. The main one of these is that the more direct and prefigurative an action is, the easier it is to justify it to the public. Prefigurative actions seek to enact in the present what they desire for the future so that the means and the end of protest are congruent. For example, XR have found that it is easier to justify closing a city centre to cars than disrupting train services. Even though both achieve disruption and attention to the movement, the former is something desirable in itself whilst the latter goes against the idea of a sustainable future city. Disruptive protest that is not linked to the aims is therefore good for drawing attention to the movement but not as good for drawing attention to the cause. Whilst there is certainly a time and a place for such disruption, it asks more of movement spokespeople in turning negative media attention back to the issue at hand.

In Chapter 3, we turn to liberal civil disobedience, which has a long history of thinking about how and when lawbreaking protest can be justified in liberal democracies. For liberals, lawbreaking has to be a last resort and it has to maintain an overall fidelity to law, accepting the legal consequences and not challenging the state itself but rather specific laws. The extent to which XR conforms to this, depends on which of its activists you ask but we see XR's open and friendly relationship to the police as indicative of at least wanting to appear to maintain within the liberal tradition. Nonetheless, XR's so-called theory of change is based upon movements that have overthrown regimes rather than changed certain laws and XR rather dramatically declare themselves in rebellion against the state because of the state's unwillingness to address climate change. In other words, there are tensions in terms of XR's conformity to liberal notions of civil disobedience. That said, the liberal tradition has generally been employed to justify acts of disobedience after they have taken place and in doing so has often sanitised disobedience to appear less radical than the practitioners of disobedience intended. The main lesson that climate change activists can take from the liberal tradition is the centrality of legitimacy in the eyes of the public as the target audience of disobedience. Nonviolence is essential to such legitimacy and it is not always obvious before the act whether it will be interpreted as violent or not.

The fourth chapter explores XR's internal democracy and asks to what extent it follows the horizontalist tradition that has evolved in social movements over the last 30 years. We argue that XR is much less horizontalist than many other social movements. What XR call a self-organising system is not based on the power of the assembly as is the case in horizontalist organisations. It is instead a more network-based model that is intended to disperse power in a transparent way and make for more efficient decision-making. This model has allowed XR to grow quickly, but it has also led to opaque decision-making. Where horizontalist movements have often been accused of making hierarchies invisible rather than doing away with them, XR's model institutionalises hierarchies to an extent. That is, there are activists who officially hold a number of influential roles in the organisation. Moreover, assemblies are held but these play more of an advisory role and constitute a sort of mock democratic process since they are not the main decision-making body. Compared to predecessors, such as the Global Justice Movement or Occupy, XR is then much more of an organisation and significantly more hierarchical.

In the fifth chapter we move to explore XR's demand of a citizens' assembly to address the climate emergency. We argue that this demand is central to three of the tensions that we set out above. It allows XR to be agnostic on solutions to the climate emergency but it also locks them into such agnosticism to an extent. It allows a movement that uses radical methods and discourses that hint at systemic change to gain legitimacy and look more reformist than revolutionary. Lastly, the demand of establishing a citizen's assembly does nothing to address the political economy that causes climate change, thereby leaving clamours for system change unspecified. If a climate citizens' assembly were to be set up within the current state structure, it would be unlikely to lead to anything more than further pressure for solutions to the climate emergency. That is, an assembly is unlikely to successfully challenge the power of fossil fuel and finance capital in itself but can certainly become a useful tool in doing so. We would therefore urge XR and other climate activists not to see citizens' assemblies as a silver-bullet solution to the climate emergency, but rather as a tool that can render the movement more legitimate in the struggle against these actors.

Chapter 6 turns to XR's theory of change, what they call the civil resistance model. We argue that this theory of change, based on the civil resistance literature, lacks much relevance for the climate change movement. It is noteworthy that XR have a theory of change at all as social movements since the end of the Cold War have largely shunned such overall prescriptive models of how to achieve positive social change. Nevertheless, the model is based on research that is in itself flawed and in turn even less relevant for XR because most of it is based on movements in the global south that have toppled dictators rather than fought for social, political and economic justice. The idea that 3.5% of the population have never failed to topple a regime has never been peer-reviewed and is based on a limited number of cases where regimes have been replaced by new governments that have been more integrated into global capitalism. Those cases have little relevance for XR and the climate change movement. The civil resistance literature also suffers from a lack of engagement with the political economy and an aversion to learn from Marxist literature and experiences that is typical of US social science. We make the case that this reluctance to engage with power relations in global capitalism is counterproductive for the climate change movement.

Lastly, the concluding chapter comes back to the tensions listed above. We elaborate specifically on how XR and the broader climate movement do and may engage with certain aspects of capitalism, such as profit, ownership and class relations. We particularly highlight greenwashing as an increasing phenomenon that state, international and corporate actors engage in and which climate activists ought to contest. Greenwashing is when practices and actors that are not ecologically sustainable are presented and treated as though they were. We conclude that whilst social movements fighting for action on climate change are wise not to declare themselves anti-capitalist, they stand much to gain from engaging with and contesting capitalism and the political economy in practice.

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CHAPTER 2

XR and Anarchism

Abstract When people think of protest that breaks laws, they often associate this to anarchism. Indeed, XR have been labelled as anarchist by many observers. In the vast majority of cases, the people doing this labelling have a very poor understanding of anarchism as a political movement. In such cases, the labelling of a social movement as anarchist becomes more of an attempt at smearing or delegitimising than analysing. This chapter does the opposite. It analyses how XR's discourses and practices relate to the anarchist tradition. We argue here that XR is much less anarchist than many other contemporary social movements and that the labelling of XR as anarchist in the right-wing press serves to render climate change activists as legitimate targets of state repression.

Keywords Anarchism · Direct action · Prefiguration · Autonomism · Occupy

When people think of protest that breaks laws, they often associate this to anarchism. Indeed, XR have been labelled as anarchist by many observers (e.g. Economist 2019; Murray 2019). In the vast majority of cases, the people doing this labelling have a very poor understanding of anarchism as a political movement. In such cases, the labelling of a social movement as anarchist becomes more of an attempt at smearing or delegitimising than analysing. This chapter does the opposite. It analyses how XR's discourses

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and practices relate to the anarchist tradition. We argue here that XR is much less anarchist than many other contemporary social movements and that the labelling of XR as anarchist in the right-wing press serves to render climate change activists as legitimate targets of state repression.

The first section looks at how the label of anarchists is used to set XR apart and delegitimise them as enemies of the social order. At times, the aim of this labelling as encouraging more violent state repression has been explicit. The second section goes beyond the label and studies how the anarchist tradition has evolved and influenced social movements more broadly. This has led to the terms 'capital-A Anarchists' and 'small-a anarchists' emerging. Capital-A Anarchists draw explicitly on anarchist ideology and have an adversarial relationship to the state and the police. Small-a anarchism is used to capture how many other social movements have been influenced by anarchist ideals that developed in opposition to both the state and Marxist parties and movements. The third and fourth sections look specifically at the extent to which XR is influenced by the two anarchist ideas and practices of direct action and prefiguration. The third section argues that XR's lawbreaking cannot be considered to constitute anarchist direct action. This is partly because it is mostly symbolical rather than prefigurative. It is also because of its focus on state power and positive attitude to the police. The fourth section argues that there are nevertheless prefigurative elements in the camps that XR have set up during their protests. Prefiguration is to enact in the present what is desired in the future; a link between the ends and the means of the protest. Car-free city centres, clothes swapping stations and communal kitchens that have been common in the temporary XR camps are certainly examples of what many XR activists would see as necessary components of a sustainable future.

2.1 The Anarchist Label as Othering

Calling somebody an anarchist has little or nothing to do with the political and ideological tradition of anarchism. People that use the label as an insult or slur have limited knowledge of anarchism and what it entails. The labelling of XR as anarchist, not least in the right-wing press, was spurred on by a policy report by the right-wing thinktank Policy Exchange. The report was titled *Extremism Rebellion: A review of ideology and tactics* (Wilson and Walton 2019) and one of the authors is

a previous Head of Metropolitan Police Counter Terrorism Command. Whilst the report failed to deliver the promised review of ideology, it does make its intentions clear in the title by branding XR an extremist organisation. The label of anarchist appears in the second paragraph of the preface and is then repeated a number of times. On only one occasion is there any attempt to explain the label when the authors claim that XR 'believe the existing social order and economic system must be overturned' (2019, p. 39). That is by any stretch a rather poor review of ideology and insufficient justification for labelling XR as anarchist, nor is it necessarily something that most XR activists would subscribe to.

The purpose of using the anarchist label instead lies in the association that exists in public discourse between anarchism and extremist politics. The purpose of the report, as evident in the title, was to declare XR an extremist organisation. It was published on the eve of XR's Summer Uprising in five cities across the UK and three months after the movement became national news with the April 2019 occupation of parts of central London. One key recommendation in the report was harsher policing than was the case in April when over a thousand activists were arrested. The authors critiqued what they perceived as a 'honeymoon period' (2019, p. 5) with soft, positive and accepting treatment of XR by politicians, police and the public. The anarchist label then serves to delegitimise the movement. It is used to say that as extremists, XR should not be treated as legitimate climate change protestors with rights guaranteed by the state. Instead, public figures should distance themselves from the organisation and the state should be ready to use more repressive force.

That the anarchist label is an insult rather than descriptive or analytical is evident in how it is received. One XR activist took to *The Guardian* to defend himself against the accusation, saying that '[t]o my mind, anarchists are anti-government, are destructive in their aims, and are not afraid to use violence' (Rivett 2019). No self-described anarchist would agree with that definition. It is nonetheless indicative of the function and meaning of the anarchist label in common parlance as a sub-culture that is incompatible with society and something to be feared.

The purpose of the anarchist and extremist labels is to render XR as outside of normal politics and something which is to be policed and repressed. It is a form of what has come to be known as 'othering' in social theory. Othering is a way of demarcating difference and placing a

person or group outside of what is perceived as normal for the intended reader. Othering is a common practice in the media and beyond when you seek to justify one type of actor or behaviour by delegitimising the other. As indicated by the rather misleading definitions of anarchism in the examples above, anarchism becomes the ultimate 'other' as political movements go. It comes to symbolise a form of left-wing extremism that is violent and destructive, a form of hooliganism more than a political movement or ideology. Most importantly, anarchists are considered so alien to politics and society that they should not be listened to.

By October 2019, the anarchist labelling of XR had been widely accepted in parts of the press. *The Economist* (Economist 2019) wrote about 'the anarchists of Extinction Rebellion' and *Daily Mail* about 'Extinction Rebellion anarchists' (Wood 2019). In another *Daily Mail* piece Douglas Murray (2019) made the purpose of the othering of the anarchist label much more explicit by asking 'Why do we listen to a bunch of anarchists who can't even work a fire hose?'. He went on to demand harsher policing and that everybody stop listening to XR. In an article that manages to call XR anarchist, communist and fascist all at once, it is revealing that the anarchist label is the one chosen for the title. Compared to those other two labels, anarchism offers a kind of implied deranged utopianism since the communist and fascist labels have been used to describe actually existing regimes. Anarchism, however, only exists in science fiction or activists' imaginations. In other words, the label of anarchist holds a special place in such discourses as violent, destructive and both utopian and dystopian all at once.

The discursive othering of XR through the anarchist label can be easily dismissed in substance but it was connected to a change towards more repressive policing. The policing of XR was ramped up for the October protests compared to the April and summer ones. Police raided the XR warehouse in London and arrested a number of activists pre-emptively ahead of the protests (Gayle 2019). They then proceeded to ban XR protests entirely in London, prohibiting gatherings of more than two people linked to XR (Mackintosh 2019). That move was a few weeks later successfully challenged in the courts as it was established that the police had acted unlawfully in imposing the ban (Dodd and Taylor 2019). This is not to say that the more repressive policing was caused by XR being labelled as anarchist but rather that such repression is justified by othering XR as anarchists. In short, the anarchist label serves a political rather than

analytical or descriptive purpose since those using it have little knowledge of anarchism as ideology or political tradition. This does not mean that XR completely lack aspects of anarchism, which is what we will now proceed to explore.

2.2 The Non-Anarchism of XR

Inasmuch as Anarchism is an -ism with a capital A, XR are distinctly non-anarchist. In fact, whilst they have been slandered as anarchist by right-wing commentators, they have been subjected to sustained criticism by those who call themselves anarchists. That critique has been multifaceted and includes topics that will be covered in later chapters, such as the internal democracy in the movement and the lack of sustained engagement with capitalism. At the same time, there are practices in XR and other non-anarchist social movements that have been influenced by anarchist forms of organising and protest. Much contemporary anarchist literature makes a distinction between 'capital-A Anarchism' and 'small-a anarchism'. These labels are used somewhat differently by different authors. David Graeber (2013) calls those anarchists who prefer not to co-operate with non-anarchists capital-A anarchists and considers himself a small-a anarchist because he works in coalitions that operate in accord with anarchist principles. Others have stretched that definition to include activists who they perceive to act in accord with some anarchist principles but who do not self-identify as anarchists (Ordóñez et al. 2018). The latter represents an over-stretch. If the anarchist label, even in its small-a form, is to have any meaning it has to be distinguishable from other activists who are not anarchists, which is the vast majority.

The most salient aspect of anarchism, which makes XR particularly non-anarchist, is that anarchism strives towards a society without the state, without government and authority. This one principle that binds anarchists together holds that 'anarchy is an ordered way of life' (Kinna 2005, p. 5) and that political authority is necessarily violent and constitutes a constant state of war. This articulation draws directly on the classic eighteenth-century anarchists Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and Mikhail Bakunin. XR are not against the political authority of the state. This can be seen both in how they discursively justify their lawbreaking and in how they go about breaking the law. Turning first to their discourse, in their 'Declaration of Rebellion' XR state the following:

> When government and the law fail to provide any assurance of adequate protection of and security for its people's well-being and the nation's future, it becomes the right of citizens to seek redress in order to restore dutiful democracy and to secure the solutions needed to avert catastrophe and protect the future. It becomes not only our right but our sacred duty to rebel.
>
> We hereby declare the bonds of the social contract to be null and void; the government has rendered them invalid by its continuing failure to act appropriately. (XR 2019a, p. 2)

This justification is firmly based in a liberal conception of the state. Ideas about a social contract existing between the state and its citizens or subjects were developed by classical liberal thinkers including Thomas Hobbes (Hampton 1986) and Jean Jacques Rousseau (Rousseau and May 2002). In such a view, the state has the legitimacy to exercise its authority as long as it provides certain rights and conditions for its citizens. This liberal conception of state power is fundamentally at odds with the anarchist view of state power as illegitimate and violent. In other words, XR's discourse is not anarchist, but rather liberal. The non-anarchist relation to the state also stretches to the focus of the rebellious activities.

Extinction Rebellion protests are directly aimed at the locations and means of state power in a way that is alien to the autonomy of anarchists. Autonomy from the state, media and police has been highlighted as a particularly anarchist aspect of the Occupy Wall Street movement. In this view, Occupy acted 'on their own to achieve their goals, without reference to the world outside—in particular, without reference to authority and the forces of order' (Hammond 2015). That Occupy acted without reference to the world outside must be taken with a pinch of salt, seeing as they chose to occupy the centre of global finance capital. Nonetheless, XR interact much more with the state than Occupy ever did. Roger Hallam's (2019b, p. 101) Civil Resistance Model specifically targets the capital city because it 'is where the government is, [and] where the elites hang out'. In other words, XR directly targets state power in a non-anarchist way.

The most non-anarchist aspect of XR has been its relationship to the police, which has drawn much criticism from other activists. One of the most recognisable anarchist slogans is All Cops Are Bastards (ACAB). This symbolises anarchists' adversarial relationship to police in all their forms. The thrust of the anarchist critique of XR is that they are naïve

in dealing with the police and the criminal justice system. XR's relationship to the police and security forces partly stems from their model of civil resistance which draws mainly on the work of Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (2011). This model will be further explored later on in this book but the fact that many successful resistance campaigns globally have involved parts of the police and security forces turning against the state alongside the protestors informs XR's stance. There is then a view in the XR discourse that the police, like other opponents, can be won over (Hallam 2019a). Whether many XR activists truly believe that or whether being friendly to the police is a tactical move to win broader support is unclear. However, the chanting of 'We love the police!' when arrests are taking place at XR protests have particularly enraged anarchist critics (e.g. Out of the Woods 2019; Punk Academic 2019).

There are three main anarchist critiques of XR's cosy relationship to the police. One, the institutional racism in policing means that the experience of getting arrested is a lot more detrimental for black people and ethnic minorities. The strategy itself is therefore exclusionary. This links into broader critiques of XR as particularly white. Two, XR glorify and diminish the damaging effect that getting arrested can have for many activists. Co-founder Gail Bradbrook, for example, said that 'being arrested has a "spell-breaking" quality, transmuting society's deeply ingrained pressures to conform into a new-found sense of personal power' (Green 2019). Needless to say, that does not reflect everybody's experience of arrest and imprisonment. Three, XR encourage activists to talk to police liaison officers at protests and other police officers when arrested in order to win them over. However, that possibility has to be weighed up against the risk of such conversations being used as intelligence gathering that will ultimately lead to more targeting and repressive policing (Netpol 2020). Indeed, when the aforementioned increased policing of the October protests happened, the response of many anarchists was 'told you so'.

XR have then been accused of being anarchist by the right-wing press and heavily critiqued for not being anarchist enough by self-described anarchists with one much-read blog post being titled 'Not the Struggle we Need' (Out of the Woods 2019). Nevertheless, even if XR are a long way from being capital-A Anarchists, they may still be influenced by small-a anarchism. Many scholars in recent years have explored what the anarchist influence in non-anarchist social movements is (Kiersey and Vrasti 2016; Prichard and Worth 2016; Wigger 2016; Berglund 2020).

Our argument here is that this influence is much less in XR than in many other movements, not least Occupy which XR otherwise have drawn much inspiration from. To show why that is, we now turn to explore the extent to which XR's lawbreaking can be considered an anarchist form of direct action.

