

# **Japan: Anti-2020 as a transnational movement: Creating autonomous spaces through international protest and solidarity against the Olympics**

Thursday 4 February 2021, by [ANDREWS William](#) (Date first published: 13 June 2020).

**A group of people is gathering on the east side of Shinjuku Station in central Tokyo on the evening of July 24, 2019. While there is nothing unusual in this *per se*, given that Shinjuku is one of the busiest districts in the city, the makeup of the people is strikingly different from a regular evening crowd. There are, of course, lots of Japanese attendees, but also Americans, Koreans, French, and other nationalities. People are unfurling large banners with anti-Olympics slogans in multiple languages. Others are preparing handfuls of flyers to distribute to passers-by or getting the sound equipment ready. This is the main street demonstration in a weeklong series of transnational anti-Olympics activities, an unprecedented project that brought together peers from Olympics host cities past and future around the world.**

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Though this year the rainy season has been atypically long, resulting in cooler July weather—especially compared with 2018’s fatal summer—it is still sticky and humid in Tokyo. It is hard to imagine running or doing sports in this temperature, but the 2020 Olympic Games are set to open in exactly one year’s time. And all the people gathering here in Shinjuku are determined to stop that from happening and to voice their opposition to the Olympics in general.

Earlier in the day, activists from Tokyo, Seoul, LA, Hong Kong, and Taiwan had convened in

Asakusa—one of Tokyo's premier sightseeing destinations—expressly to target tourists by staging an impromptu protest with placards outside a famous landmark. The motley band of activists then headed to Tokyo International Forum, where an official one-year-to-go event was taking place with the Japanese prime minister, representatives from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), and other dignitaries. Notwithstanding the heavy security, the activists held a mini protest outside the venue, even engaging in banter with one surprised IOC member as he was walking to his vehicle.

In Shinjuku that evening, the speeches start and we hear from activists talking passionately about their own cities' contexts in their own languages, translated on the spot into Japanese by volunteers. News camera crews maneuver to get shots of this cosmopolitan assembly. It is a curious, loose rally that defies simple description. There are scholars and young students, veteran activists and novices. It is not only the foreign faces that make the attendees stand out. Someone in the South Korean contingent, for instance, wears a mask of bark from a forest controversially logged as part of the redevelopment of Pyeongchang for the 2018 Winter Olympics.

A phalanx of police officers appears and, as is customary with protests in Japan, begins urging the organizers to start the march according to the registered itinerary. The non-Japanese participants have been warned to take care with the police, who have arrested members of the anti-Olympics movement in Tokyo at previous protests. In the end, though, the police are less aggressive than at past demonstrations, and rather seem nervous about handling the participants—numbering around 230, much higher than the estimate the organizers had registered—and perhaps especially so because so many are foreign citizens. The modus operandi is typical enough: officers start marshaling the marchers along one lane in the road while the traffic continues beside them, constantly exhorting people to stay in line and keep moving. The march snakes forward boisterously with call-and-response slogans, winding its way around Shinjuku Station to an audience of thousands. After completing a full circuit of the station, the march veers off into the side alleys of Kabukichō and we are suddenly almost rubbing shoulders with the onlookers. People wave, take photos, or simply watch with bemusement. In some ways, this is just another weird street occurrence in Shinjuku, a district long known for its noisy counterculture underneath a commercial veneer. But what is taking place this evening is actually an unprecedented political event.

Finally, we arrive back at the small plaza area on the east side of the station, where the mood is exhilarated. For many of the non-Japanese participants, this was a whole new kind of street protest; similarly, for the Japanese participants, who comprise the anti-2020 movement in Tokyo, the transnational nature of this modestly sized yet unique gathering was also a completely fresh experience and one of the best-attended street protests of the movement to date.

Drawing on Olympics discourse by Jules Boykoff and social movement analytical models by Della Porta and Tarrow as well as Castells, this article will outline the anti-2020 Olympics movement in Tokyo and what I argue is its most significant achievement so far: mobilizing an ambitious, transnational alliance with like-minded partners around the world. As explored through four case studies of activities, this border-crossing network takes locally specific issues and pairs them with more universal problems, forming a broader struggle that reciprocates with its peers in other Olympics cities in terms of both ideas and discourse as well as practices and activities. The result is a bigger, better, and more effective anti-Olympics movement that will keep on building momentum even after the Closing Ceremony for the Tokyo Games. Moreover, the process of engaging with this transnational network creates heterogeneous autonomous spaces when activities come together, both reflecting the aspirations and ideological outlook of the participants and also functioning as a vibrant counterpart to the sanitized vision of internationalism and diversity promoted by the official Olympics.

