

4-1-2017

Butler, J. Gambett, Z. I & L Sabsay (Eds.) Vulnerability in Resistance. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016.

Pramod K. Nayar Ph.D.
University of Hyderabad, India, pramodknayar@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs>



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Environmental Studies Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Nayar, Pramod K. Ph.D. (2017) "Butler, J. Gambett, Z. I & L Sabsay (Eds.) Vulnerability in Resistance. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016.," *Journal of International and Global Studies*: Vol. 8 : No. 2 , Article 13.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lindenwood.edu/jigs/vol8/iss2/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of International and Global Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@Lindenwood University. For more information, please contact phuffman@lindenwood.edu.

Butler, J. Gambetti, Z. I & L Sabsay (Eds.) *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016.

With Judith Butler's innovative and provocative works (*Precarious Life* and *Frames of War*), 'vulnerability' has effectively become a 'frame' to examine cultural phenomena, social justice, or war. *Vulnerability in Resistance* is a volume that poses a different binary, vulnerability and resistance, but not as mutually oppositional. Rather, the volume wishes to ask: "What if...vulnerability were imagined as one of the conditions of the very possibility of resistance?" (p. 1). Drawing its basic strength from critical feminist social theory that refuses to associate passivity with femininity, the volume refuses to treat vulnerability as merely passive. The point, argue the editors, is to think through operations of power that render entire populations vulnerable. Vulnerability, then, is politically produced. A response articulated from within states of vulnerability—"political agency produced under conditions of duress" (p. 6)—should count, they argue, as a form of resistance to the political, and as a route into subjectivity as well.

In her opening essay, Judith Butler proposes that we treat embodiment as "both performative and relational" so that we can discern how emplacement within institutional structures of power condition the existence of that body (p. 21). This means vulnerability itself is a "socially induced condition" (p. 25). Butler perceives 'resistance' as both a resistance *to* vulnerability and as a social and political form informed *by* vulnerability, so that vulnerability is a "middle region" between affected and acting, activity and passivity (pp. 25-6). Turning to nonviolence as a form of resistance, Butler argues that here bodily vulnerability, when intentionally exposed to further danger, is "marshalled or mobilized for the purposes of resistance" (p. 26).

Zeynep Gambetti's essay on the Occupy Gezi protests (2013) links acting and suffering. Gambetti proposes that we see the embodied protests as performances, an act that produces a certain kind of ethical self that is an 'effect,' an "outcome of a set of unpredictable responses to differential positions opening up as one acts" (p. 46). A later essay, that by Başak Ertür, also turns to the Occupy Gezi protests, innovatively proposing that human barricades in the face of state power are forms of 'countermonumentalization,' which, although vulnerable, are significant *embodiments* of collective action in the face of further violence. Resistance, Ertür concludes, is the "reclamation of vulnerability" (p. 118).

Sarah Bracke proposes that the emphasis on resilience effectively works to reinforce inequality and injustice because structural conditions, by praising victim resilience, produce a subject who is *willing* to cope with increasing precarity of her life. Bracke argues that while vulnerability forces us to address the question of social transformation, the emphasis on resilience ensures that the onus is on the individual and not on the social order to change conditions that demand resilience. Marianne Hirsch aligns vulnerability studies to trauma and memory, arguing that artists mobilize vulnerability as a response to traumatic histories. Hirsch, troubled by the "unforgiving temporality of trauma and catastrophe" (p. 80), suggests that we need to think of alternate temporalities because vulnerability enables an open-ended temporality that can serve as the starting point for a potential history.

Elena Loizidou calls for attention to the link between the sensual and the political action, where dreams, longing, and the arts, all reliant upon uncontrolled sensuality, constitute resistance. Elena Tzelepis studies the work of Mona Hatoum, which documents the theme of loss in Palestine. Tzelepis argues that Hatoum's art is focused on the disturbed figural unity of the body and draws attention to the vulnerability of bodies when exposed to the other.

Two essays focus on precaritized populations. Rema Hammami examines Palestine, a site of extreme precarity, arguing that more than humanitarian linkages, the people there need informal solidarity networks. Living in conditions akin to the Palestinians, the Kurds in Turkey, a precaritized population, are the subject of Nükhet Sirman's essay. Turning to another form of precarity, one founded in gender identity, Meltem Ahiska's study of battered women argues that modes of humanizing battered women end up anonymizing them as victims. The survivor women, writes Ahiska, "have to position and reposition themselves against the threat of violence, which means they have to submit to the regime of gender within which female desire is equated with dangerous sexuality, and hence violently regulated to the point of death" (p. 223). Elsa Dorlin, also working with gender and precarity, argues that the veil debate in France is built around notions, however implicit, of hypervisibility and surveillance. With the veiled woman, she argues, "No recognition is being demanded in the terms of visibility" (p. 242). Athena Athanasiou's essay on Serbian women and mourning argues that not being "at home with" mourning is a form of resistance. Athanasiou argues that the survivors appear as "traces" of those who cannot appear, when the former turn up in public spaces as living memorials, and yet, she says, these survivors are "homeless in the world after the other's death" (p. 261). Leticia Sabsay's theoretical essay emphasizes permeability and relationality as ways of re-thinking subjectivity because then we see the subject occupying a transindividual position in the world.

The volume's sustained engagement with individual and collective vulnerability offers us a particular agenda for the political: resistance *through* vulnerability. Such a resistance, the volume demonstrates, takes the form of embodied protests, whether in the physical barricades people enact with their bodies, resistance to arrests, or voluntary exposure to further violence as they protest. Turning the very fact of their vulnerability into the basis for a political subjectivity, the victim-subjects refuse the limiting status of 'victim.' In her work on protest-performance (*Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 2015) Judith Butler speaks of the "public insurgencies of grief" (p. 197), and almost all the essays in the volume under review revolve around the public expression through embodiment of such insurgencies. A new way of thinking about political subejctivity is at hand, where one does not, any more, see vulnerability as openness to injury or victimhood alone but as the basis for resistance. Counter memorialization, resilience, and exposure are not only modes of mobilizing the injurable body as the site but also the source of the kinetic energy of political action: public bodies in motion, public bodies in relation.

This is an important volume for those interested in grammars of resistance, protest cultures, and the mobilization of grief as a route into collective political subjectivity. Its cross-cultural range enables us to see overlaps in forms of embodied resistance even when these latter are specific to a milieu and political condition.

Pramod K Nayar PhD
University of Hyderabad, India
pramodknayar@gmail.com