2.3 Direct Action

Most of XR's lawbreaking is direct action and they frequently use the term. In everyday language and media reporting, the terms direct action and civil disobedience are used interchangeably. Indeed, XR use the terms interchangeably as in this extract from their handbook: 'If you are open to being involved in civil disobedience […], you go to a nonviolent direct-action (NVDA) training' (XR 2019b, p. 7). They also use the term civil resistance in terms of broader strategy, as mentioned above. In the academic literature these three terms are used differently. They have different geographical, historical and disciplinary origins. We will address civil disobedience and civil resistance separately in later chapters and will here focus on direct action. This term also has multiple uses. In its most basic form the practitioner of direct action 'seeks to intervene directly and physically upon another actor or object', whilst indirect action seeks to 'persuade a third actor (state, media, corporation) themselves to intervene' (Hayes and Ollitrault 2019, p. 140). To appreciate what may be considered direct and indirect in relation to XR we need to consider their aims. Those aims are to address climate change, but they also claim that in order to do so we need a different democratic system. The way there is through disruption that cause 'economic cost [to] the guys running this world' (Hallam 2019a, p. 102). In relation to XR we can therefore state that the more an action directly aims to stop sources of climate change, the more direct it is. In addition, XR's actions can also be construed as direct if they prevent government from operating and/or cause direct costs to the state or other powerful actors.

Most of XR's disruptive protests do constitute direct action according to this basic definition. This may include protesting direct drivers of climate change, such as protesting fast fashion in shopping centres (AFP 2019) or financial investments in fossil fuels in the financial district in the City of London (Gayle and Taylor 2019). It also includes disrupting city centres, not least the capital city, because it is aimed at government and the economy. Not least, XR's tactics of getting arrested in great numbers

is partially motivated by overwhelming the state. Getting arrested in itself therefore constitutes a form of direct action when it comes to XR. This puts them in stark contrast to anarchists for whom using the criminal justice system in such a way ends up strengthening the state and its repressive forces rather than challenging it (Out of the Woods 2019). Distinguishing between direct and indirect action in this way is not a merely descriptive process. It matters politically.

It is easier to justify lawbreaking that is direct action rather than that which is indirect. One of the most criticised of XR-related actions to date has been one of their most indirect actions. As part of the October protests in London a smaller group of activists disrupted Underground services at Canning Town, partially by getting on top of the train carriages. This created dramatic scenes as many would-be passengers strongly objected and some proceeded to physically pull the protestors down (Townsend 2019). The criticism from media, right-wing commentators and fellow XR activists had two main aspects. First, public transport is exactly the kind of thing that a future sustainable society would need more of. Secondly, the passengers being disrupted were less likely to be in Hallam's words, 'the guys running this world' than if activists had targeted a station located where London's financial or political elites work (Rowlatt 2019). Although disruptive and imposing, it was then indirect both in terms of protesting climate change and in terms of protesting the state and the economy. In other words, this criticism shows that it is difficult to justify disruptive indirect action.

Whilst most of XR's lawbreaking is direct action according to the basic definition set out above, it is not what anarchists would call direct action. Some anarchists would dismiss XR's focus on nonviolent direct action. As mentioned above, a common misconception about anarchism is that it is violent and destructive. However, although many anarchists do not believe in violence as a productive means of protest, others object to strict nonviolence. For Peter Gelderloos (2007) nonviolence ends up protecting the state and the racist and patriarchal violence that is carried out or condoned by the state and the criminal justice system. It comes, he argues from a position of privilege since 'nonviolence assumes that instead of defending ourselves against violence, we can suffer violence patiently until enough of society can be mobilized to oppose it peacefully' (2007, p. 83). The contrast with XR's strict nonviolence even when confronted with state repression could not be starker. However, although this places XR as opposed to the more capital-A Anarchism of Gelderloos,

they may yet be considered by some as small-a anarchist precisely because they explicitly practice direct action. We argue that would be misleading.

Whilst there are aspects of XR's direct action that overlaps with small-a anarchist values, the context and discourse surrounding it makes XR's direct action distinctly non-anarchist. In an effort to distinguish between civil disobedience and anarchist direct action, David Graeber argues that

> direct action is the insistence, when faced with structures of unjust authority, on acting as if one is already free. One does not solicit the state. One does not even necessarily make a grand gesture of defiance. Insofar as one is capable, one proceeds as if the state does not exist. (Graeber 2009, p. 203)

This is not coherent with XR's view of a social contract being broken by the state, requiring a reimagined democracy that would nonetheless be organised by a present or future state. XR are certainly making grand gestures of defiance and those are very much directed at the state, rather than proceeding as if the state did not exist. XR do then practice direct action but they do so in a way and on premises that are opposed by anarchists. What little small-a anarchist tendencies XR have, are instead visible through the concept of prefiguration.

2.4 Prefiguration

Like many contemporary social movements, XR have elements of prefiguration, where the means of struggle are in accordance with the aims. However, these prefigurative elements are least present in XR's more confrontational lawbreaking protests and more evident in the camps that they set up during their protests. Often connected to and embraced by anarchists, prefiguration has spread in social movements globally. It is distinguished by a focus on process rather than strategy (Maeckelbergh 2011). The core idea is that there should be an 'attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present' (Yates 2015, p. 1). This comes out of one of the core anarchist critiques of Leninist Marxism, namely that it is consequentialist (Franks 2003). Consequentialism means that the ends justify the means. For anarchists, consequentialism explains why Marxist revolutionary movements ended up creating regimes that were every bit as oppressive and unequal as those that they replaced. In not unconnected events, the end of actually existing socialism through

the fall of the Soviet Union and the Berlin Wall, made this idea of prefiguration popular with left-wing social movements and activists around the world. It was an appealing factor in the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas in Mexico from 1994 onwards. It was also a key part of what has been termed the Global Justice Movement (Maeckelbergh 2011). This was the wave of protests in cities hosting negotiations of international organisations around the turn of the millennium (Seattle, Genoa, Prague, etc.) and is also linked to what became the World Social Forum where social movements from around the world met parallel to the World Economic Forum in Davos (Buckley 2013).

Prefiguration became a large part of Occupy, and the broader Movement of the Squares which it was part of, and some of those prefigurative tendencies are also present in XR. The Movement of the Squares has been criticised for often lacking concrete demands but it is generally accepted that they protested both economic and democratic systems and processes (Fernández-Savater et al. 2017; Flesher Fominaya 2017). They did so through a prefigurative logic of 'building the new society in the shell of the old' (Graeber 2013, p. 190). A strong component of that was the claim that liberal democracy was broken, and they came to practice forms of direct and deliberative democracy that sought to do away with hierarchies. Democracy within the occupied squares was therefore based on assemblies where there may be temporary coordinators but no leaders (Rodgers Gibson 2013; Hammond 2015; Hardt and Negri 2017). This claim of the failure of representative liberal democracy and the need to find new less hierarchical forms of democracy is something that XR have inherited. The so-called horizontalism and experiments with deliberative democracy will be explored in depth in Chapter 4. It suffices to say here that the practice of critiquing representative democracy by not just saying but also doing things differently is prefigurative and therefore draws on small-a anarchist principles. That prefiguration is not limited to democracy but also economic.

Through emulating the camps of the Squares, XR have been able to create a prefigurative microcosm of a future utopian society. Because XR are much vaguer when it comes to economic critique and demands it is difficult to judge what it would take to act prefiguratively in that sense. Nevertheless, the camps have allowed XR to experiment with alternative forms of society and economy. As an example, the camps have kitchens/restaurants serving vegan food at no or cost price; well-being tents where you can rest and have a chat; libraries where you can sit and

read books about climate change and resistance; clothes swapping places; and organised activities for children. Setting up these services that are not profit-driven and aspire towards sustainability are certainly prefigurative for a climate change movement even if that movement is vague about the kind of changes that it seeks. Morgan Rodgers Gibson (2013, p. 345) noted about Occupy that the '[e]ncampments effectively became prefigurative political alternatives to the status quo in which participants engaged in genuine attempts to build the institutions of a liberated society in the shell of the old'. The same can be said for XR, whose camps then draw on the small-a anarchist prefiguration of Occupy and the Movement of the Squares. Similar small-a anarchism is much less evident in XR's lawbreaking.

XR's direct action is primarily symbolic, rather than prefigurative. In an effort to distinguish anarchist prefigurative direct action from other forms of protest, Benjamin Franks (2003) contrasts it to symbolic and constitutional action. Like Franks, XR reject constitutional action that goes through the existing institutional channels to affect change. XR's civil resistance model is based on the premise that 'conventional campaigning does not work' (Hallam 2019a, p. 100). Nonetheless, XR's direct action is symbolic and consequentialist. For Franks (Franks 2003, p. 18), '[s]ymbolic actions are those acts that aim to raise awareness of an issue or injustice, but by themselves do not attempt to resolve it'. Although Franks acknowledges that much prefigurative action is also, and sometimes primarily, symbolic, XR's is particularly so. This is because of the temporary nature of all XR protests. The prefigurative microcosms that were set up through Occupy did not have a predetermined end-date whereas XR's camps do. That in itself makes them more symbolic. Some XR actions are also more on the purely symbolic end than others. For example, many actions are criticised by right-wing commentators for blocking traffic and therefore causing more pollution (Chipperfield 2019). Part of the XR response to that is that it is insignificant compared to the systematic damage of climate change. It then becomes symbolic and consequentialist rather than prefigurative since it is necessary to call attention to the problem. In short, XR's more rebellious and news-worthy actions are the ones that are the least prefigurative.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued that XR are far away from being anarchist. They do not share anarchist views of the state and the criminal justice system by their nature being violent and oppressive. Moreover, they use this criminal justice system as a tool in protest in ways that anarchists repudiate. Though they do use direct action as a key method, they do so in a way that is distinctly non-anarchist. It is aimed at the state and it is often symbolical and consequentialist rather than prefigurative in that the aims of the protest are not generally part of the means. However, this does not mean that there are no signs of anarchism in XR's practices. The prefigurative aspects of the camps that have been inherited from the Occupy movement have anarchist traits in that they seek to enact in the present a smaller version of what may be part of a future sustainable society. The horizontality in the decision-making that will be covered in Chapter 4 is also part of these traces of anarchist politics. Nevertheless, we argue that these traces are much less visible in XR than they are in many other social movements, including Occupy.

We therefore echo and give substance to XR's rejection of the anarchist label. Because that label performs a political function in that it separates XR from normal politics and justifies state repression against them, it is of course unlikely to stop based on reasoning and analysis. We do urge other commentators not to use the anarchist label in relation to XR because it is simply wrong and misleading. As for XR activists who are thinking about how to use direct action to enact change, we urge you to read the anarchist literature of which we have only scratched the surface here. For nearly 200 years anarchists have thought about what it means to take direct action and to break the law in different circumstances and with different justifications. It is possible and advisable to learn from the rich anarchist tradition without subscribing to it. With that said, we now turn to another tradition that has considered the same question.

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CHAPTER 3

Civility and Disobedience

Abstract There is a rich tradition of thinking about when it is acceptable to break the law in a liberal democratic society. For XR, as for other social movements, practicing civil disobedience means to engage in a battle over legitimacy. Civil disobedience is a performative act aimed at a target audience that seeks to delegitimise opponents. XR explicitly draw on the liberal tradition of civil disobedience being justified as a last resort, since all other avenues have been tried and tested and that time is running out. XR also show a fidelity to law when they accept the legal consequences of disobedience.

Keywords Civil disobedience · Legitimacy · NVDA · John Rawls

Breaking the law as a means of protest probably dates back as far as law itself. Despite what some commentators claim, doing so does not make you an anarchist. On the contrary, there is a rich tradition of thinking about when it is acceptable to break the law in a liberal democratic society. In this chapter, we argue that for XR, as for other social movements, practising civil disobedience means to engage in a battle over legitimacy. Civil disobedience is a performative act aimed at a target audience that seeks to delegitimise opponents. Political polarisation in itself, which has increased dramatically in the last decade, makes civil disobedience more

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likely because whoever is in power will be regarded as illegitimate by many. We further argue that XR explicitly draw on the liberal tradition of civil disobedience but do so in a way that stretches the concept by declaring the social contract 'null and void' (XR 2019a, p. 2).

In the first section, we set out a basic definition of civil disobedience as both civil and disobedient. We elaborate on what it means for protest to be civil and disobedient in relation to forms of protest that are less civil or less disobedient.

In the second section, we then take a closer look at the particularly liberal tradition of when civil disobedience is justified in a liberal democratic society. We here argue that civil disobedience is primarily a battle for legitimacy. It is practised in order to delegitimise that which is being protested in front of a target audience, which is generally society at large. An important aspect of showing yourself to be a legitimate and conscientious actor is to accept the legal consequences which XR certainly do when they accept and even embrace arrest. Moreover, by directly referring to the social contract being broken in their justification of rebellion, XR echo John Rawls' (1971) influential account of disobedience being justified when the state fails in its duty to offer just and efficient government.

In the third section, we take a closer look at Rawls' justification of civil disobedience, which claims that it can be justified when practised as a last resort and when acting within an overall 'fidelity to law' (Rawls 1971, p. 366). Fidelity to law here means that protest should broadly accept the power of the state and be reformist rather than revolutionary. XR's whole discourse around their reason for lawbreaking is that it is a last resort, that all other avenues have been tried and tested and that time is running out. Their approach to fidelity to law is more ambiguous. On the one hand, XR are accepting of legal consequences, thereby showing respect for the law. On the other hand, they model their resistance on protests that have deposed dictatorships and often use discourses that have a deeper critique of the state than Rawls imagined.

In the fourth section, we explore the role of arrests further and claim that they play a pivotal role in showing sacrifice, which is intended to gain support from much of the public. Such sacrifice is particularly necessary for XR since they do not make up parts of the global population that are particularly affected by climate change currently. The sacrifice therefore gives a legitimacy to act and disrupt that is otherwise not obvious. Nonetheless, we also highlight that the focus on arrests is a stumbling

block in making the movement more inclusive because it alienates ethnic minority populations who are targeted by police and the criminal justice system.

3.1 Civil Disobedience

Civil disobedience, although used interchangeably with direct action by XR and other social movements, requires more by those who practice it. First of all, civil disobedience requires disobedience. It needs to break laws and rules and disobey law enforcement. As explained in the previous chapter, direct action is not practised in direct relation to the law and is therefore not always disobedient per se. Civil disobedience is in this sense aimed at the law. The point of it is to break the law. Through their peaceful confrontations with police and explicit aim of arrests, XR put disobedience at the front and centre of their tactics. As social movements go, XR are then particularly disobedient.

As well as disobedient, civil disobedience has to be civil. As a minimum requirement, that means that it has to be nonviolent. This is also different from direct action, which can be violent. Nonetheless, it chimes with the term Non-Violent Direct Action (NVDA), which is actively used by XR and many other social movements. Some theorists take 'civil' to mean more and also incorporate the aims of the protest. Tony Milligan (2013, Chapters 4 and 5) argues that if the aim of a protest is reactionary, cruel or unjust, then it should not be deemed civil. For example, anti-abortion activists who prevent women from entering abortion clinics cannot be considered civil because the aim is to impose a control over women's bodies that is not imposed over men's bodies. Nor can fox hunting that breaks or bends the law be civil because it is aimed at carrying out a cruelty to animals. The notion of civility therefore puts demands on what kind of causes can be pursued using civil disobedience and these should not be reactionary or illiberal. Combatting climate change and pursuing climate justice are undoubtedly civil causes according to this notion of civility.

XR is a movement that takes the civility part of civil disobedience particularly seriously. They draw on Gandhi's notions of civility in doing so. Gandhi spent decades developing his theory and practice of civil disobedience or *Satyagraha*; first in South Africa and then in India against British colonial rule. Although versions of civility varied throughout this period, one thing that makes Gandhi stand out in the history of civil

disobedience is how he saw civility not just as polite manners employed submissively or strategically but as something coming from deep within, something spiritual (Milligan 2013, Chapter 8; Hayes and Ollitrault 2019, pp. 147–150). Such civil disobedience cannot be born out of hate but must come from a 'desire to do the opponent good' (Milligan 2013, p. 89). This spiritual approach is recognisable in XR's disciplined nonviolence. To partake in XR's disobedience, activists have to first attend a special training session where they learn how to remain calm under pressure (XR 2019b, p. 7). This involves relaxation techniques and a steadfast commitment to nonviolence under any circumstances. The chants of 'we love the police' that have been so derided by other activists and social movements have to be seen in this light of Gandhian spiritual civility and principled nonviolence. However, there have been grey areas in XR's civility.

Two of the most contentious aspects of XR's disobedience relates to a civil duty of care. On the one hand, the movement has been critiqued for the lack of duty of care towards its activists. By actively encouraging activists not just to disobey but to get themselves arrested, XR are exposing its activists to the criminal justice system at their own economic cost. To be sure, the founders and other leading members of XR have led by example and been arrested multiple times (Green 2019; Johnson 2019). Moreover, XR have committees dedicated to arrestee support who are there to emotionally care for arrested activists. That withstanding, many potential activists will not be able to afford legal costs. There is a particular issue here around the white and middle-class image of XR, both in terms of its activists and its politics. On the other hand, the Heathrow Pause protest was an instance where the duty of care towards public safety came under question. Heathrow Pause was to involve flying drones low around Heathrow Airport in a way that was meant to stop planes from taking off for security reasons but without actually causing risk to life (Heathrow Pause 2019). Originally intended as an XR action, the internal opposition against the action was so strong that the organisers decided to do it under a different name. In the end, Heathrow decided not to ground any planes because of the drones and the activists involved were arrested (Johnson 2019). In the eyes of many critics inside and outside the movement, Heathrow Pause came too close to violence, potential harm and a lacking duty of care.

3.2 Legitimacy

Disentangling civil disobedience from direct action and civil resistance highlights the importance of the notion of legitimacy in civil disobedience. This is because the concept of civil disobedience rests on a tradition of liberal moral philosophy and political theory, which the other two concepts do not. Civil disobedience is more than a description of certain kinds of illegal but nonviolent protest in the way set out above. The significance of civil disobedience and its philosophical baggage is something that is largely overlooked by the literatures on civil resistance that have been so central to XR's tactics. For example, in their book on civil resistance, Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (2011, pp. 92, 119, 130, 133, 161) use civil disobedience as synonymous to civil resistance when describing cases where the movements being studied have used the term. In an overview of the social movements literature, Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani (2006, p. 177) use the term to describe certain forms of protest that movements can use as part of their repertoires of action.