We are living through what is regarded as a golden age of transnational activism and social

movements, from anti-globalization and global justice to Occupy, antifa, and Fridays for Future (Baumgarten 2014). Others have already investigated the relationship between mega-events and alter-globalization, and proposed sport as a transformative agent for social movements (Harvey, Horne and Safai 2009). The transnational and globalized nature of Olympics protest, however, remains relatively under-studied. Cottrell and Nelson (2010) have previously argued for its significance but their intervention focused more on the macro-political contentions and the broader actors (including institutions and states). It is now necessary for research to prioritize grassroots transnationalism as a potent network.

## Methodology

This article is developed out of a much longer thesis submitted in the summer of 2019, updated with new data and findings from another major case study. I locate this version of the study primarily as an ethnography of a social movement within the field of cultural anthropology.

I have been conducting fieldwork on the movement since 2016, borrowing here from Spradley's framing of participant observation in terms of a "social situation" comprising identifiable actors, activities, and place (Spradley 1980, 39). I treated my range of interviewees and fieldwork events in terms of what Spradley (*ibid.*, 42-4) calls clusters or networks of social situations based on both physical proximity and interrelations, which reflects my understanding of the key groups as a single social movement (as discussed later).

My fieldwork took the form of participant observation at events, protests, and other activities. I have been able to attend a number of public and non-public events during my time in the field. I could also keep close track of events I did not attend through online reports or asking participants after the fact. My resulting data were primary materials and resources (statements, leaflets, published essays and articles, social media posts), field notes, and interviews. The latter, which comprised both formal (in-depth) and informal (interactions during fieldwork and meetings) examples, were conducted with participants selected based on accessibility and demographic range (a university professor, the homeless, civil servants, other kinds of workers, with ages varying from forties to sixties). Such interviews were typically an hour in length and took place at convenient locations like a restaurant or office, or at the "tent village" in which certain participants live in Yoyogi Park, or before and after regular group meetings. I could compensate for a deficit in interview data somewhat by consulting previously published interviews. Unlike other similar studies of Olympic Games dissent or impact, I did not study one single "host" community *per se* but rather a network, meaning my interviews were focused on activists, though many of these are also direct members of the evicted communities.

As always with this kind of research, ethics and "distance" is a constant concern. Remaining neutral as a researcher studying a movement with which one has personal sympathy presents multiple difficulties. This is not an exclusive dilemma; various Japanese scholars have contributed academic interventions about Tokyo 2020 while also participating in and/or organizing anti-Olympics events. Neutrality was further complicated in my case as the people in the movement trusted me more and more, and I became directly involved in certain aspects (for instance, helping to organize an international symposium in July 2019 and assisting with some translations, though tasks that ultimately boosted my understanding of the dynamics and discourse of the movement). I attended many demonstrations but initially did not actually march during the protests. Eventually, though, it became apparent that it is hard to conduct effective participant observation unless one *participates* as well as *observes*. Moreover, remaining on the sidelines with a notepad and other tools hindered the process of communicating and engaging with the subject of study, and formed a potential

obstacle to building trust.

While this article attempts to set out the broader anti-2020 context for the study, unless explicitly stated otherwise, terms like “anti-2020” and “the movement” herein refer to the specific cluster/network of groups and activists that I am treating as a single movement, rather than the overall anti-2020 movement(s) or oppositional voices to the Tokyo Olympics in general. Furthermore, my use of “Olympics” and “Olympic Games” principally refers to the Summer Olympics and encompasses both the Olympic and Paralympic Games, except when stated otherwise.

## **Models and Processes of Transnational Practices**

Cristina Flesher Fominaya proposes a distinction between *transnational* social movements and *global* social movements (2014, 40). The former implies social movements operating at local and national levels while making efforts to transcend this to build networks across borders. Global social movements, on the other hand, are themselves envisioning their scope and sphere as international from the very start. An anti-Olympics movement is arguably both in part, just as the Olympics themselves are, though it is the endeavor to go beyond the local host city’s dilemmas that distinguishes the most impressive anti-Olympics groups—like the Tokyo movement. Central features of any global movement, Flesher Fominaya argues, is heterogeneity of the protests, which involve non-institutional and institutional organizations, and encompass individual activists and advocates as well as much larger groups and blocs. While the overall anti-2020 movement in Japan certainly conforms to this categorization, the specific movement in this study is a less convincing fit. It is indeed a heterogeneous network of small groups and individuals, but one whose scope is nonetheless limited to a certain section of local grassroots homeless advocacy activists and left-wing activists from anti-nationalist, pacifist, and anti-emperor circles. As we shall see, its international aspirations were acquired, not present from its inception.

