Afterlives of revolution: Nikkie Wiegink’s comments

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“The struggle continues” is a famous and frequently repeated phrase attributed to Eduardo Mondlane, the first President of FRELIMO, the Mozambican Liberation Front that fought against Portuguese colonial rule. After independence, this rally cry was used to mobilise support for building the newly independent state, evoking how revolutionary ideals and objectives “live on”. But what happens to revolutions when they are silenced? What is the potency of revolutions when they have officially been declared “dead”? What remains of those who were part of such revolutionary movements?

In *Afterlives of Revolution: Everyday Counterhistories in Southern Oman*, Alice Wilson takes up these questions and prompts the reader to think of revolutions and their legacies beyond polarising narratives of failure and success. The book zooms in on counterhistories of former militants in the Dhufar region of Oman, where a liberation movement referred to as "the Front" was established in 1965. The Front was defeated in 1975 and, since then, the ruling Sultan Qaboos' authoritarian government has prohibited any public mentioning of the revolution or the Front and its participants. This probes Wilson to ask, "how those living under authoritarianism experience and create revolutionary aftermaths?" (4). Her book delves deep into "the lasting values, networks, ideas, and legacies" (4) that constitute the afterlives of revolution in Dhufar. In doing so, it expands our understanding of the diverse ways in which revolutionary projects can continue to shape (future) emancipatory projects. Consequently, the book offers an exciting theoretical exploration of revolutions and provides new conceptual tools, fresh analytical insight, and methodological guidance for studying the aftermaths of political upheaval and the experience of those ensnared within them.

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The book's first chapters present a thoughtful re-narration of the Dhufar war and the proposal to "explore revolutionary social change as 'messiness'" (63). Not fitting the official revolutionary narrative of either success of failure and of precise beginnings and endings, messiness allows for the possibility of social change *before* a revolutionary program, for fleeting, everyday revolutionary vernacularisations, and for understanding people's relations to the revolutionary movement beyond an analysis of either support or rejection. These messy identifications reflect in the plurality of after*lives* of revolutions and are part of the intersectional diversity in which these afterlives unfold. This is a very helpful

starting point for the rest of the book, but also for the broader analysis of the experiences of those who partake in revolutionary and other kinds of (armed) revolt. The messiness is also, in my reading, reflected in the Sultanate's wartime and postwar co-optation of revolutionaries through patronage and a variety of unevenly distributed "packages". These benefits, and the infrastructural transformation of Dhufar in general, reveal the political drivers of the Sultanate to win the "hearts and minds" of Dhufaris, Wilson argues. It would be interesting to interrogate the extent to which these benefits and the transformation of space also, in their own way, constitute counterhistories or signal certain afterlives of armed conflict – including revolution and counterinsurgency – in a context of official silence.

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Wilson's main focus lies with the social dimensions and personal transformations of revolutionary projects and how these may be socially reproduced. In a context of political repression that prevents public commemoration and references to the Front and the war, where to find afterlives of revolution? Wilson takes the reader to street corners, taxi rides, and on a stroll through a mall, finding bits and piece of afterlives of revolution in jokes, careless references, repurposed rituals, and kinship relations that are "out of place". Wilson shows that we can look for afterlives of revolution in less obvious places of political mobilisation: in the intimate realm of kinship (chapter 4), in everyday forms of socialising (chapter 5), and alternative forms of commemoration (chapter 6). She evokes the deeply stratified Dhufar society to grasp the weight of how friendships and affinities of former revolutionaries transgress dominant social hierarchies of gender, social status, tribe, ethnicity, and race.

The relevance of exploring the social dimensions of afterlives of revolution becomes prominent in Wilson's detailed and careful ethnography, exemplified in

her discussion of wartime and postwar kinship relationships. During the war, one of the ways in which the Front attempted to introduce counterhegemonic values of egalitarianism and non-tribalism was by supporting marriages across different social categories. In the postwar period, Wilson shows some of the subtle ways in which revolutionary ideas and relations are reflected in marriages between former revolutionaries, in the naming of children after former revolutionaries, and in postwar marriages between children of former revolutionaries. She pays keen attention to "kinship out of place" in almost off-hand references to family histories and other intricacies of everyday interactions. Wilson shows how these kinship practices thereby sustain counterhegemonic social values and counterhistories of revolution while not being seen as forms of resistance against the dominant order.

Importantly, Wilson refrains from romanticising such practices and is attuned to the intersectional diversity within afterlives of the revolution. She underscores the constraints and privileges inherent in social practices that make up such afterlives. To illustrate, Wilson takes the reader to nightly informal gatherings of male former revolutionaries of different social and tribal status. These everyday social interactions form a unique sight in the streets of Salalah. They perpetuate revolutionary values such as social egalitarianism and can be regarded as a form of subversion of dominant social hierarchies in Dhufar. Simultaneously, these all-male gatherings expose privilege and the incomplete realisation of revolutionary values, such as gender equality, as female former revolutionaries were not able to partake in such public socialisations. This is one of the many examples of fine-grained ethnography by which the book shows compellingly the ambiguous, "small-scale" but nonetheless significant afterlives of revolution. By turning to the vitality of revolutions in dreams, ideas, and networks, the book opens new avenues for studying aftermaths of political upheaval and their impact on those involved.

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Moreover, by expanding the temporal and spatial horizons of revolutionary experiences and legacies, the book demonstrates the conceptual significance of the notion "afterlives" beyond mere metaphor.[1] Yet the concept of afterlives also evokes questions of haunting, trauma, transcendence, and religion, which are not—or could not be—addressed extensively in the book. These omissions do not diminish the power of the book's arguments, but instead highlight the potential for a broader research agenda on "afterlives of revolution" beyond the scope of this study. Moreover, Wilson is throughout the book consistently conscious and explicit about the limitations of her research and interpretations. She shows the many ways in which official silence regarding the Front shaped her ability to study its afterlives. Her careful discussions of ethical dilemmas in fieldwork and in writing, are exemplary for those seeking to study counterhistories of revolutions or other forms of political upheaval in authoritarian states. By allowing room for alternative interpretations and ambiguity, Alice Wilson's arguments result even more convincing. Revolutionary afterlives remain ongoing and open-ended. By turning our attention to the social and everyday dimensions of these ongoing legacies, Alice Wilson breaks open the analysis of revolutions, especially in places where these are silenced.

[1] Schäfers, Marlene. May. 2020. 'Afterlives: An Introduction.' *Allegra Lab*. https://allegralaboratory.net/afterlives-introduction/