Unlike alternative terms, civil disobedience rests on a moral philosophy where the separation of the legal and the legitimate is at the core and where its practice is limited to being a last resort that retains fidelity to law overall (Rawls 1971, Chapter VI). It is not revolutionary as most of the struggles in the civil resistance literature are (Sharp 1973, 2012; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Nepstad and Kurtz 2012), and not anarchist, anti-state or prefigurative as much of what is described as direct action is. For the German political theorist Jurgen Habermas, civil disobedience becomes a 'litmus test for the democratic constitutional state' (Habermas 1985, p. 95) and those who practice it become 'guardians of legitimacy' (1985, p. 103). The purpose of civil disobedience is then to challenge the legitimacy of that which is being protested, thereby separating the legal from the legitimate. If it is repressed with state violence, the legitimacy of the state and the criminal justice system is weakened. We can see how this is already playing out in relation to repression of XR. XR were recently included on a list of extremist ideologies as part of the UK Prevent programme. Prevent is a counterterrorism programme that relies on schools and other state institutions to pick up on behaviour that may lead to terrorism. It has been critiqued for putting much of Britain's Muslim population under constant vigilance, thereby alienating people rather than preventing violence (O'toole et al. 2016). The inclusion of

XR on the list was reportedly short-lived but further undermined Prevent in the eyes of professions that it relies upon. This was acknowledged by the previous head of Prevent who said that 'confidence from communities was vital to its success and legitimacy' (Dodd 2020). In other words, repressing civil disobedience comes at the cost of lost legitimacy for the state.

Civil disobedience challenges legitimacy by being a communicative act. For Kimberley Brownlee (2012, p. 18), civil disobedience 'must include a deliberate breach of law taken on the basis of steadfast personal commitment in order to communicate our condemnation of a law or policy to a relevantly placed audience. That audience is usually our society or the government'. This means that there is a target audience for acts of civil disobedience which directly or indirectly can change the law. Brownlee (2012, pp. 27–28) further separates communicative acts of civil disobedience from non-communicative acts of personal disobedience, which may include cases of conscientious objection as well as refusals of healthcare professionals to carry out abortions. John Rawls also highlights the public aspects of civil disobedience when he states that 'it is done in public. It is engaged in openly with fair notice; it is not covert or secretive' (Rawls 1971, p. 366). This communicative and public aspect of civil disobedience contrasts to the autonomous nature of anarchist direct action. Whilst the former looks outwards, the latter looks inwards.

Part of the communicative and open nature of civil disobedience is a willingness to take on the law and possibly face the consequences of doing so. This aspect of risking and accepting punishment and using this punishment as a communicative platform is a recurring thread in the history of civil disobedience, from Thoreau's (1969) essay written after a night in prison for refusing to pay taxes to a state that waged a war of aggression and relied on slavery, to Martin Luther King's (1969) Letter from Birmingham City Jail. Having a target audience that is communicated with through open acts of disobedience has then always been central to practitioners of civil disobedience, as well as the philosophical justifications of the phenomenon (Rawls 1971; Arendt 1973; Singer 1974; Habermas 1985; Brownlee 2012). XR have tried to emulate using prison as a communicative platform to some extent, though with limited effect. As an example, Roger Hallam recorded a video called 'Message From Prison' before being imprisoned (Heathrow Pause 2019).

Although there was a vast amount written on civil disobedience in relation to and in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement and the anti-Vietnam War protests in the US in the 1960s and 70s (see Bedau 1969; King 1969; Rawls 1971; Arendt 1973; Singer 1974), the most influential and controversial of these for current academic debates is Rawls' writing on the role of civil disobedience in what he called a 'nearly just society'. He defined civil disobedience as 'a public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government' (Rawls 1971, p. 364). Moreover, Rawls argued that civil disobedience should be restricted to appeal against infringements to equal liberties and equality of opportunities and that it should not be used to address economic issues or where there may be some self-interest (1971, p. 372). Rawls' writings have been critiqued on the basis that 'a nearly just society' is far from any existing societies whose levels of justice are at least contested, thereby invalidating many of his arguments in relation to existing societies (see Brownlee 2012; Milligan 2013).

XR's discourse is heavily influenced by the Rawlsian justification of civil disobedience. This is not least visible in relation to the social contract. Rawls based his justification of civil disobedience on his interpretation of the social contract. He argued that social institutions ought to be effective and just. Nonetheless, the onus in Rawls' writing is on justice, not efficiency and this is replicated in most writing on civil disobedience. To claim to conduct civil disobedience is to appeal to a higher justice (Rawls 1971, p. 383), a higher moral right (Singer 1974, p. 64; Brownlee 2012, Chapter 4) or a higher law, such as a constitution (Arendt 1973, p. 60). This is likely because the justification of civil disobedience as developed in the 1960s and 70s was strongly influenced by the US Civil Rights movement and that struggle was primarily about justice. When XR claim that the social contract has been broken, they do so primarily on the basis of efficiency. The claim that the government is failing to protect its citizens and assure their security is based on an inefficient government since this applies to all citizens in XR's key discourse (XR 2019a, p. 2). Whilst XR increasingly engage in debates around climate justice, they do not base their claims about the social contract being broken on injustice. Instead, the claim is that the state is acting illegitimately because it is failing all its citizens.

3.3 The Last Resort and Fidelity to Law

XR's justifications of lawbreaking draw heavily on the civil disobedience history and literature. The affinity to Rawlsian thought is not least evident in describing their actions as a last resort. For Rawls (1971, p. 373), it is a condition for civil disobedience 'that the normal appeals to the political majority have already been made in good faith and that they have failed'. This is because breaking the law is an extreme act that should only be considered once legal routes have been attempted and 'further attempts may reasonably be thought fruitless' (1971, p. 373). It would then not be justified or legitimate to use civil disobedience if there may be other legal options still available. Brownlee, who otherwise is critical of Rawls' restrictive notion of civil disobedience, also supports the 'last resort' criterion. She argues that 'civil disobedience may be justifiable as a matter of necessity only when lawful efforts have repeatedly shown the majority to be immovable or apathetic to this legitimate cause' (Brownlee 2012, p. 200). The last resort criterion is also present in Brownlee's argument that necessity lies at the heart of claims to civil disobedience and that claims grounded in necessity are an appropriate legal defence when activists end up in court (2012, Chapter 6). Only when lawbreaking is a last resort can it be claimed to be a necessity. Civil disobedience is then a form of protest that seeks to contest the legitimacy of laws and opponents by appealing to society through illegal acts that are conducted as a last resort. It is in this sense different from both direct action and civil resistance, terms which say nothing about legitimacy, appealing to society and whether or not lawbreaking is done as a last resort.

XR's whole discourse of extinction and what they are as a movement is based on rebellion being a last resort. Their 'Declaration of Rebellion' starts with the following:

> This is our darkest hour.
>
> Humanity finds itself embroiled in an event unprecedented in its history, one which, unless immediately addressed, will catapult us further into the destruction of all that we hold dear: this nation, its peoples, our ecosystems and the future of generations to come. (XR 2019a, p. 1)

This extract exemplifies the urgency in XR's discourse. Later in the declaration, XR link this urgency to the necessity to rebel:

> When government and the law fail to provide any assurance of adequate protection of and security for its people's well-being and the nation's future, it becomes the right of citizens to seek redress in order to restore dutiful democracy and to secure the solutions needed to avert catastrophe and protect the future. It becomes not only our right but our sacred duty to rebel. (XR, 2019a, p. 2)

Disobedience thus becomes a last resort because time is running out and governments have failed. This is, naturally, a different interpretation of what constitutes a last resort than what Rawls imagined. Rawls' claim is based on all other means being exhausted. To be sure, XR make that claim too: 'Conventional campaigning does not work. Sending emails, giving money to NGOs, going on A-to-B marches [have] failed to bring about the necessary change' (Hallam 2019, p. 100). However, because XR do not primarily see climate change as an issue of justice but rather as efficiency in Rawlsian social contract terms, exhausting other means would likely not be enough to justify disobedience if it was not for the urgency of acting on climate change in 2020. That is to say that in 1970 it would have been harder to justify disobedience on the grounds of urgency than it is today. It is fair to say then that the last resort criterion is essential for XR's justification of disobedience but that this is articulated in a rather different way than imagined by Rawls in the 1970s.

Rawls' last criterion of what can justify civil disobedience, that it should retain 'fidelity to law' (1971, p. 366) is ambiguous in relation to XR but also in relation to other famous instances of civil disobedience. Martin Luther King (1969, p. 79) claimed to have 'the very highest respect for the law' but his politics were a lot more radical, focused on economic injustice and anti-systemic than Rawls' sanitised version of civil disobedience gives room for (Celikates 2015). Nevertheless, for both King and Rawls, the fidelity to or respect for the law follows from the act being public, nonviolent and accepting of the legal consequences. This, Rawls argues, 'helps to establish to the majority that the act is indeed politically conscientious and sincere, and that it is intended to address the public's sense of justice' (Rawls 1971, pp. 366–367). Fidelity to law shows society as the target audience that the aims of civil disobedience are reformist, rather than revolutionary. XR's intentional arrests certainly display a respect for the law and this respect is to some extent taken to an extreme with the chants of 'we love the police'. However, the civil resistance model that will be further explored in a later chapter is based

on political struggles that have aimed at regime change. Thus, if the aim is to get 3.5% of the population to engage in a struggle that can topple the state in its present form, the fidelity to law can at least be questioned.

The extent to which XR's aims are revolutionary or reformist is diffuse and will depend on which XR activist you talk to. Their demand is a citizen's assembly to solve the climate crisis. That in itself is reformist. But if such an assembly was to have the power to overrule all existing institutions and power relations, then it goes beyond reformism. Imagine for example that the assembly would decimate fossil fuels, industrial farming and global trade in goods. All these would be perfectly reasonable reforms from a climate change perspective, but they would fundamentally transform capitalism. For XR, it would involve 'a rapid change in wealth distribution and power structures, preventing a rich elite from perpetuating a self-serving ideology' (XR 2020). In other words, the extent to which XR act within a Rawlsian fidelity to law depends on how revolutionary you take this anti-elitist discourse to be.

3.4 Arrests, Sacrifice & Exclusion

Inasmuch as fidelity to law is meant to display personal sacrifice, it certainly does apply to XR. The mass arrests have been a key factor in XR's prominence. In the previous chapter we set out how intentionally getting arrested sets XR's civil disobedience apart from anarchist forms of direct action. Above, we set out how it forms part of an open and conscientious approach directed at society as the target audience within a fidelity to law. We have also stated that civil disobedience is a communicative act. For XR, that communication goes via the media, particularly through sympathetic journalists in selected outlets (McNern 2019). What the arrests specifically are meant to achieve is to display personal sacrifice. This is in addition to the disruption and highlighting of the emergency that is already achieved by the actions themselves. XR do more than accept the legal consequences as any practitioner of civil disobedience should; they actively seek those legal consequences as an end in itself. Apart from clogging up the criminal justice system, the reason for doing so is to show personal sacrifice as is made clear in XR training sessions.

The display of sacrifice involved in the voluntary arrests make up for the lack of specific claims to injustice. Recall that most instances of civil disobedience involve a claim to justice and protest against injustice. We can think here of historical examples of Gandhi and the Indian struggle

against British imperialism or King and the US civil rights movement's struggle against racist segregation laws and for equality. We can also think of more recent examples, such as the children of people killed by the military dictatorships in South America seeking to bring the military commanders responsible for the murders of their parents to justice (Flesher Fominaya and Jimenéz 2014). Or we can think of the Spanish housing activists who protect each other from eviction and perennial indebtedness as a result of a housing crisis that was caused by the banks but paid for by households (Berglund 2018). All these struggles have been waged by people who have experienced a specific injustice against those responsible for the injustice. XR activists can claim no such specific injustice. XR activists are mainly white and British. XR UK is not made up of those currently bearing the brunt of a changing climate. They therefore have to derive their legitimacy to act and disrupt from somewhere else. This is where the sacrifice of arrests is helpful. XR's notion of sacrifice is directly derived from the civil resistance literature that will be further explored in Chapter 6. Here it is made clear that protest polarises the public and in order for that polarisation not to become overall negative, an 'act of sacrifice…can help to foster an empathetic reaction: they convince the undecided to side with communities in resistance rather than forces of repression' (Engler and Engler 2017, p. 206). Nonetheless, the focus on getting arrested epitomises XR's problem with privilege and exclusion.

XR are by design a white and privileged movement in terms of their demographic, their tactics and some of their discourses. They are accused by both other activists and commentators of being too white and too middle class. Unlike what some of the critique implies, however, this is something that is much discussed in XR and something that many activists want to change. We argue that whilst it is encouraging to see attempts of XR to be more inclusive, these are unlikely to be successful. Our own engagement with XR have proved the image of whiteness to be true. There are very few Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic activists in XR, at least in Bristol where we have been engaged. To be sure, this is something that the environmentalist movement has struggled with for much longer than XR have been around. The claim that XR activists are too middle class is harder to prove and rather depends how you define class. In our experience, there is no lack of low-wage workers in precarious employment involved with XR; what has been termed 'the precariat' (Standing 2011). That said, certain kinds of cultural capital are certainly helpful in feeling

part of XR. However, what really excludes broader demographics from engaging with XR is the focus on disobedience and arrests.

The tactics of Extinction Rebellion are designed for middle-class, white Britain. The institutional racism of the criminal justice system is well-documented with Black and ethnic minority Britons being more likely to be stopped and searched, arrested, imprisoned, killed by police and die in custody (Burnett 2012; Netpol 2020). To have a tactic that directly puts activists in contact with that criminal justice system is therefore exclusionary by design. Since activists are expected to pay their own fines and court fees, there is also a strong class element to the tactics of arrests. In short, XR's tactics presume a level of privilege. That in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. There is no shortage in human history of progressive movements for change being led by elements of the middle class. Where it has sometimes become problematic is where the whiteness of the movement has translated into reinforcing racism in a number of ways. First, the chants of 'we love the police' naturally antagonise people whose experiences with the police as an institution have been violent and oppressive because of racism. Second, a story about white activists reporting black activists to police for suspected pickpocketing during the April 2019 action reinforced the impression of police as allies and Black people as a dangerous and criminal other (Out of the Woods 2019). Third, the statement saying that police should address knife crime instead of XR ignored the racism involved in policing knife crime in London (Out of the Woods 2019). If XR, as is likely, remain largely white, such acts and discourses that reinforce racism may continue. However, there are things that XR can do and are doing to mitigate its whiteness.

Whilst it is unlikely that XR will itself become a more diverse movement, they should continue and deepen their efforts to engage with climate justice movements within and beyond the UK. The new strategy agreed for XR in Bristol for 2020 directly refers to Nafeez Ahmed's (2019) much-read constructive critique of the movement and its positioning in relation to race and class. Part of that plan is to co-host African Liberation Month along with various African community groups in the city (XR Bristol 2020). Another positive step would be for XR UK to emulate their counterparts in the US who have adopted a demand of climate justice to add to the three original demands. Ultimately though, without becoming more diverse in their membership, XR spokespeople are likely to continue to occasionally make statements that reinforce rather than challenge racist and classist power relations.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have argued that the justifications of and limitations to lawbreaking protest in liberal democratic societies set out by the liberal literature on civil disobedience informs XR's practices, discourses and effects. It highlights that what XR do when they practice civil disobedience is to delegitimise the state and the corporations that they target in front of society as a target audience. In doing so they emphasise their actions as sacrifice, as a last resort and as within a fidelity to law; echoing the civil disobedience literature. Yet, we question the extent to which XR's actions and discourses remain within a liberal conception of fidelity to law, particularly in its more stringent Rawlsian sense. This question links back to the first of the tensions that we set out in the introductory chapter, namely whether XR campaign to put pressure on the state to act or whether they seek to transform the state into something else. If it is the latter, that would certainly stretch Rawls' conception of what is justified. This is then a form of creative tension in the movement where different activists would give different answers and where XR benefit from the legitimacy rendered by fidelity to law, whilst engaging in actions that aim to push the boundaries of that fidelity. Whilst pushing theses boundaries in the search for innovative protest, XR activists will no doubt continue to discuss the boundaries of violence and nonviolence and seek to maintain their commitment to the latter. In doing so, it is worth being mindful that these boundaries are not clear and obvious. Suggested actions, like that of Heathrow Pause, which are seen to cross that boundary are likely to come up again.

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CHAPTER 4

Between Democracy and Efficiency

Abstract This chapter explores the organisational structures and procedures that XR rely on. We argue that XR's organisational setup has facilitated the movement's rapid growth but has also made internal decision-making opaque, thereby decreasing internal democracy within the movement. It is in this sense less horizontal and democratic than many other recent or contemporary social movements. Where contemporary movements often have the assembly as the decision-making body, XR's People's Assemblies lack power, which instead lies in the networked structure. An unequal distribution of mandates, knowledge and personal relationships here leads to a more hierarchical organisation.

Keywords Horizontality · Holacracy · Self-Organising Systems · Democracy

Social movements since the end of the Cold War have paid significant importance to how democracy is practised internally. From the Zapatista takeover in Chiapas to the Movement of the Squares in 2011, the critique of the lacking democracy in society at large as been protested through various forms of participatory deliberative democracy internally in social movements (Della Porta 2009; Fernández-Savater et al. 2017). Social movements have come to organise horizontally in a critique of

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the vertical structures prevalent in state institutions and political parties (Feenstra 2015; Flesher Fominaya 2015). How a movement organises is important to its self-understanding and identity. Horizontality is thus central to the prefigurative organisation of social movements discussed in Chapter 2. Internal democracy and organisation also have a significant impact on the strategic and tactical achievements of movements. This chapter explores the organisational structures and procedures that XR rely on. We argue that XR's organisational setup has facilitated the movement's rapid growth but has also made internal decision-making opaque, thereby decreasing internal democracy within the movement. It is in this sense less horizontal and democratic than many other recent or contemporary social movements.

The first section lays out the central features of XR's organisational structure, in particular the movement's adaptation of the Holacracy operating system and its division into local groups and national working teams. The second section interrogates the practice of horizontalism and shows how XR have been influenced by horizontalist values. XR's decentralised setup and its organisational culture are highlighted as potentially inclusive and participatory. The third section looks into XR's networked organising and illuminates the power imbalances hidden therein. It is argued that XR's claims to leaderlessness are misleading and that formal and informal hierarchies are preserved through an unequal distribution of mandates, knowledge and personal relationships. The fourth section argues that XR's desire for radical democracy is most visibly expressed in its people's assemblies but that these are also flawed. The assembly's structure and procedure are set out, its participatory and prefigurative purposes are presented, its post-consensus approach to decision-making is outlined and activists' concern about the people's assemblies are recounted.

4.1 Nested Structures and Geographical Scaling

XR's internal structure is characterised by two features: the movement's adaptation of the Holacracy 'operating system' and its separation into local groups and national teams. Holacracy is a method of organisational governance which is used by both businesses and non-profit organisations. It is a form of self-management that is intended to enhance an organisation's adaptability and allow for faster adaptions to changing circumstances than traditional hierarchical setups (Bernstein et al. 2016). Two elements of the Holacracy system, 'energizing roles' and 'circle

structure', feature prominently in XR's organisational setup (Holacracy 2020). Roles are organisational constructs with a descriptive name that are defined by at least one or a combination of purposes (what goal is pursued?), domains (what is exclusively controlled and regulated?) and accountabilities (which ongoing activities are performed?). In contrast to job descriptions, one person can assume multiple roles. In XR, the idea is that authority is distributed to individuals in clearly defined roles that come equipped with specified mandates. These allow role-takers to make decisions about any issues covered by their mandate (XR 2019c).

The various roles in a Holacratic organisation are arranged in a circle structure. Circles represent self-organising teams which can set their own procedures for fulfilling the purposes and accountabilities assigned by a broader circle. The roles of 'rep link' (who represents his/her circle in a broader circle) and 'lead link' (who represents his/her circle in a sub-circle) connect circles on different scales (Holacracy 2020). XR use this circle structure to cluster groups and embed them within broader teams: 'Larger teams have sub-teams within them, and sub-teams can have their own sub-teams and so on, like Russian dolls' (XR 2019c, p. 3). In order to ensure information flow through multiple scales and balance among different areas, each group elects an external coordinator, the rep link-equivalent, who represents their team in a coordinators' group (XR 2019c).

In addition to this nested setup, XR separate into local groups and national teams. Local XR groups are active on a regional scale and organise in working groups and affinity groups. Working groups focus on particular projects, plan mass actions and support members. The local XR group in Bristol, for instance, has had working groups for actions, affinity group support, arrestee support, arts, books, coordination, finance, food, fundraising, hosting, integration, legal support, literature, media and messaging, newsletter, office, outreach, political, regenerative culture, self-organising systems, social media, spokespeople, talks and training, and welcoming at meetings (XR Bristol 2020). The working groups tend to meet weekly in person and also use various phone apps for communication between meetings. Affinity groups are ideally made up of eight to twelve people who come together to prepare for and take action. Members of an affinity group are meant to have a shared vision of what they want to achieve and look after each other during actions. Affinity groups can autonomously decide what actions they want to take part in, either participating in one of XR's mass actions, joining with other local

affinity groups to do an action or undertaking actions on their own. For large-scale actions, affinity groups from multiple local XR groups come together, usually in a major city, to carry out acts of civil disobedience. Hereby, affinity group members can assume a number of roles, such as action support, providing direct personal support for arrestable activists, or legal observer, responsible for observing a particular group or activity and taking notes of interactions with the police (XR 2019a).

Next to (or above) local groups, there is XR UK. They have offices in London but people from around the country are part of XR UK. They represent the UK movement as a whole. Since XR UK do not directly engage in actions, this part of the movement solely organises in UK-wide working groups (XR 2020d). Beyond their representative function, XR UK also act as treasury and direct and coordinate local groups, tasks that are, in the words of a local XR group coordinator, fraught with an 'endless potential for tension'. On the one hand, many local activists express worry that XR UK are overly preoccupied with theories of social change and disconnected from what is actually going on in the movement. XR UK, in turn, are struggling to create a more unified national strategy and to present the movement as a whole in a good light to the public, which may entail reigning in local groups who are perceived to deviate too much from core practice.

In XR, Self-Organising System (SOS) working groups are tasked with designating mandates and setting up new roles and teams (XR 2019c). As the name suggests, SOS aims to ensure that XR self-organise, that groups identify their own tensions in order to balance between or navigate through them. By tensions, XR mean frustrations or problems that require a change in, or an addition to, the current organisational setup. By creating functional and transparent structures, SOS is to 'inspire, equip, and support people to work effectively together in a decentralised way, whilst also maintaining healthy interpersonal relationships and accountable use of power' (XR 2020d). Internal structures are meant to be continuously adapted to the needs of the organisation so as to ensure that XR remain a people-led movement.

4.2 Horizontalist Aspirations

XR claim to be participatory, decentralised, and inclusive. To this end, 'top-down structure[s] where someone tells you what to do' are renounced in favour of the Holacracy system which encourages members

to be proactive by making it unnecessary 'to ask for permissions from a central group or authority' (XR 2020a). The movement claims to be leaderless and to strive towards breaking down 'hierarchies of power for more equitable participation' (XR 2020b).

All these organisational principles are inspired by horizontalist movements. Horizontalism is an attitude and a practice characterised by 'less hierarchical, networked relationships of decision making and organizing structures that actively attempt to limit power inequalities' (Maeckelbergh 2009, p. 69). The concept gained traction in the 1990s out of radical peasant and indigenous movements in Latin America such as the Piqueteros in Argentina and the Zapatistas in Mexico (Holloway 2002; Sitrin 2006). Horizontal practices subsequently emerged in the Global North, most prominently in the Global Justice Movement and the Movement of the Squares (Hayduk 2013; Nail 2013). In the literature on social movements, horizontalism is schematically differentiated from verticalism, a centralised, top-down model of internal organisation that relies on leaders—people who are invested with the authority to make decisions for the group as a whole and to give orders to those subordinate to them (Graeber 2002). Vertically structured movements generally justify hierarchies on the grounds that, by limiting information flows and assigning clear responsibilities, they allow for better coordination as well as greater unity and tactical sophistication (Maeckelbergh 2009; Bailey 2019). Horizontalist movements, in contrast, abolish formal leadership and arrange for inclusive decision-making procedures. They reject delegate assemblies, instead forming affinity groups 'with rotating facilitators rather than sustained leaders, working groups rather than standing committees, and with spokes-councils organized as fishbowls for maximum transparency' (Martín Alcoff 2012, p. 269). Debating and alliance-building are encouraged and participants are given an opportunity to influence not only a movement's strategies but also its ends (Nunes 2005; Juris 2008). Moreover, consensus decision-making usually plays a prominent role (Giugni and Nai 2009; Graeber 2013). All these practices are designed to forestall or mitigate forms of domination which can arise within a social movement and, ultimately, to alter the very way power operates in society (Holloway 2002; Morland 2004; Gordon 2007). In other words, there are strong prefigurative elements to horizontalism where a future more democratic society is enacted within a movement.

Some horizontalist practices can be found in XR, not least through decentralisation. In particular, the distribution of authority to local affinity

groups is depicted as being crucial to XR's success. For one, decentralisation is held to be advantageous for movement building. If XR were to prescribe one uniform strategy, activists would be hampered in pursuing the creative projects and acts of civil disobedience that have accounted for much of XR's success. XR argue that a mass movement cannot be built on a centralised strategy since

> people act on what they believe in…If the strategy deviates from their perspective even a small amount, they tend to lose motivation and fall away from the movement. (Burns and Reimann 2019, p. 107)

XR further maintain that decentralisation engenders a diversity of tactics through which 'what seemed to be contradictory activities reinforced each other' (Burns and Reimann 2019, p. 108). The distribution of activists into different working and affinity groups serves to keep internal conflicts to a minimum. Letter writers can give the movement a mainstream appeal while road blockers simultaneously signal that people are prepared to act. In this way, autonomous organising enables people who would otherwise not work together to reinforce the impact of each other's actions. Conflict between different viewpoints and tactics is not suppressed and, if not exactly embraced, at least accommodated (Maeckelbergh 2012, p. 229).

During actions, decentralised organising allows XR members to react quickly to changing situations on the ground and makes it more difficult for the police to repress spontaneous actions and to identify organisers and leaders. One XR member pointed out that 'dissipated communication channels where no one person has all the information' make it difficult for police and government agencies to gather intelligence and prevent actions. One coordinator recounted how the movement's decentralised structure allowed him to plead ignorance.

> Whenever the police ask me anything, I say 'I am not in charge'. Because I am not. Because nobody is. But I know an awful lot more than most people.

In networked movements, the relation- and partnerships between groups are as permanent or temporary as the mutual interests and desires that maintain them. What shape the network takes and what it does cannot be predicted beforehand, whether by the police or the movement itself (Franks 2003, p. 33).

Affinity groups are largely free to pursue projects of their own choosing as long as members conform to XR's action consensus (XR 2020c). They do not need to wait for permissions or directives but can independently pursue actions. In affinity group formation sessions, action participants are only advised to contact local coordinators prior to carrying out very disruptive or shocking actions. Part of this category was the aforementioned much-criticised tube disruptions at Canning Town and the Heathrow Pause action. These actions also exemplify the perils of decentralised activism. As recounted by a prominent XR activist,

> [Canning Town was] planned by a tiny faction of the movement, opposed by the overwhelming majority of our activists, and yet it was still allowed to happen under the banner of Extinction Rebellion. It soaked up all the media coverage that day, distracting from more thoughtful actions and altering the public perception of our protests. Yet it was only about ten or fifteen people who were ever convinced it would work. (Knights 2019a)

While the train action serves as an example of what can go wrong when groups enjoy autonomy, the Heathrow drones action shows that affinity groups' independence is not unlimited. In the retelling of a local coordinator,

> a bunch of people in XR, including a co-founder, said 'we want to do this, we think it would be really powerful' and they can give a good, logical-sounding explanation why this would be a good action. And yet people can say, 'not only do we not want to do that, we do not want you to do that as part of XR'. […] Apparently it is not okay for an affinity group or subgroup to say, 'we think this fits the principles and values of XR, so we are going to do it autonomously'.

Disruption via drones was considered a strategic error by a majority of activists and the action was eventually undertaken independently from XR (Read 2019). But the process through which the Heathrow action was prevented is in no way transparent or clear. XR do not have any official procedures for stopping actions that are endorsed by more radical XR groups but rejected by a majority of the movement. The whole process depends on the ability of more cautious activists to convince proponents of potentially divisive tactics to stand down. The Heathrow action was amenable to internal obstruction because flying drones required preparations which gave other factions in XR time to exert informal pressure

on the action's proponents. More spontaneous actions are less likely to encounter internal opposition before they are carried out.

4.3 Power Structures and Hidden Hierarchies

The most pertinent criticism of horizontalism has been its alleged strategic inaptness (Marcus 2012). Many observers sympathise with horizontalist principles such as equality and non-domination but question if some form of hierarchy is not simply necessary for effective organising. From their viewpoint, the distinct individualism underlying horizontalism undermines the collective power of social movements. For Jodi Dean, in place of spontaneous mass dynamics, what is needed is a 'new party of communists' which systematically forms collectivities, coordinates different struggles and creates the institutional conditions necessary for democratic self-governance (Dean 2013, pp. 241–244; 2016, pp. 262–265). What can be described as small-a anarchist horizontalism is seen to stand in the way of a movement's ability to realise its aims. There is, in other words, a trade-off between democracy and efficiency. XR partially reject this argument. The movement maintains that decentralising authority and adopting an organisational culture that embraces diversity, equality and deliberation contributes to its success. Yet XR also drop many horizontalist practices. Consensus decision-making is largely discarded, power imbalances persist through an unequal distribution of mandates, knowledge and personal connections and the movement's claims to be leaderless are misleading. Where horizontalism is seen to clash with effectiveness, horizontalism is generally relinquished.

In XR, consensus decision-making is largely supplanted by the system of roles and mandates taken over from Holacracy. In contrast to horizontalist movements, consensus-based and group decision-making are only used in specific situations, for instance when one wants to draw from members' collective intelligence or get their buy-in for decisions, and not by default. Instead, individuals assume roles with clear and formally established mandates that give them the authority to make decisions within a defined purview (XR 2019c). By the movement's own account, this change in decision-making procedure allows XR to strike a 'balance between acting quickly in response to fast-changing situations and being able to integrate the collective wisdom of multiple perspectives when needed' (XR 2020a). But it also has the drawback of precipitating more hierarchical relations between members. Even though XR present

their organisational structure in the form of embedded circles, in lieu of pyramid charts, Holacracy is not a flat organisational model. Since consensus is not required, members with mandates can make decisions over the objections and against the opposition of other team members. In principle, activists could be forced to use methods or work towards a goal they strongly disagree with. This in itself is hard to reconcile with horizontalist or small-a anarchist values such as non-coercion and non-domination. Furthermore, individuals hold multiple mandates. The resulting danger is that members, and especially coordinators, accumulate multiple roles and thereby dominate the decision-making procedures within multiple teams. In such a way, mandates can generate and reinforce power discrepancies between members.

Authority is not only founded on formal structures, such as mandates, but can also be based on informal factors. Even movements that abandon verticality and command and control centres in favour of networked interactions, tend to have members around which power concentrates (Gerbaudo 2012; Bray 2018). These effectively assume non-formalised leadership roles that lack the accountability of formal responsibilities. In the words of one respondent, 'there are people in these node points of the system who have a lot more power', who 'have more say in what happens'. Two informal factors, which determine how much influence members have, are knowledge and personal connections. People who have spent more time within the organisation have an advantage when it comes to impacting decisions since they know the internal processes and who to contact if they need advice or help. For newcomers, in comparison, it can be very challenging to know how to contribute. In XR's weekly meetings, everybody sits in circles and a good portion of the attendees may be relatively new members themselves. If one is looking to speak with members of a certain team, one has to ask around until someone knows someone who might know who you should be looking for. To complicate matters further, internal structures and processes and the people filling certain roles are constantly changing. Consequently, having been part of the movement for a longer time and knowing more people gives an edge in making an impact and influencing decisions.

In XR, the group of people that stands out most for their sheer visibility are the movement's founders, most notably Roger Hallam and Gail Bradbrook (see Out of the Woods 2019). The two co-founders are often accused of having acted as quasi-official leaders and have had disproportionate influence over what XR do and how the movement

presents itself to the media and is therefore perceived by the public. This internal and external critique intensified after Hallam's comments about the holocaust in November 2019 (BBC News 2019). The influence of co-founders is not circumscribed by formal roles but is perceived as coming down to a combination of charismatic leadership and an 'I was here first' mentality. In one activist's words, as the 'people who were there in the beginning', they 'have the most authority over what XR is, over what it says and demands'. Even though XR have grown significantly since it was founded 'in a small English town' by 'fifteen people who had studied and researched the way to achieve radical social change' (Knights 2019b), the movement has retained its founding members as influential decision-makers and public figureheads. Hence, XR's self-designation as a 'leaderless movement' (XR 2020b) is misleading. The term has been employed to denote the absence of institutional leadership in movements such as Occupy, Black Lives Matter and the Yellow Vests movement (Bray 2018). Even in this technical sense, the term does not quite apply to XR because of their mandate system. Moreover, the designation of leaderlessness is usually understood to mean that a movement does not recognise any leaders at all. But XR have leaders, people who take on more responsibility, who speak for the movement and articulate the reasons and aims behind its struggle. Members of the Occupy Movement tended to stress that they were not speaking for everyone and were usually unwilling to be made to represent the movement as a whole. This is not the case in XR.

4.4 People's Assemblies

XR's indebtedness to horizontalist movements and their desire for radical democracy that is lacking elsewhere is most visibly expressed in the movement's people's assemblies. People's assemblies open up a time and a space where everybody who wishes to can have their voices heard and share thoughts and feelings about change in an organised fashion. In contrast to the team structures described above, which assume responsibility for day-to-day organising and planning, people's assemblies are only convened under certain circumstances. Since people's assemblies are designed to facilitate discussions and collective decision-making for larger groups of people, XR mostly convene them during occupations and local group meetings, and especially in situations when getting everyone's feedback seems appropriate. XR delineate three ways in which people's

assemblies can be used. First, by drawing in members of the public to join the conversation, assemblies held in public spaces are part of XR's movement building efforts. Second, assemblies held at occupations and roadblocks are themselves a form of direct action. Third, the assembly procedures can be used by XR groups of any size and composition for 'organising and decision making' (XR 2019b).

Beyond these more immediate objectives, social movement scholars have recognised a longer-term strategic value of deliberative decision-making bodies. Hardt and Negri (2012) and Kiersey and Vrasti (2016, pp. 84–86) contend that deliberations and communal endeavours set into motion a collective self-transformation of participants. The sluggish decision-making procedures of deliberative assemblies produce an 'autonomous temporality' where time 'establishes its own calendar and rhythms of development' and is 'withdrawn from the schedule imposed by external pressures and electoral seasons' (Hardt and Negri 2012, pp. 52–54). This autonomous temporality, Hardt and Negri (2012, pp. 53–54) argue, is conducive to the emergence of new political and revolutionary subjectivities. It is a time that 'fosters both the creation and spread of knowledges as well as the education of political affects' (Negri 2003, pp. 139–169; Hardt and Negri 2012, pp. 31–32, 53–54, 69). Consequently, regardless of a movement's short-term success or failure, future struggles will be able to draw from built-up repositories of experience and feeling (Virno 1996). XR take this line of thought further by claiming that its people's assemblies are an answer to the future challenges precipitated by climate change. For XR, participatory democracy has not only strategic value for the movement itself, but also survival value for communities worldwide. XR activists already foresee a future in which societies cannot evade but will have to adapt to the impacts of global warming (see Bendell 2018). People's assemblies are thus part of

> the deep adaptation that communities will have to go through in order to face together the growing impact of climate and biodiversity breakdown. As societal structures collapse, we are going to have to reclaim power for our communities and these forms of participatory democracy will become essential to the way we organise. (XR 2019b, p. 3)

In this discourse, in order to tackle this dystopian future, more inclusive, participatory and deliberative forms of democracy than we hitherto practice are required. XR's people's assemblies are then designed to anticipate

and prefigure these future democratic collaborations in what can be seen as making utopia of dystopia.

The procedure of people's assemblies follows prior horizontal movements' experiments in deliberative democracy, such as the Occupy Movement's general assemblies. In XR, assembly meetings commence with a facilitation team reading out key principles of XR and clarifying the hand signals used during assemblies. Like the 2011 Movement of the Squares, XR use hand signals so that participants can express themselves without resorting to applause, shouts or booing. In comparison to verbal responses, hand signals have the advantage of not interrupting the speaker and thereby allowing for more fluid conversations (Welty et al. 2013, p. 28). At those assemblies that take place during occupations of public spaces, participants are also encouraged to come forward to 'testify', that is to recount what brought them to the occupied site. Next, the 'three pillars' of people's assemblies are explained. First, 'radical inclusivity', anybody who wants to take part is able to do so and all voices are heard and valued equally. Second, 'active listening', while someone is talking, participants focus on what the person is trying to convey rather than already formulating their own response. And third, 'trust', everybody should try to trust the process and respect everyone who is involved (XR 2019b). Subsequently, the participants form breakout groups of eight to ten members in order to discuss the proposal or question of concern. Each breakout group elects a facilitator who makes sure that everyone's voice is heard and encourages people to share equally, and a note taker who summarises what is being said. Every breakout group is tasked with formulating a one-sentence reply to each question which is then read out in front of the assembly. In the end, the facilitation team summarises the outcomes of the assembly and passes on relevant information to all participants, for instance where and when the next assembly will be held or what actions or events will take place over the next days.

Central to the people's assemblies is what XR activists call its 'post-consensus approach' to decision-making. Since breakout groups are held to one-sentence replies, discussions circle around finding some sort of agreement. But often even after deliberating, not all participants will agree on an issue. This is then meant to lead to identifying positions that nobody is strongly opposed to or which a majority can agree on. This process usually involves 'temperature checks' via hand signals, effectively a mixture of deliberation and voting. This is intended to gauge how many people are in favour, how strongly they are in favour, how

many are opposed and how strong their reservations are. In contrast to consensus decision-making procedures where one individual can veto or block decisions, this post-consensus approach allows for swifter decision-making since not every single person has to be convinced for an action to be taken (Maeckelbergh 2012; XR 2019b). A member of the XR facilitation team reasoned that this trade-off was necessary because tackling the climate crisis demands urgent action. However, it should be noted that XR's post-consensus approach is not all that different from what earlier horizontalist movements, such as Occupy, have done under the label of 'modified consensus process'. In contrast to both unanimous and majority decision-making, general assemblies of the Occupy Movement passed proposals as long as they were backed by at least 90% of participants (Occupy Oakland 2011). Hence, even in a paradigm horizontalist movement such as Occupy, some inclusivity was renounced in order to produce faster decisions, or perhaps any decisions at all.

The prevalent concern about the people's assemblies is if and to what extent the assemblies' feedback is incorporated back into XR's internal decision-making processes. In some unproblematic cases, decisions can simply be implemented immediately. If the assembly decides to abandon an occupied site, people pack their bags (after detaching themselves from whatever infrastructure they are glued or chained to). Yet, often the issues people's assemblies debate require less prompt or definite responses. For instance, if the question is what people want to do at the next day of action or what XR's national strategy should be, breakout groups can be expected to make a multitude of partially conflicting suggestions. These suggestions are then collected and handed onto a coordinator who presents them in the next coordinators meeting. But to what extent the outcomes of people's assembly discussions inform the eventual decisions in the coordinators meeting is quite controversial within XR. One involved coordinator opined that 'the coordination group can draw a conclusion, recognise where the balance is, where the feeling is' and that 'it should be more of a bottom-up structure than a top-down one'. Another coordinator was more 'cynical about some of the people's assemblies as something that makes people feel good and filled some time but actually did not have any influence on what happened'. He worried that they can devolve into 'sham listening exercises, consultation processes' that give people the impression that they are listened to while the actual decision was made months before.

The uncertainty surrounding the people's assemblies is reinforced by the opaqueness pertaining to many of XR's internal decision-making processes. With the exception of some secret action preparations, activists are very open about what they are doing and XR as a whole aspire to be transparent. But keeping all members informed within XR's structure is a challenging task. On the one hand, since there are multiple channels of communication, including social media, email newsletters, text messages, WhatsApp, Signal or Basecamp, distributing information over one medium is not enough. On the other hand, there are frequent information bottlenecks on the coordinators' side. Coordinators recognise that 'it is hard for them to deal with all this information they are getting' and to convey it to the right recipients. Consequently, 'rank-and-file' members often only learn what decisions were made in working and coordinators groups, but not why these decisions were made. Frequently, it is not the content of the decisions that is in question. The problem is rather that the reasoning behind decisions is not easily comprehensible to people who have not been involved in the decision-making process.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that XR's organisational make up has been well suited to accommodate the movement's fast expansion while somewhat constraining democratic self-governance. XR's adaptation of Holacracy has allowed for effective internal organising and action planning. The division into local groups, which focus on bringing about disruptions, and the national working teams, which primarily handle the movement's public image and strategy, has proved to work well for mobilising members. The concomitant drawbacks are tensions concerning the distribution of mandates, responsibilities and funding. Decentralisation and the people's assemblies were identified as the primary mechanisms for democratic self-governance within the movement. The dispersion of authority to smaller groups has made XR less hierarchical and more grassroots-oriented in character, but it has also made internal decision-making more opaque. People's assemblies give members the opportunity to get to know different viewpoints and have their own voices heard, but there remain concerns about their actual impact on the eventual decisions.

There is no doubt that XR follow horizontalist ideals that have been fostered and developed in social movements for 30 years. XR will say that their Holacracy and self-organising systems constitute a development

of such horizontality that retains its democratic ethos whilst being more efficient. To be sure, horizontal organisations have long been accused of obscuring hierarchies rather than doing away with them. XR's model, whilst seemingly transparent, somewhat institutionalises both hierarchies and the obscurity of decision-making. This has to some extent been an asset to the movement as it has enabled quick growth and efficient decision-making. Nevertheless, the risk that the opacity of the network-based Holacracy model carries is that activist feel disenfranchised as expressed by some of our research participants. Such feelings of disenfranchisements may then have a negative effect on the movement's long-term growth and sustainability.

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CHAPTER 5

Reimagining Democracy

Abstract This chapter explores XR's demand for a citizens' assembly and how it draws on critiques of representative democracy that have been growing in social movements to provide a more democratic model. We argue that the citizens' assembly demand as sketched by XR comes from an established critique of representative democracy but that it then becomes a way of avoiding answering the big question of what needs to be done to address the climate emergency. The demand for a citizens' assembly on the climate emergency highlights the tensions in XR and beyond around solution agnosticism and the ignoring of the power relations and structures that drive climate change in contemporary capitalism.

Keywords Citizens' assembly · Deliberative democracy · Participatory democracy · Representative democracy · Deliberation

Representative democracy is in crisis, or so we are increasingly told. Countries worldwide turn more authoritarian and liberal democracies seem incapable of handling today's most important challenges, be it increasing inequality or climate change. This chapter explores XR's demand for a citizens' assembly and how it draws on critiques of representative democracy that have been growing in social movements to provide a more democratic model. We argue that the citizens' assembly demand

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as sketched by XR comes from an established critique of representative democracy but that it then becomes a way of avoiding answering the big question of what needs to be done to address the climate emergency. The demand for a citizens' assembly on the climate emergency highlights the tensions in XR and beyond around solution agnosticism and the ignoring of the political economy.

In the first section we argue that XR's critique of representative democracy draws on political discourses of anti-capitalism, so-called left populism and an institutional critique of the short-termism in representative democracy. We then proceed to study the demand of a citizens' assembly and how such assemblies have emerged from the scholarship on how deliberative democracy can address some of the shortcomings of representative democracy. In the third and fourth section we explore what the citizens' assembly demand does for XR as a movement. We argue that the demand lies at the centre of the tensions around solution agnosticism, reform or revolution and the non-engagement with the political economy that we set out in the introduction. It allows XR to defer solutions to the climate crisis to a future citizens' assembly and thereby avoid detailing critique and demands. XR's assembly demand is designed to create radical climate policies and not to lastingly transform the way we do politics. The prospective climate assembly, as envisioned by XR, represents a single exception to politics as usual which can exert pressure on politicians to act in the public interest and enact the climate policies that we need. We argue that a citizens' assembly is unlikely to solve the climate emergency but rather becomes a tool in the much broader struggle to do so. This is because a citizens' assembly does not fundamentally alter the power relations in society and the economy that drives the climate emergency.

5.1 The Crisis of Representative Democracy

XR's critique of representative democracy comes at a time when representative democracy has lost significant legitimacy across society and society has become increasingly polarised. As such, we distinguish three types of political discourse that XR echo or draw upon in their critique of representative democracy; anti-capitalism; so-called left populism; and an institutional critique of the short-termism of representative democracy. In their Declaration of Rebellion, XR announce that

> we, in alignment with our consciences and our reasoning, declare ourselves in rebellion against our government and the corrupted, inept institutions that threaten our future. The wilful complicity displayed by our government has shattered meaningful democracy and cast aside the common interest in favour of short-term gains and private profit. (XR 2019d, p. 2)

This declaration gives expression to the movement's conviction that the political process is broken. Representative democracy has here proven incapable of acting in the public interest and tackling problems such as inequality and climate change. The movement holds that the present political system serves the needs of short-term financial interests of elites; has been co-opted by these elites; and is structurally inept to deal with climate change.

XR's discursive treatment of capitalism is muddled and purposely so. Many XR spokespeople and members are anti-capitalists and publicly state their political convictions. The movement's official line, in contrast, is to stay away from what XR call 'lefty language'. But even in this official line, there are references to the domination of capital to explain past governments' failure to address the climate crisis. Here, 'democratic representatives are lobbied by powerful corporations' (XR 2019c), which makes them more beholden to the interests of businesses than the public. This is seen as particularly catastrophic for climate change policy since the current fossil-fuel-run capitalist economy has significant interests in maintaining the status quo. There is in other words an implicit, if not explicit, critique of what Badiou calls (2010, pp. 98–99) 'capitalo-parliamentarialism'.

Implicit or soft anti-capitalist discourse often appear as what has been termed left populism, where the people are pitted against the elite (Stanley 2008; Mudde 2017). According to Roger Hallam (2019a), 'elites in business, government and the media' (p. 9) and 'the various supporting pillars and groups who follow their orders: courts, police, security people etc.,' (p. 17) are unwilling to 'respond even minimally to demands for structural change' (p. 23). This reluctance makes them the 'opponents' in XR's struggle. Here the problem is seen to be 'post-democracy' (Crouch 2005), a system in which the private interests of a small elite predominate democratic institutions. There are in other words strong similarities between particularly Hallam's anti-elitist language and that of the Movement of the Squares (Flesher Fominaya 2015; Fernández-Savater et al. 2017), as well as the anti-austerity parties that grew out of that movement (Della Porta et al. 2017).

Lastly, XR critique the institutional limitations inherent to representative democracies. The movement argues that the 'five-year electoral cycle discourages governments from attending to long-term issues like climate breakdown' (XR 2019c, p. 16). They argue that since 'political power in the UK is in the hands of a few elected politicians' who 'simply can't see past the next election', the political system has failed to make 'the long-term decisions needed to deal with the climate and ecological emergency' (XR 2020a). Policies whose positive impact will only become evident in decades to come do not help politicians win the next election. Hence, representative democracies exhibit a strong tendency towards 'short-termism', a bias that partially accounts for the electoral system's failure to adequately tackle climate change (see Hanusch 2018). An aggravating factor, according to XR, is politicians' reliance on opinion polls, or 'partially informed knee-jerk reactions', to 'inform themselves on what their constituents might want' (XR 2019e). This, they argue presents a form of 'will of the people' that is devoid of any reflection or learning. There are in other words echoes of various strands of scholarly and popular critique of representative liberal democracy in XR's discourse.

The difficulty of representative democracy to tackle a long-term issue like climate change has led to demands of both authoritarian and more democratic forms of governance. Many concur with XR's diagnosis but infer an argument in favour of technocratic authoritarianism (Stehr 2016; Fiorino 2018). By their account, climate action requires 'governance by experts' and a political process which is less publicly accountable (Shearman and Smith 2007). XR and many other social movements go in the other direction and advocate for deeper forms of democracy. The climate emergency requires, according to XR, 'radical system change on a scale never seen before' (Knights 2019, p. 11). The movement is however diffused on what such radical system change may entail in political economic terms but is clearer on how they will take place in terms of institutional democratic reform. The 'only way by which we can take back control from the corporate captured system currently failing us', according to XR, are 'radical new forms of democracy that put decision-making back in the hands of the people' (XR 2019b, p. 3). To this end, XR propose the establishment of citizens' assemblies. If these are the political discourses that XR draw upon in demanding a citizen's assembly, there is also a wealth of theoretical and empirical scholarly research into forms of deliberative democracy that bolster this demand.

5.2 Participation and Deliberation

The demand of a citizens' assembly draws on a long tradition of critique of representative democracy and for deliberative democracy to play a greater role in governance. The demand states that the 'government must create and be led by the decisions of a citizens' assembly on climate and ecological justice' (XR 2019a). The citizens' assembly is to be tasked with finding solutions to the climate and ecological crisis, providing the public 'with a way to decide what is best for our future, even if that requires radical changes in the present' (XR 2020a).

Assembly members are to be chosen through the selection mechanism known as sortition, or selection by lot. As for jury service, every eligible citizen has an equal probability of being selected to participate (Smith 2009, p. 167). XR propose stratified random sampling where 'the public is divided into subpopulations based on, for example, gender, age, ethnicity, education level and geography' and the makeup of the assembly is proportionally representative of the population as a whole according to these subcategories (XR 2019c, p. 15). This process ensures that the chosen members are broadly representative of the demographics of the general public (Manin 1997). Unlike jury service, however, citizens who receive an invitation to become an assembly member will not be obliged to take part (XR 2019c). By making participation voluntary, assembly members are more likely to be interested and motivated in the proceedings. But even with stratified random sampling, voluntary participation decreases representativeness by allowing for some self-selection, perhaps towards more politically engaged citizens (Leib 2004, pp. 103–114; Fishkin and Farrar 2005, p. 74).

The purpose of sortition is to do away with current inequalities in terms of representation. For XR (2020a), current representative democracy enhances pre-existing power relations and disproportionately advantages older, male, white and wealthy populations and interests. Because future assembly members would not be exposed to lobbying and electoral pressures, they would speak more freely about what was on their mind and decide on what they truly believed was in the public interest. Yet, the selection process can put pressures of a different sort on participants. While meant to encourage assembly members to draw from their diverse experiences and backgrounds in joint pursuit of the public good, sortition can also encourage participants to think of themselves as representing 'people like them' (Smith 2009, pp. 82–83). It may be expedient

to temper strong claims to representativeness so that participants do not think of themselves 'as irreconcilably divided by race, selected only to fill a particular racial or gender slot' (Abramson 1994, p. 11).

A common critique against citizens' assemblies that XR has to counter is the average citizens' alleged ignorance or incompetence. It is often posited that randomly chosen citizens are not qualified to make policy decisions since they lack the required expertise, experience, skills or, in harsher formulations, cognitive capabilities (van Reybrouck 2016). Weighting different responses to climate change requires a deep understanding of the science of climate change, technical expertise of relevant technologies and policy knowledge. This supposedly makes climate assemblies a more precarious endeavour than prior citizens' assemblies on abortion, euthanasia or same-sex marriage. XR would however be right to retort that the purported technical expertise of politicians and other policymakers has so far not led them to implement compelling climate policies. Moreover, assembly members have plenty of opportunities to listen to and cross-examine experts in order to gain relevant knowledge.

Citizens' assemblies are a form of participatory democracy. In contrast to a representative system with elected officials, citizens' assemblies put power in the hands of people who are not professional politicians. By involving citizens in policymaking, citizens' assemblies are designed to be participatory in regard to political outcomes. The idea is that the decisions of a citizens' assembly can be accepted as representative of what the general public had decided if all citizens had taken the time to properly inform themselves on an issue:

> People are supposed to think: 'If I were selected, if I had time to learn and to deliberate with my peers, perhaps I would come to a similar conclusion as the assembly did'. (XR 2019e)

However, the model falls short of realising two elements of a participatory democracy, mass participation and civic education (Pateman 1970; Fishkin 2009, Chapter 3). In fact, only a minuscule percentage of the general population takes part in a citizens' assembly. If some 100 people participate out of tens of millions of eligible citizens, this hardly constitutes a wider democratisation of society (Pateman 2012; Lafont 2015). Consequently, the educative effects attributed to participatory practices are also restricted to the very few participating individuals. If the large majority of people does not personally experience the assembly process,

they will not be able to benefit from the experience and grow into better people or citizens in a way that participatory democracy is intended to (Pateman 1970). For a polity to be truly participatory, not only should everyone be given an equal chance to participate; a broad segment of the population actually has to be involved. As well as participatory, citizens' assemblies are also designed to be deliberative.

Citizens' assemblies are deliberative in that they enable lay citizens to make good policy decisions by bringing people together and facilitating face-to-face discussions (Goodin and Dryzek 2006; Warren 2008). They aspire to the ideal of a deliberative democracy which attributes a central significance to deliberation and the concomitant requirement to give reasons for one's opinions (Rawls 1997; Smith and Wales 2000; Gutmann and Thompson 2004; Fishkin 2009; Lafont 2020). Deliberation consists of 'mutual communication that involves weighing and reflecting on preferences, values, and interests regarding matters of common concern' (Bächtiger et al. 2018, p. 2). Deliberative democracy is conceptually contrasted with aggregative models of democracy that are based on the counting of votes. The former considers the reasons people give for their expressed views and asks for justifications. The latter model takes people's preferences as given and only seeks to combine them in a fair way (Dryzek 2000, p. 3; Gutmann and Thompson 2004, pp. 13–21; Chambers 2009). Ideal deliberation aims to arrive at a rationally motivated consensus. But in practice, deliberation and aggregation, talking and voting, are often combined (Cohen 1989; Bächtiger et al. 2018). Citizens' assemblies generally have a voting mechanism in place to decide on the final policy recommendations. After all, it is very improbable that all assembly members will arrive at a complete consensus for any one policy, let alone a significant number of measures.

A key area of inquiry in deliberative democratic theory pertains to the conditions that constitute authentic deliberation. Even within XR, while citizens' assemblies are accepted as a good idea in principle, there are prevalent concerns regarding their practical implementation. One XR activist aired concerns 'about how we choose the experts that provide the evidence to give to people' and how to put the 'knowledge of a very technical, complex subject into the hands of ordinary people' so that they have a good enough understanding 'to make well-informed, sensible decisions'. This goes to show that, in order to be perceived as legitimate, citizens' assemblies need to have a thought-out process in place to guide

participants step-by-step to the eventual drafting of policies (Fung 2003; Gerwin 2018; Patriquin 2019, Chapter 2).

XR advance an assembly process that is divided into four phases: learning, consultation, deliberation and decision-making (XR 2019c, p. 12; 2019e). During the learning phase, experts and stakeholders present information on the issue at hand to the assembly members, who also have an opportunity to invite and question additional experts. All the assembly members are to learn climate science and social justice issues. XR advocate that participants subsequently disperse into multiple citizens' panels on specific issues, such as transport, agriculture, housing or power, with a size of between 50 and 100 members each. Next, in the consultation phase, individuals and groups from society can make written submissions which are summarised and presented in the assembly. During the deliberation phase, in plenary sessions and facilitated group discussions, assembly members reflect on and discuss the evidence and opinions they have heard. Finally, based on these deliberations, they draft and vote on policies and deliver a report outlining their decisions.

To guarantee a fair process and legitimate deliberations, four distinct groups are to run and monitor the citizens' assembly (XR 2019c, pp. 8–9). An impartial coordinating group conducts the random selection of citizens and invites experts, stakeholders and facilitators. An advisory board, composed of academics and practitioners, develops the selection criteria for the expert/stakeholder panel and ensures balance of the background material and evidence presented to the assembly. A team of experienced facilitators sits with assembly members and makes sure that the deliberation is not dominated by a vocal few. Lastly, an oversight panel is tasked with monitoring the entire process.

Deliberative democratic practices, and by extension citizens' assemblies, have encountered a number of criticisms. For one, deliberation is held to be susceptible to manipulation. Contrary to the 'ideal speech situations' posited by discursive theorists such as Habermas (1984), in real-world discussions the force of the better argument may rarely be decisive. Humans are not purely rational beings and vulnerable to sophistry and manipulation. There is plenty of opportunity for the most educated and those most skilled in rhetoric to sway the decisions in their favour (Elster 1998, pp. 1–2). Moreover, deliberation does not necessarily result in consensus. Even deliberations that take place under favourable conditions are not always conducive to a convergence of opinions or a deeper understanding. They 'can get nowhere and peter out, they can cause

people to become even more confused than they were at the outset', 'foster polemics, and generate further bitterness, rancor and division' (Geuss 2019). Empirical findings attest to the phenomenon of group polarisation, where discussion is likely to shift judgements towards more extreme positions than the initial inclination of members (Sunstein 2000). And especially in divided and polarised societies, discussions between citizens often exacerbate differences rather than resolve them (Mouffe 1999; Dryzek 2005). Lastly, and especially troubling for climate assemblies, decision-making in deliberative bodies is slow and it has historically taken a long time for assemblies' recommendations to become law (Fenton 2019). A long-winded process is incongruous if quick action is needed. These critiques notwithstanding, XR's demand of a citizen's assembly is grounded on decades of scholarship on the shortcomings of representative democracy and potential for deliberative democracy.

5.3 Citizens' Assemblies and Solution Agnosticism

The citizens' assembly demand serves to make a strategy that is based on how to achieve revolutions become democratic and reformist. It thus lies at the centre of the tension between revolutionary and reformist tendencies in XR's discourse. The movement's strategy, or 'theory of change', is based on the tactic of mass arrest. XR aim to mobilise a small minority of the general population to publicly and visibly break the law in acts of nonviolent civil disobedience. Roads are blocked and transport systems obstructed until the inflicted economic costs and logistical difficulties caused by mass-arresting peaceful protesters force the government to accede to the movement's demands (Hallam 2019b). XR recognise that this seemingly revolutionary strategy can be problematic for a democratic movement. After all, a majority of the population may disagree with XR's aims and demands. XR attempt to circumvent this problem by means of the citizens' assembly demand. That is, XR do not impose solutions of its own on the majority but rather demand to let the people decide. Thereby, according to a local XR coordinator, the movement turns a strategy that is 'profoundly anti-democratic into something that is supremely democratic'. Through the assembly demand, the movement's strategy becomes compatible with its democratic self-appraisal. This makes the citizens' assembly demand an indispensable corollary to XR's theory of change as it balances the revolutionary with the reformist.

This analysis, however, is in tension with XR's demand to achieve carbon neutrality by 2025. XR stipulate that the national citizens' assembly is to determine how to achieve net-zero emissions in the UK by 2025 (XR 2019a). The 2025 target is widely regarded as highly ambitious and its realisation would require, according to XR, a mobilisation 'of the scale of a World War' (XR 2020e). Crucially, this implies that the timeline for the yet-to-be-determined policies is set by XR and not itself up for democratic scrutiny and debate. Assembly members are only to decide on the policies that will achieve carbon neutrality by 2025, not to question the target itself. This indicates a tension in XR's solution agnosticism as it limits the remit of a future citizens' assembly. It expresses an uncertainty about a citizens' assembly deciding that carbon emissions should only be level as late as, for instance, 2040. Alternatively, it addresses the risk that the future assembly will not be able to agree on a target.

The citizens' assembly demand has limited the movement in talking about solutions to the climate emergency. XR have been reticent when it comes to lobbying for particular climate and environmental policies and projects. A number of local working groups are discussing action plans with city councils, for example, regarding airport expansions. Nevertheless, there is little broader debate within XR about what kind of society we need and what kinds of lives we would have to live in order to address the impending climate crisis. Discussions between XR members circle around topics such as actions, movement strategy, media messaging and well-being. There is surprisingly little discussion about both climate change and what kind of systemic changes would be needed to address it. This void speaks to the tensions of solution agnosticism and how XR relate to capitalism in their clamour for system change. The void is justified on the basis that XR are a self-selective movement that has neither the legitimacy nor the ability to implement political responses. For XR, only the national government 'has the power to enact the scale and scope of necessary action' (XR 2019e). Hence, the movement is best served by influencing the public debate and forcing the government to create a citizens' assembly in the first place. Essentially, XR is to concentrate on forcing the government to agree to its three demands.

This reluctance to talk about political solutions has not gone unchallenged. A number of XR activists hold that the citizens' assembly demand indulges the illusion of a straightforward path towards victory. In one coordinator's view, XR does not

> talk about solutions, what we are gonna do. We barely even have policy demands. We just say 'let's build a citizens' assembly' and the citizens' assembly will work out the policy positions.

From this perspective, XR's theory of change gives people a false sense of security. Some activists thus believe that XR need to take a more active part in bringing about the transformations in our ways of life and the structures that sustain them. To do this, XR should broaden its strategic outlook from solely pressuring the state to making changes in the very make up of (capitalist) society. This view seems to have held some sway in the movement. In the strategy paper for 2020, XR delineates a year where rebellion will go

> beyond the streets and into the fabric of everything we do…We won't wait for our demands to be met, we will begin to enact them, piloting new participatory systems in democracy, media and economics. (XR 2020c)

Part of this project are local citizens' assemblies which will enable communities to develop their own, smaller-scale initiatives. XR are also planning to increase their contestation of non-state actors, be it the 'corporate media' or the 'economic systems that destroy life on earth', by 'offering alternatives which disrupt the business-as-usual hold on power' (XR 2020c). This reorientation is more in the spirit of a 'revolution of the everyday' which urges individuals and communities to create democratic and egalitarian spaces in the fissures of power without initially aiming for large-scale transformations (Davies 2014). It is in other words a whole lot more prefigurative than what XR have been doing up until this point. How this new prefigurative agenda will play out in practice is as of yet uncertain but it does point to tensions in and a possible break from the solution agnosticism that has dominated until now.

5.4 Revolutionary Reformist Politics

This brings us to the tangled relationship between the prospective climate assembly and the current political system. As we argued above, XR introduces the citizens' assembly as a response to the failures of representative democracy. Like many other movements, XR see the political sphere as negligent and corrupt and look for different means of redress.

The citizens' assembly demand promises to go 'beyond politics' (XR 2019a), heralding a new kind of collective decision-making. However, XR's proposal is less transformative of the current political system than may be inferred by the movement's rhetoric. For one, the citizens' assembly is to be an addition to the representative system, not a substitution. The assembly's decisions 'will provide political cover and public pressure for politicians to set aside the usual politicking and do the right thing' (XR 2020a). It will thereby 'enable politicians to address the emergency before it's too late' (XR 2019c, p. 5). Policymakers remain central to XR's vision and parliament as well as all other representative bodies will continue to exist and do what they have always done. Additionally, the citizens' assembly is only to discuss how to tackle the climate and ecological emergency. Once the assembly submits its recommendations, it will disband again. The climate assembly's scope and duration is in this discourse not intended to lead to lasting disturbance of the liberal democratic consensus. An add-on, single-issue, once-only citizens' assembly would not fundamentally alter the political system. In this sense, the national coordinator for XR UK's citizens' assembly working group is right to claim that 'a citizens' assembly, to me at least, is not that radical at all' (All Hands On 2019). Here, 'beyond politics' does not signify a transformation of the political sphere but an exception to politics as usual subsequent to which things can continue as before. The tension between reformist and revolutionary undertones in XR's discourse becomes visible here. The talk of system change and the deeper theory of change based on transforming the state as we know it and its concomitant unequal power relations gives way to a reformist discourse where a citizens' assembly is an add-on to existing structures.

The primary use of the prospective citizens' assembly is not to alter politics but to get better climate policy. XR hope that the climate assembly will endorse a more radical and socially just environmental action plan than anything that parliament can come up with. Such deliberative mini-publics have indeed been found to 'be relatively sensitive to the perspectives of environmentalists' (Smith 2003, p. 101). While they do not always provide the results environmentalists look for, green positions seem to be favoured compared to decision-making in representative bodies (Dryzek 2013; Bryant and Willis 2019).

Nonetheless, the outcomes of the assembly process will depend on the assembly's design. These design elements are contested, as is perfectly

exemplified by the differences between XR's demanded citizens' assembly and the existing Climate Assembly UK, which is taking place at the time of writing (Climate Assembly UK 2020). The latter was established by six House of Commons select committees and convened over four weekends in the Spring of 2020. For a start, contrary to XR' s demands, the Climate Assembly UK discussed how to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. By postponing the underlying target by 25 years, the ensuing policy proposals were ensured to be less far-reaching and impactful. Additionally, as XR (2020d) point out, 'the net-zero target Climate Assembly UK will work towards does not account for emissions from aviation or trade' or for the 'UK's international emissions, so we can continue to outsource a significant proportion of our emissions to other countries'. Another limitation of the assembly is what XR criticise as an overall focus on 'changes on the individual level' that 'will not adequately address top-level policies, such as regulations for industry, infrastructure and international supply chains' (XR 2020d). People debated 'how we travel', 'what we buy' and learned about heat and energy use in the home, consumption, waste, dietary choices and land use (Climate Assembly UK 2020). Yet structural issues relating to the global economy were effectively omitted. We can then see how what appears to be a radical political demand in the form of a citizens' assembly can be watered down and thus result in something that falls well short of necessary action.

The Climate Assembly UK, lastly, has only an advisory status. It was not commissioned by the current government but by the previous parliament and is consequently restricted to making advisory recommendations (Fenton 2019). According to XR, non-binding recommendations are insufficient since they are open to challenge by the current political system, and hence interest groups and corporations. XR suggest that assembly proposals with over 80% support should be binding. As for recommendations with between 50 and 80% support, the government is to address them and provide a rationale for why they were either rejected, modified or accepted (XR 2019e). While this would be ideal, there is an understanding within XR that getting the government to agree to legally binding decisions is unlikely. The more realistic option is to exert pressure on politicians so that they do not dare to reject the assembly's proposals (XR 2020b). In this case, the likelihood of success will also depend on the perceived legitimacy of the citizens' assembly amongst the broader public.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have argued that XR's citizens' assembly demand draws on influential critiques of representative democracy and delineates a seemingly straightforward solution to the climate crisis. While we agree with XR that a randomly selected, deliberative political body has a number of desirable attributes we nonetheless allege that XR's proposal relies on several leaps of faith. To start, the citizens' assembly's ability to deliver a more participatory and deliberative democracy is severely restricted. XR's claim to go beyond politics does not signify a lasting transformation, but a short-lived exception, to politics as usual. The assembly demand's actual role is to create a one-time chance for implementing radical policies specifically relating to climate change. XR may, however, be overly optimistic in their expectations of the assembly results. Guided deliberation does not necessarily lead to superior policymaking and assembly members may not arrive at a consensus or clear majority decisions. Citizens' assemblies have indeed been shown to favour environmentalist positions, but the prospective climate assembly's design will be crucial for determining the eventual recommendations. These design elements are highly contested and amenable to the vested interests that currently impede effective climate action. Lastly, in order for radical proposals to be implemented, the climate assembly will either have to sit above existing representative bodies and make legally binding recommendations or there has to be strong political and public support for the assembly. In the current political climate, the former option seems unlikely and the latter is highly dependent on XR's success at 'truth-telling' and convincing the public of the urgent need for action.

Citizens' assemblies and the demand for them can be a useful political tool in the fight for climate action and climate justice, but they are unlikely to be a silver-bullet solution. Deferring solutions to a climate assembly gives XR democratic legitimacy but it also ignores the power structures that are in fact preventing effective action on climate change. Part of XR's discourse is that representative democracy has been co-opted by economic elites and the fossil fuel industry has played a particular role in delaying addressing the climate emergency. There is also a recognition that the media plays an important role in maintaining what XR call the status quo on climate change. A citizens' assembly that operates in a political system and society that is still dominated by these power relations would not have the power to overcome them. A hostile media could have

undue influence on part of the assembly. It could also severely undermine the legitimacy of the assembly in the eyes of much of the public in the currently polarised society. Shielding participants in the assembly from undue influence from the fossil fuel industry would also be crucial but challenging.

Not least, a citizens' assembly on climate change would have to be so overarching in its remit that it would have to sit above the rest of the state in many ways. This is because addressing climate change will involve huge changes to how we make, sell, buy, trade, transport and invest in goods and people globally. In other words, it involves transforming global capitalism. The initial response to COVID-19 taking place at the time of writing gives some indication to how dramatic such changes are likely to be. That is a rather larger task than deciding on individual policy issues, such as when abortions should be legal. We do not dispute that a citizens' assembly would be as qualified as elected representatives to make important decisions. We do however dispute citizens' assemblies as solutions in and of themselves. That is, if we in a hypothetical future would find ourselves in a situation where a citizens' assembly is unaffected by the currently existing power relations in global capitalism, we would have to overcome those power relations first or the effects of the citizens' assembly would be too limited to achieve the necessary reforms. The citizens' assembly would not do that for us. In short then, if demanding a citizens' assembly can give legitimacy to XR and climate change activists; suggestions from a citizens' assembly set up under current circumstances would have a high level of legitimacy, making the assembly a useful tool in the fight for climate action; but the assembly would not be able to solve the climate crisis without wider changes in the power relations that have created the climate crisis.

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CHAPTER 6

A Theory of Change: The Civil Resistance Model

Abstract Extinction Rebellion's claim that 3.5% of the population can achieve transformational change has galvanised support for the movement. In this chapter we examine XR's civil resistance model and interrogate some of its key claims and their grounding in academic literature. We argue that contrary to XR's claims, their theory of change is not substantiated by social science. Whilst they have been able to draw useful lessons about the power of disruption, the civil resistance literature on its own falls significantly short in terms of showing us how to build a powerful movement for action on climate change. This is not least because it fails to engage with the power structures that drive climate change.

Keywords Civil resistance · Theory of change · Pillars of support · Hegemony · Gramsci

Extinction Rebellion's claim that 3.5% of the population can achieve transformational change has galvanised support for the movement. It has become central to XR's theory of change. This claim and many others of XR's guiding principles come from the academic literature on civil resistance. This literature is primarily concerned with how to overthrow dictatorships through largely nonviolent means (Sharp 1973, 2012; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). Recently, findings from the literature

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have also been applied to social movements in the US (Engler and Engler 2017). In this chapter we examine XR's civil resistance model and interrogate some of its key claims and their grounding in academic literature. We argue that contrary to XR's claims, their theory of change is not substantiated by social science. Whilst they have been able to draw useful lessons about the power of disruption, the civil resistance literature on its own falls significantly short in terms of showing us how to build a powerful movement for action on climate change. This is not least because it fails to engage with the power structures that drive climate change.

In the first section we argue that by developing a specific model of how to achieve transformational change, XR abandons the trend in social movements over the last 30 years not to have a strategy of how to obtain political power. The second section then moves to explore the 3.5% claim in some depth. We first scrutinise the shaky evidence behind the 3.5% and note that this has not been published in a peer-reviewed publication. We then argue that the cases of regime change that the claim is based upon have little relevance for the fight for climate action. In the third section we look at other lessons that XR take from the civil resistance literature. We highlight how the idea of polarisation through disruption has served XR well and worked in order to gain support for climate action in the British context whilst increasing the salience of climate change as an issue that concerns people. However, beyond that the civil resistance literature is limited for climate activists. This is not least because this distinctly US-centred literature shies away from addressing capitalism and the political economy in a way that is limiting for social movements who contest the power relations in contemporary global capitalism. We here suggest a Gramscian understanding of building a counter-hegemonic climate movement that is based on an economic, political, social and cultural reading of the forces that drive climate change.

6.1 What Is to Be Done?

The most striking aspect of XR's theory of change is really that it exists at all. By developing a theory of how to transform or revolutionise the state, XR breaks with the tradition of social movements as it has developed since the fall of the Soviet Union. This is because with the end of so-called actually existing socialism, those fighting for economic, social and political justice more or less gave up on revolutionary change of liberal democracy.

To some extent, they accepted defeat to Fukuyama's (2006) declaration that liberal democracies represented the pinnacle of human political organisation. To be sure, social movements and their activists did not stop their struggle for economic and social justice. The explicit social and economic transformations that movements and parties on the left sought, however, were no longer accompanied by specific demands on how to transform the state and they did not rely on prescriptive models of how to bring that change about. Some of this shift was captured through the concept of 'new social movements' (Kriesi et al. 1995), though this move particularly relates to an increase in social demands and a comparative decrease in economic demands. What we mean is that twentieth-century revolutionary movements developed several models for how the state was to be captured. Naturally, the ones that proved successful in one place were often replicated elsewhere. Such replication was rarely successful and often devastating. Think here of Lenin's vanguard party or Castro and Guevara's focalist guerrillas as specific strategies to bring about specific forms of transformation to the state. That kind of prescriptive models gradually went out of fashion for left-wing activists as the twentieth century progressed and died a death with the end of the Cold War.

For the last 30 years, social movements have shied away from models of how to transform the state. The Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, who took control of part of the region in 1994, was an emblematic example of this that in many ways came to shape the discourses of left social movements. For the Zapatistas, the aim is not to take state power but to build power from below. Although this was preceded by taking control of a given territory by force, the following two and half decades have been about building an alternative to neoliberal capitalism rather than taking over its key institutions. The Zapatistas have had a tremendous influence on social movements globally, not least by organising the first large meeting of social movements and NGOs from across the world in what was to become the World Social Forum (Buckley 2013). However, the Zapatistas have been eager to discourage others to copy their practices in a clear distancing from the way in which Guevara sought to export focalism to countries like Angola and Bolivia in the 1960s. The reluctance to engage with broader models and strategies to bring about the desired change has not least been present in the two largest movements since: The Global Justice Movement and the Movement of the Squares. Indeed, a key critique against these two has been their lack of strategy (Dean 2016; Kiersey and Vrasti 2016). They were good at

pointing out what the problem is but never really sought to directly contest state power. XR are different. They do have a model for achieving change that they believe can be replicated. Indeed, in setting this model out in his book, Roger Hallam chose to use the title of Lenin's book 120 years earlier, 'What is to be done?', as a sub-heading (Hallam 2019a, p. 16). This indicates that the move from the prefigurative and horizontalist ideals of contemporary social movements to the more vanguardist thinking of twentieth-century Marxist movements is a conscious one on the part of Hallam, if perhaps not so on the part of the movement as a whole. That is, however, where the Marxist connections end.

XR claim that their theory of change is based on evidence from social science. In fact, we can be much more specific than that. XR's theory of change comes from a small subset of scholarship often called the civil resistance literature. This is largely separate from the vast literatures on social movements or critical political economy. To understand these disciplinary boundaries, it is useful to see what is seen as inside and outside of what is being studied. We are critical political economists. That means that we are interested in social movements that directly or indirectly contest power relations in capitalism. This interest is based on a belief that the economic organisation of society drives many other aspects of life and that any analysis must pay attention to that economic organisation. This kind of fundamental belief is what social scientists call an ontological perspective. As critical political economists we are interested in actors that seek to transform capitalism in one way or another. That means that our interest may span across both social movements and political parties, across all parts of the world and across nonviolent and violent forms of struggle. In turn, the social movements literature is less concerned (though not unconcerned) with capitalism and limits the attention to non-parliamentary politics. That literature also spans the globe and is also interested in both violent and nonviolent forms of protest. Social movement scholarship is defined by what it studies and not a common ontological position. The civil resistance literature is more limited in its scope than the other two. It is specifically interested in nonviolent conflict that aims to overthrow regimes in the Global South, although it has been broadened recently. Civil resistance scholars call these struggles maximalist in order to separate them from most social movement activity in the Global North which does not seek to overthrow the state or the regime (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). The civil resistance and critical political economy literatures share an interest in revolutionary change but the

former limits such change to the regime or state. In short, capitalism, globalisation or neoliberalism do not enter the frame of analysis for civil resistance scholars. If the aim is to develop a model of change aimed at addressing climate change based on evidence from social science, opting to take such evidence from the civil resistance literature is not an obvious choice, to say the least.

XR take a number of key points from the civil resistance literature to develop its own theory of change. A central claim is that in order to achieve the desired change, it is necessary to get a sizeable minority of the population directly involved in the struggle. They specifically base this claim on a Tedx talk by the leading civil resistance scholar Erica Chenoweth (2013) where she says that nonviolent movements that have involved 3.5% of the population or more have always succeeded in achieving regime change. XR also draw on the findings of Gene Sharp (1973, 2012), the father of the civil resistance literature, and his many years of qualitative research on struggles against despots around the world. The main purpose of the civil resistance literature is to promote nonviolent resistance against undemocratic regimes. This involves both promoting nonviolent resistance over violent resistance and promoting nonviolent resistance over non-resistance. A key lesson that XR take from Sharp is his social view of power. If people stop obeying, the power of the regime crumbles. This is particularly the case when the disobedient people include those with key roles in maintaining the power of the regimes, like the police, the military or civil servants. These sources of regime power have been called 'pillars of support' (Helvey 2004; Engler and Engler 2017), which is a term that XR use in their internal training sessions. Whilst the pillars in the literature are upholding a dictatorial regime, for XR they are upholding the status quo of climate breakdown where the government is one of the pillars, albeit the most important one. These pillars of support are disrupted through polarising the public. This is achieved through creating tensions and 'dilemma actions' (Hallam 2019b, p. 102) where the authorities have to decide whether to repress disruptions with force or allow it to take place. Both are seen as a win because the attention and the tension push people to take a side. Built into this theory of change is that many will be pushed away whilst hopefully more will be pushed towards XR against what they see as illegitimate use of force by the authorities. The following sections will scrutinise this model, both by questioning some of the key claims in the civil resistance literature

and by questioning the logic of taking a model that is based on toppling dictatorships and applying it to the fight for action on climate change.

6.2 The 3.5%

The claim that participation of 3.5% of the population in protest is what is necessary for success does not stand up to scrutiny. On the one hand, it does not stand up to scrutiny as a social scientific claim in its own right. On the other hand, it is even less relevant when applied to the fight for climate action. Nevertheless, still in February 2020, XR claim on their website that '[h]istorical evidence shows that we need the involvement of 3.5% of the population to succeed' (XR 2019). The claim originates from Erica Chenoweth (2013) in a Tedx talk and XR's use of this figure and the research it stems from has previously been challenged by several commentators (Ahmed 2019; Berglund 2019). Erica Chenoweth created a dataset of Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO) that along with some more detailed case studies resulted in the book *Why Civil Resistance Works* (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). The 3.5% claim does not appear in the book. In fact, we have been unable to find any peer-reviewed publication that contains the claim. Chenoweth has herself made the claim in both a Tedx talk and an opinion piece in the Guardian (Chenoweth 2017). These sources both link back to the book and the data set, but neither the book nor the dataset make direct reference to the 3.5%. Whilst both the book (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, p. 33) and the dataset (Chenoweth and Lewis 2013) present estimated numbers of people who took part in civil resistance campaigns in any given year, neither present this as a percentage of the population. In other words, the percentage of population has not been a variable that has been considered during the original research. It is likely then that Chenoweth has added such a variable in a version not publicly available in order to make the 3.5% claim. Considering the salience that this claim has obtained in public debate over the last year, a clearer indication of what it is based on would have been welcome. We approached Chenoweth for such clarification without success but nevertheless continued to look for the answers in the dataset ourselves. To be sure, we do not dispute that a greater number of participants in a campaign increases its likelihood of success. That is a truism. What we dispute is the relevance and accuracy of putting a number on it that is meant to transcend vastly different political contexts. It is quite an exaggeration to say that this rather precise numerical claim, which

has not gone through peer-review and the basis of which is uncertain, is backed up by historical or social science research.

The shaky foundation of the claim itself notwithstanding, the thrust of our critique is that the cases upon which the 3.5% claim is based have no bearing on the fight for climate action. In absence of a definitive list to back up the 3.5% claim, we have used the NAVCO dataset to try to establish such a list. Because the dataset does not have exact numbers of protestors, but ranges, there may be cases on our list that did not actually amount to 3.5% and are not part of Chenoweth's unpublished list. Nevertheless, using the ranges provided, we have excluded many cases that did not reach 3.5% in their respective country. That leaves the following 28 cases. Eight of the cases are in Africa, with three of those in Zambia. 14 are former Communist states in Eastern Europe or Central Asia, 12 of which took place in conjunction with the end of the Cold War. Of the others, two were in South East Asia, two in Southern Europe and two in the Middle East. Nafeez Ahmed (2019) argued that the cases in the NAVCO dataset involved 'political regime change usually followed by absorption into the neoliberal world system driving carbon emissions'. The absence of political economic phenomena like capitalism and neoliberalism in the civil resistance literature is something that we will return to, but the lack of such a variable here is limiting. Indeed, the only obvious exception to Ahmed's point is the Iranian revolution, which led to a regime that turned away from neoliberal governance, albeit certainly not away from fossil fuel dependency (Table 6.1).

Even beyond the list here of the largest successful nonviolent protests, the cases studies by civil resistance scholars are of little relevance for national and global efforts to force action on climate change. XR's aims are both more and less than most cases of civil resistance. They are less in the sense that XR do not necessarily aim to overthrow the state or even the government, even if some of their activists, not least Hallam, believe so. XR's aims are much more than these cases in the sense that action on climate change requires deep shifts in the way that we make and trade things, how we value that mode of production and the power structures that maintain what XR call the status quo of climate change. Ahmed (2019) points to the cases where less market- or US-friendly regimes have been replaced by ones that seek deeper integration into global markets. Nonetheless, many of these cases in the dataset did not involve very much change at all in terms of the social and economic structures of society. To explain what we mean here we can look at examples from Latin America,

Table 6.1 Cases from the NAVCO dataset

Country	*Year*	*Target*
Greece	1963	Karamanlis regime
Zambia	1963	British rule
Portugal	1974	Military rule
Iran	1978	Shah Reza Pahlavi
Philippines	1986	Ferdinand Marcos
South Korea	1987	Mil govt
Poland	1989	Communist regime
Hungary	1989	Communist regime
Czechoslovakia	1990	Communist regime
Slovenia	1990	Communist regime
Albania	1991	Communist regime
Belarus	1991	Communist regime
Slovenia	1991	Yugoslav Government
Estonia	1991	Communist regime
Zambia	1991	One-party rule
Kyrgyzstan	1991	USSR
Latvia	1991	Communist regime
Mali	1991	Military rule
Lithuania	1991	Lithuanian regime
Slovakia	1992	Czech communist government
Niger	1992	Military rule
South Africa	1994	Apartheid
Serbia	2000	Milosevic regime
Senegal	2000	Diouf govt
Zambia	2001	Chiluba regime
Madagascar	2002	Radsiraka regime
Georgia	2003	Shevardnadze regime
Lebanon	2005	Syrian forces

Source Chenoweth and Lewis (2013)

a part of the world that is missing from the list above. I (Oscar) participated in the protests that brought down the increasingly corrupt regime of Alberto Fujimori in Peru in 2000, a case which is included in the NAVCO dataset (Chenoweth and Lewis 2013). What is excluded from Chenoweth's explanation is the impact of the withdrawal of support of the Fujimori regime by the US and the Organisation of American States (OAS) that observed the fraudulent 2000 elections. This was then not a case of Peru being absorbed into the neoliberal system as it already was part of that system. It was rather a regime change that important actors in that system were comfortable with and changing their support became a

form of damage limitation so that clamour for change in political regime would not spill over to demands of more widespread social and economic justice. The question then is what a movement that seeks to challenge the powers that drive fossil fuels and increased consumption can learn from civil resistance struggles that have generally increased those powers or left them untouched. The answer is not a lot. Whilst there are undoubtedly aspects from some of these struggles to be found through qualitative research that XR can learn from, quantitative claims need to be based on similar cases and XR's fight is not similar to those in the NAVCO dataset.

The list illustrates how illogical it is for XR to draw inspiration primarily from the civil resistance literature over the literatures on social movements or critical political economy. Again, looking at Latin America, other instances of civil resistance, not included in the dataset, share more traits with XR's aims of climate justice. Escalating protests by social movements made up by indigenous organisations and trade unions in Bolivia led to the toppling of numerous unpopular governments and the election of one of the leaders of the protests, Evo Morales, as President in 2005. Issues pertaining to climate justice and fossil fuel extraction were central to those movements, to his presidency and to challenges to his presidency from both left and right until he was deposed in a military coup in 2019 (Hesketh and Morton 2014; Andreucci 2017). Andreucci (2017, p. 170) specifically explores the 'shifting power relations between social movements, the hydrocarbon industry, and the state'. Our claim here is that this literature, broadly located within critical political economy, which takes social relations in capitalism seriously is of more relevance than studies which ignore those relations. Why this case is not included in the NAVCO dataset at all is unclear. Since XR's emergence Chenoweth's research has become more widely acknowledged and her quantitative civil resistance research has attracted criticism.

Apart from the 3.5% claim, XR also draw inspiration from Chenoweth in calling for strict nonviolence. The emphasis on nonviolence is both a strength and a weakness in Chenoweth's work and its translation to the context of liberal democracies. One strength is the claim that nonviolent struggles attract more participants from different demographics, rather than the mainly young men involved in armed struggle. This is a valid point that is backed up both quantitatively and qualitatively (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011). Logically, this finding also travels to contexts in the Global North where social movements that reject confrontation with

police are more likely to attract a greater variety of participants. As a quantitative claim, however, the two again have next to nothing to do with each other. The civil resistance scholarship (Sharp 1973; Ackerman and Krueger 1994; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011) recognises that the vast majority of nonviolent campaigns have had violent components, sometimes quite substantial ones. Therefore, anarchist social movements in the Global North that may use self-defence and vandalise shop windows or machinery would almost certainly be classed as mainly nonviolent if they were in the Global South according to the very criteria set out by civil resistance scholars. Ahmed (2019) argues that Chenoweth's reduction of campaigns 'into discrete categories to serve the purpose of quantification is often arbitrary' and that it 'often ends up excluding the deeper context of decades-long struggles, community organising, grassroots network building'. In other words, it simplifies long political and societal processes and ends up hiding as much as it reveals. It also gives much power to the person doing the coding of these complex cases. In other words, there are serious challenges to the relevance of quantitative civil resistance studies in their own right but the adoption of lessons from this scholarship for climate change activism in the Global North is particularly problematic.

6.3 Civil Resistance and Climate Change Activism

To be fair to Extinction Rebellion, they did not come up with the idea of applying findings from the civil resistance literature to social movements in the Global North on their own. They explicitly draw inspiration from the 2016 book *This is an Uprising* (Engler and Engler 2017) and the research and training of the Ayni Institute (2020) which one of the authors of that book is linked to. The Ayni Institute, which was founded in 2012 engages in training, education and sharing of experiences between social movements across the Americas. In their semi-academic and highly recommended book, Engler and Engler (2017) take a number of findings from the civil resistance literature and relate these to social movements in the US. XR, in turn, take a number of findings from *This Is an Uprising* that contribute to what they see as their DNA. DNA trainings are then rolled out across the country and offered to activists.

The idea of using disruption in order to polarise the public is the main lesson that XR has taken from the civil resistance literature and it is one that has served them very well. Civil disobedience and other forms of

disruptive protest is always intended to create a tension in society. It raises an issue to the forefront, and it forces people to take a side. It is inevitable that as some members of the public will be drawn to the movement and to deeper sympathies, others will be pushed away and become more averse. Engler and Engler (2017, p. 206) point out that it is important that the positives are not outweighed by the negatives here. For a movement that is fighting for its own activists, support for the movement and the cause are more closely related. For environmental activists, it is less so. People may not agree with XR's methods and be put off by the movement, but this is unlikely to make them see climate change as a less serious issue. There is in this sense a lower cost for overstepping the boundaries of acceptable protest. As explored in Chapter 3, however, those boundaries are certainly still relevant, and they generally regard what may be considered violent and not. The positive polarising effect of a year of intense climate activism was recently visible in a report by researchers at Cardiff University (Steentjes et al. 2020). Those not worried about climate change have gone from 38 to 20% since 2016 and those who are very or extremely worried have gone from 19 to 40% of the UK population (p. 14). In the same survey, 29% opposed climate activists whilst 47% supported them (p. 58). Though we do not have the detailed data, it is noteworthy that the opposition to activists is higher than the lack of concern for climate change. Thus, the polarisation can have a positive effect for mobilising the public for climate action even if that public does not support XR per se. Beyond the disruptive polarisation, the lessons that XR take from the civil resistance literature are as limiting as they are enabling.

Civil resistance is a concept originating from the US and it is one that is primarily used in the US. The recent iterations of this scholarship are also ones that are designed to appeal to potential activists in the US. This largely explains the aversion of engaging with the political economy in this literature. In most academic disciplines in the US, engaging with Marxist scholarship is a certain way to marginalise yourself as an academic and limiting your influence on the debate. This is not the case to the same extent in the UK and the rest of Europe. Particularly since the 2008 crisis, there has been an increased engagement with capitalism and its power relations across the social sciences. Although Gabriel Hetland and Jeff Goodwin (2013) identified 'the strange disappearance of capitalism from social movement studies' some years ago, austerity and the very clear economic demands of the Movement of the Squares brought back a

focus on capitalism to European social movement studies (e.g. Della Porta 2015; Hayes 2017). There is in European academia less of a separation between what social movements do (their tactics and strategies) and the politics that the social movements engage in (social relations under capitalism). Critical political economists have sought to further bridge this gap (e.g. Bailey et al. 2017; Bailey 2019). For those studying social change from below, the perceived necessity to ignore Marxist, or even political economic, scholarship is particularly debilitating.

The debilitating effect of wilfully ignoring the political economy in the civil resistance literature is not least visible in the view of power, the state and the pillars of support. Gene Sharp's social view of power is that power is upheld and maintained by people's obedience and if people stop obeying, state power crumbles (Sharp 1973). Whilst there is merit to this view of power, it is insufficient in order to understand how power operates in all places at all times. It is largely coherent with the traditional view of power as something that can be observed when one actor makes another one do something that they would not do otherwise (Dahl 2007). Later developments in the conceptualisation of power include seeing power as shaping the perceived interests of other actors (Lukes 2005) or seeing power as something productive rather than something which is exercised by one actor over another (Foucault 1980). Most relevant to our critique is that Sharp's concept says nothing of how state power is connected to the power of capital or, as XR call it, business.

XR's use of the concept of pillars of support to understand power in relation to climate change is particularly debilitating in its avoidance of Marxist literature. In the civil resistance literature, society is separated into various pillars that the regime and those fighting it will seek to contest and control. For Robert Helvey (2004, Chapter 2), some are essential in order to maintain regime power. These include police, military, civil servants, media and business community in descending order. Others are ones that a stable regime will control but where opposition often starts. These include youth, workers, religious organisations and NGOs. Engler and Engler (2017, Chapter 4) take this concept and apply it to social movements in the US. For example, they look at how the LGBT movement successfully fought for marriage equality in what was a broad cultural struggle where the entertainment industry played an important role. In essence, the idea of pillars of support advices activists to fight on many fronts in order to destabilise the status quo.

The pillars of support is a depoliticised and 70 years later version of what the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci was writing about when imprisoned by Mussolini in the 1930s. Through the concept of 'hegemony', Gramsci critiqued the excessive focus of taking over the state in Leninism as well as the idea that Communism would be a natural end state that all societies would ultimately reach after experiencing capitalism. Gramsci saw that Mussolini's fascist capitalist society was not merely held by force. Instead, class relations were reinforced by culture and society in the form of religion, folklore and education amongst other factors (Gramsci 1996). In order to build a successful counter-hegemonic movement it would not be enough to take over the state in a Leninist way, which Gramsci called a 'war of movement'. The war of movement thus had to be accompanied by a 'war of position'. For Owen Worth (2018, pp. 138–139) this means 'a set of alternative principles and practices, capable of contesting and replacing those of the existing order'. Moreover, these principles and practices have to combine economic, cultural, social and political objectives. Gramsci's hegemony then includes both the institutions of the pillars of support and the cultural norms and power relations that these institutions foster and maintain.

XR would benefit from a more Gramscian understanding of what climate change activism entails. In XR's interpretation of the pillars of support, that which is upheld by the pillars is not the regime, but the status quo on climate change. XR state that

> 'Pillars of support' is a tool that helps us map the norms, systems and institutions that uphold the status quo. The status quo is the current position we are in: the existing state of affairs. They help us understand the status quo isn't an all powerful and homogenous power, but actually it is supported by subsections of power. (XR 2020)

They then proceed to say that the main focus of the movement is the pillar that they call 'the government'. This is a simplistic and, in some ways, misleading way of interpreting what makes up the status quo on climate change. XR's model says nothing about the connections between the fossil fuel industry, the global financial sector, international organisations and national governments. As a result, 'the status quo of climate change' does not come to mean very much at all. Making more sense of what does make up this status quo would help climate change activists to find better targets for their actions in the broader war of position.

In their practice, XR are already engaging in a broader war of position and a more sophisticated understanding of what makes up the status quo of climate change. Their targets are increasingly financial institutions and they have become more active in divestment campaigns. From what we have observed, this development has been driven by grassroots activists in various parts of the UK. This is an important development. XR have quickly become experts in how to carry out and how to communicate civil disobedience. As set out in Chapter 3, civil disobedience is a particularly efficient way of delegitimising actors and processes in order to build political momentum against them. Whilst actions directed at the state and the government will continue to be necessary, the groundwork of building momentum against other key parts of the status quo of climate change are also central to the fight for action on climate change and climate justice.

6.4 Conclusion

We have argued in this chapter that XR's theory of change falls short of what is required and possible in terms of building a dynamic movement to contest the forces that drive climate change and fight for climate justice. The US-centred civil resistance literature that the model is built upon is an odd inspiration for a climate change movement. This literature is primarily concerned with regime change movements in the Global South. Its analysis is completely devoid of engagement with capitalism and the political economy. This literature makes no attempt at understanding the complex power relations and structures that drive climate change in the contemporary globally integrated, financialised and fossil fuel dependant capitalist economy. Nor does it address how this economy is sustained politically and culturally. It is thus a literature about political change that almost entirely lacks political analysis. This is not least evident in how its understanding of power is a very basic one of obedience and disobedience. Although there are certainly tactics that can be learnt from the civil resistance literature, it offers no strategy for the climate change movement.

XR are keen to stress that we listen to the science on climate change. We ask of XR that they stop claiming that this theory of change is based on social science. It is not. We further encourage XR and other climate change activists to engage with broader thinking about how to achieve social, political, economic and cultural change in the context of climate

change and the forces that drive it. Doing so will help climate activists to direct their actions at a broader range of actors for maximum political effect. Luckily, not much would be required for XR to do this. They have already started to broaden their targets and the internal adherence to this theory of change has weakened. XR have shown the British public how powerful and efficient civil disobedience can be. Their modest but significant achievements to date have shown that pressure for change generally comes from a sizeable minority rather than necessarily a majority of the population. Whilst that is indeed what Chenoweth and the civil resistance literature says, it was also what Lenin and Che Guevara said. In other words, there is nothing new about this finding, although excessive focus on electoral politics may have led people to forget this. Social movements matter and they work (Cox 2018). XR matter, albeit not in the way that their civil resistance model makes out that they matter.

This chapter has directly addressed the tension of having a theory of change that we set out in the introduction. It has also engaged with the tension of whether XR is a revolutionary or reformist movement. Hallam is the architect of this model. For him, XR is clearly engaged in a revolutionary project although it is very uncertain what that revolution consists in. For some XR activists the Gramscian idea of a counter-hegemonic movement makes more sense. This chimes with XR's ideas of being part of a broader movement of movements where different actors bring different things to the broader climate change movement (XR 2020). That is also a revolutionary approach. Nevertheless, for many activists these kinds of state-toppling or counter-hegemonic approaches are alien and they perceive themselves to be part of a movement that puts pressure on the government to carry out necessary reform. These different activists can, of course, and do work together in the same movement. For one leading XR activist this diversity meant that XR should not be considered a social movement because they agree on little else beyond the urgent need to tackle climate change. The coming together of activists with such different outlooks is what we mean by creative tensions. Lastly, this chapter has addressed the tension around the diffuse engagement with the political economy in XR's discourse. We have traced this partly to the lack of such engagement in the civil resistance literature that XR base so much of its tactical and strategic discourse on. In the concluding chapter we will further explore how XR relate to the political economy and why it matters.

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CHAPTER 7

Conclusion: XR, the Climate Change Movement and Capitalism

Abstract It may be unwise for a climate change movement to declare itself anti-capitalist if it seeks a broad appeal. However, it is equally untenable for a climate change movement not to engage with capitalism and the political economy since this is where the driving forces of climate change can be found. Climate change activists therefore ought to consider how climate change relates to aspects of capitalism, such as growth, trade, profit, property rights, financialisation and class relations.

Keywords Climate change activism · Anti-capitalist · Capitalism · Political economy · Climate change · Climate emergency

In this book we have sought to explore, understand and contextualise Extinction Rebellion as political actors. We have done so by putting their tactics, strategy, structure and political demands at the centre of our analysis. We have argued that XR have greatly contributed to the increasing attention paid to climate change by citizens, policymakers and other actors. They have done that through practising civil disobedience in a way that has been hard to avoid and that has created tensions in society as intended. Civil disobedience is a battle over legitimacy. XR have captured the zeitgeist of political polarisation and used this to their advantage. This has resulted in fierce critique from a minority but in an increase in concern about climate change amongst the public. It has forced people

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to take a stance as the model of polarising disruption that XR use intends to.

We have shown that XR's lawbreaking protest shares much more with the liberal tradition of justifying civil disobedience than with the anarchist direct action tradition. This is because XR's goals are not anarchist and their direct action is often not prefigurative in that it does not directly seek to enact in the present what it aims towards in the future. Instead it seeks to disrupt in a mixture of direct and indirect ways. They share the liberal concern with justifying their disobedience by emphasising that it is a last resort and that it is practised within an overall fidelity to law. The open, conscientious and sacrificial elements of the disobedience along with the reverence for the police shows this liberal, rather than anarchist, ethos in XR's lawbreaking.

In exploring XR's views and practices of democracy we found a dissonance between the critique against the lacking democracy in society at large and internal practices that are not particularly democratic. Although the movement shares much of the critique of liberal representative democracy that has grown in social movements over the past decades, they deviate from those social movements in how they view the role of internal democracy in that critique. In this sense they break with the prefigurative horizontality of post-Cold War social movements. For social movements, practising direct, deliberative and participatory democracy internally has been a way of protesting the lack of true democracy that the liberal democratic state offers. It has been a way of showing what is possible. In doing so, many movements have sacrificed efficient decision-making for democracy. XR do the opposite. They sacrifice democracy for efficiency. The internal structure is officially transparent but in practice opaque. Whilst holding assemblies is influenced by the prefigurative horizontal tradition, XR's assemblies are not where power lies and they are merely consultative. That said, anybody is free to set up an XR group and can obviously influence what that group does. This has enabled the movement to grow as quickly as it has. Though it is always perilous for scholars to predict the future, we anticipate that the lack of internal democracy is what will eventually lead to XR's decline. When people give up their free time, they want to feel that they can have an influence, that they are being heard and that they are not just foot soldiers. The lack of such influence is in our view likely to lead to a slow decline in activists.

One of XR's key demands is nonetheless a democratic one, namely a citizens' assembly on the climate and ecological emergency to overcome

the inaction on climate change. The claim is that representative democracy has been co-opted by elites and has proven incapable of addressing the climate emergency that is threatening humanity and civilisation. The assembly would be put in place through sortition and reflect the demography of the population. The assembly would invite experts, listen to their advice and deliberate on solutions. Such assemblies have proven efficient in dealing with tough issues, such as marriage equality in Ireland, by being able to bypass strong opposition of powerful religious institutions. The idea of a citizens' assembly rests on a rich scholarship on deliberative democracy. We have argued that both the demand of a citizens' assembly and potential policy solutions that such assemblies may produce can be useful tools that render the climate change movement more legitimate. Nonetheless, a citizens' assembly on climate change would have to have such extensive remit that it would come up against entrenched powerful interests at the heart of the global political economy. These interests are already what is stopping action on climate change and XR lack an explanation for how a citizens' assembly would be able to bypass them. That is, if the assembly is set up within the current state system, there would be many mechanisms for interested parties to dilute the effect of the assembly. This may be through delegitimising its democratic credentials through a hostile media, lobbying assembly members, lobbying politicians not to adopt recommendations or challenging recommendations in the courts. As such, citizens' assemblies would be more a tool in a broader political movement for action on climate change and climate justice than a solution in itself.

Lastly, we have critically interrogated many of the claims that XR make as part of their civil resistance model and show how these claims cannot be backed up by social science or any historical record. Struggles for social, political and economic justice permeate the history of humanity. Unfortunately for those seeking silver-bullet solutions for how to achieve radical change, the very different social, political and economic contexts of these struggles mean that it is futile to draw general lessons of what will work for social movements. We can and should draw inspiration from others' experiences, but always in a way that is sensitive to our own context. There are two main problems with XR's model and the way that it is derived from the civil resistance literature. The first is that it takes a dubious and poorly substantiated claim about numbers that are required to topple dictators in individual countries in the Global South

and applies this to the fight for climate action that is necessary in all countries, not least in the Global North. Differences between dictatorships and liberal democracies; national and global struggles; and pro-capitalist and anti-capitalist campaigns are all ignored in this leap. The second problem is that it constitutes a refusal to engage with the type of societal transformation that would be needed. It refuses to engage with the political economy of climate change and how that may be different or similar to what other social movements have been involved in.

7.1 Creative Tensions

In exploring these aspects of XR's tactics, strategy, structure and political demands, we have identified four tensions that run through the movement. These tensions are to a varying extent also relevant to the broader and fast-growing climate change movement. The first of these is a tension between reformist and revolutionary aspects of climate change discourses. Is climate change activism about putting pressure on the state to mobilise and mitigate and adapt to a changing climate? Or is it to deeply transform, revolutionise or replace state structures because the existing ones are seen as unable to engage seriously in mitigation and adaptation? XR's lawbreaking tactics and the demand of a citizens' assembly can be interpreted as both reformist and revolutionary depending on who you ask and which aspects you look at. The civil resistance model, albeit flawed, is designed to be revolutionary, achieve system change and possibly replace the state as we know it, though it is uncertain with what beyond a citizens' assembly. This tension is unneccessary to reconcile. Activists with a more revolutionary mindset will bring innovative approaches to the movements whilst it is important not to alienate potential activists who prefer a more reformist approach.

The second of the tensions that we identified concerned whether it is tenable for climate change movements to be solution agnostic. Through their citizens' assembly demand, XR have to some extent locked themselves into a situation where they do not perceive themselves to be able to legitimately propose policy solutions. Unlike the school strikers who have embraced a Green New Deal, XR leave the climate change policy to a future citizens' assembly. This makes it harder for the movement to contradict those who point to population control or stopping climate migration as solutions. XR in the US have adopted a demand of climate justice. Whilst XR in the UK also speak of climate justice and parts of

the movement speak of decolonising; climate justice and decolonisation are not as central to XR UK as they are to XR US or other climate change movements in the UK. The important question to ask here is 'what demands can we legitimately make?'. Demands that arise from citizens' assemblies do give legitimacy. But so do demands that are based on values of justice and equality. To be sure, XR do not stay away from policy recommendations. Banning airport expansions and fossil fuel divestment are prominent policies that XR support. At a local level XR engage even more in specific sustainable policy proposals. We appreciate that there is a reluctance to get behind policies that may be divisive. It can be difficult for an organisation that seeks to be a mass movement because it may limit the people that consider joining. However, agnosticism also carries risks. On the one hand, people may be reluctant to engage with a movement that lacks a more explicit policy agenda as it can seem politically vacuous. On the other hand, XR has become an influential voice on climate change and it is a missed opportunity not to use that voice to actively promote good and just solutions over bad and unjust ones. In a way, this tension plays out in every planned action and messaging and XR have certainly become less solution agnostic than they originally were.

The third tension that we have identified is very specific to XR and it concerns their adherence to a specific theory of change. As both Nafeez Ahmed (2019) and we have argued, there is not much substance to this theory of change. Many activists that we have spoken to have taken much of Ahmed's critique onboard and it was a stated rationale behind XR Bristol's own new strategy document (XR Bristol 2020). As social scientists who study social movements that seek radical change, we urge XR to stop peddling the 3.5% claim as well as claims that they have found a secret formula to how to achieve change. Instead we encourage XR to further develop their thinking of how they fit into the movement of movements of climate change activism. Moreover, we suggest that they broaden their reading beyond the US-based civil resistance literature and pay more attention to Gramscian ideas and critical political economy and social movements literature more broadly. The adherence to the theory of change is an increasing tension in XR, but not a particularly creative one.

Finally, the main tension that runs through all aspects of what XR and other climate change movements are about is the question of capitalism. XR are explicit about anti-capitalism and other 'lefty-language' being outside of their framing (XR 2020). It is common for social

movements not to declare themselves anti-capitalist or on the left even though it is evident that they campaign against capital and that they have left-wing values regarding equality and justice. The rationale for this is simple. There is no reason to alienate potential supporters and activists that do not inherently see themselves as anti-capitalist or explicitly left wing. For example, the Spanish anti-eviction movement PAH campaigns for the right to housing and against banks and financial institutions through various forms of civil disobedience, but stay away from branding themselves as left wing since this could stop right-wing voters who face eviction from joining (Suarez 2017; Berglund 2018). In this sense, being anti-capitalist should not be seen as a pre-requisite to join a direct action climate change movement. Nevertheless, for a movement that offers as much internal training as XR, more explicit engagement and education around the forces that climate change activists are up against would not go amiss. To conclude this book, we will therefore briefly explore why climate change activists ought to consider the relationship between climate change and capitalism and how XR currently relate to this relationship.

7.2 Climate Change Activism & Capitalism

The purpose here is not to set out a definitive relationship between capitalism and climate change. There is a vast literature on green political economy that does just that (e.g. Koch 2012; Wright and Nyberg 2015; Gough 2017; Raworth 2017). Instead, we highlight some ways in which XR already engage with key aspects of capitalism and how climate activists may want to consider those aspects further.

There is no lack of implicit critique of capitalism in XR's discourse as these extracts from *This is not a Drill* (XR 2019) show:

> our government has shattered meaningful democracy and cast aside the common interest in favour of short-term gain and private profit. (XR 2019, p. 2)

> There are better ways to live, produce and to consume. (Shiva 2019)

> The problem is Capitalism. The problem is Colonialism. The problem is Power. The problem is inequality. The problem is greed, and corruption, and money, and this tired, broken system. (Knights 2019, p. 12)

They talk about profit and specifically short-term profit. They talk broadly of how we produce and consume. And they connect capitalism, colonialism, power and inequality. Some of these issues are particular problems of the capitalism that we live in here and now whilst others are more general for capitalism on the whole. Take for example the short-term gain. This concern speaks directly to what has been called 'shareholder value'. It has been identified as a key feature of the more financialised capitalism that has evolved over the last 40 years (van der Zwan 2014). It means that short-term share prices have become comparatively more important than long-term profits and business models for corporations that are on the stock market. Shareholder value does pose a particular problem for climate change since it favours the short-term interests of investors over the long-term interests of the business and certainly the long-term interests of the planet. Whilst the short-termism of shareholder value is a prominent feature of contemporary capitalism, it is perfectly possible to imagine a capitalist society where it plays a much more marginal role as it has done in most of the history of capitalism.

An often-repeated green critique of capitalism is that it relies on continuous economic growth and that such growth is impossible to sustain on a finite planet. This critique was first developed in the early 1970s and has since been updated (Meadows et al. 2005). At the time of writing, COVID-19 is starting to severely affect the global economy. It is paralysing much economic activity and leading to a global recession. The extent of the economic effects of this public health crisis will show many vulnerabilities in the highly globally integrated capitalism of the twenty-first century. It is already showing a decrease in many sources of CO_2 emissions. In that sense it shows aspects of the shock to the capitalist economy that addressing the climate emergency would entail. Trade and transport are big drivers of climate change and they would have to decrease sharply in an effort to address the climate crisis. Nonetheless, even though growth and increasing trade are central to contemporary capitalism, the economy would still be capitalist even if trade decreased and there was a prolonged recession.

Private profit, critiqued in the declaration of rebellion in the quote above, is a more essential part of capitalism in all its iterations. It is part of what makes capitalism a distinct mode of production. It is the mode of production that Vandana Shiva critiques in the other quote above. A mode of production is how we make, consume and trade things. In the Marxist tradition, what distinguishes capitalism as a mode of production

is that it has two classes (Wood 2002; Radice 2015). One class relies on selling its labour and tends to be called 'labour' or 'workers'. The other, much smaller class, owns the means of production and tend to be called 'capital'. That does not mean that capital is free to do what they want. For capital to survive, it needs to be profitable. To be profitable, it needs to be competitive. In order to be profitable and competitive, capital must exploit workers. Exploitation here is not necessarily as violent or abusive as it may sound. It merely means that capital has to get more value out of workers than it pays them in wages. Otherwise it would not be profitable, and it would lose out to other more profitable businesses. Therefore, if you oppose the right or the necessity of capital to make profit at the expense of workers, or indeed nature, then you can call yourself an anti-capitalist since you would prefer a different mode of production.

Property rights underpin capitalism as a mode of production. The expansion of property rights into more and more spheres of the social and natural world has been an important feature of how capitalism has developed in recent decades. Green political economy points to how increased property rights lead to over-exploitation and unsustainable resource extraction. The non-capitalist economies in Communist regimes were often no more sustainable than capitalist ones, showing that the state is not necessarily a more sustainable owner of resources and the means of production than corporations are. Elinor Ostrom, the only woman to ever win the Nobel Prize in economics, showed that common ownership, neither in the form of the state nor corporations, of resources leads to more sustainable practices (Wall 2014). Climate change activists may therefore consider what sustainable ownership ought to look like. Challenging property rights in such ways is certainly to engage with capitalism and the political economy.

In practice, XR and the broader climate change movement is already contesting the driving forces of climate change in contemporary capitalism. The demands to divest in fossil fuels is the prime example of this. In Europe, including the UK, climate change activists have achieved great things over the past two years. They have pushed climate change towards the top of the political agenda and increased awareness, concern and engagement amongst people. This has resulted in governments, international organisations and corporations talking a green language. This represents a victory but also the start of a new battle, namely, to reveal and contest when this new use of green language is merely greenwashing. Greenwashing is when practices or actors that are not sustainable are

presented as such. For example, an energy company that relies on 90% fossil fuels choosing to highlight its marginal investments in renewable energy in its advertising is greenwashing. As are governments that present themselves as green whilst not taking anywhere near sufficient measures. The European Green Deal is a case in point. Not least, regulations around what is officially considered as green or brown investments should be subjected to scrutiny and contestation by activists. In other words, contesting greenwashing has become an urgent area of contestation for climate change activists and no tactic is as efficient as civil disobedience when it comes to delegitimising the actors that engage in greenwashing. In conclusion then, it may be unwise for a climate change movement to declare itself anti-capitalist if it seeks a broad appeal. However, it is equally untenable for a climate change movement not to engage with capitalism and the political economy since this is where the driving forces of climate change can be found.

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