If we can thus distinguish a global movement from a transnational movement, what does the latter actually do that embodies this “transnational” character? When searching for transnational frameworks, the superficial approach is to point to a symposium with foreign speakers or translations published by activists as evidence of a movement’s “international” dimension. Such examples certainly abound in the 2020 movement, but what we can also see in Tokyo, and what I argue truly qualifies it as transnational, is reciprocity; a boomerang effect, whereby activists at different sites across borders bounce off each other, responding to and extending their practices depending on what peers do in the other cities.

Della Porta and Tarrow (2005, 2) outline three processes of transnationalization in social movements: diffusion, domestication, and externalization. The 2020 movement manifests all of these; in particular, its engagement with anti-Olympics discourse like Boykoff’s notion of celebration capitalism (discussed below) demonstrates the way ideas spread to Tokyo from other cities, are absorbed and adapted to local contexts, and then used to fuel challenges to supranational institutions (namely, the IOC). As my case studies will illustrate, the anti-2020 movement is becoming increasingly ambitious with its “externalization” by holding protests and summits in Tokyo with fellow activists from around the world.

## **NOlympics Anywhere**

Boykoff (2017, 175) delineates two typologies of political activism associated with the Games: athlete activism and political movements resisting the Games in host cities. Among the latter, a

recent transnational network has emerged collectively embracing the NOlympics Anywhere slogan. It is a set of left-wing, pro-community movements focused on social (namely, gentrification), environmental, and economic concerns, and identifying the same ideological forces behind the problems with the Olympics: nationalism, capitalism, and neoliberalism (Robertson 2019a). This global NOlympics Anywhere network comprises Comitê Popular Rio Copa e Olimpíadas, Anti-PyeongChang Olympics Alliance Action, NON aux JO 2024 à Paris, NOlympics LA, and others (OlympicsWatch, n.d.). [1]

Given the universal visions of Olympism (IOC 2015, 12-14) and the international nature of the Olympic Games as an event, it is perhaps hardly surprising that anti-Olympics movements, including 2020's, are likewise transnational and international in their activities and perspectives. In so doing, they can surpass the inherent NIMBYism of a residents' movement campaigning against a local development project: rather, opposing the Olympics in your city is ultimately not just about your own city. The activists who take up the mantle of fighting the Olympics in this way are archetypal examples of what Boykoff (2020) calls "NOlympians."

As Boykoff (2014, 103) notes elsewhere, transnational activism has facilitated an increase in Olympic protests over the past 30 years—greatly accelerated, of course, by developments in digital media and technology. One comparative study has shown that protests have grown in frequency, scope, and scale across transnational networks, and are contributing to the negative image of the Olympics among residents of potential host cities, so much so that the pool of willing bid candidates is dwindling (Cottrell and Nelson 2010).

It exceeds the scope of this article to analyze fully the emergence of NOlympics Anywhere, which is still a nascent and developing force. Nonetheless, it is clear that the most prominent drivers of the movement so far are NOlympians currently or formerly based in LA and Rio, whose efforts have also been central to the transnational aspects of the Tokyo movement. And it is also clear that this network has recently reached a significant stage in its development. Indeed, Cerianne Robertson (2019b), who is closely involved with NOlympics LA, suggests that before 2019 "there was no single transnational anti-mega-event movement" but events organized during the year crystallized efforts into a sustainable, formidable movement.

Not every anti-Olympics protest or opposition movement in a host city is automatically part of this new NOlympics Anywhere movement—something which, as shown below, is also true of Tokyo. What these groups in this loose network do share are such qualities as: an opposition to holding the Olympics in their own respective city but an opposition to the Olympics in principle; an association with the politics of anti-capitalism, anti-neoliberalism, and anti-globalization; a membership composed of a healthy mix of community stakeholders, activists, and scholars; a strong affiliation with homeless advocacy, campaigning against gentrification, or otherwise supporting the vulnerable; emerging from grassroots groups and activism rather than institutions; and embracing a transnational field of vision. Current NOlympics Anywhere groups readily link up with other anti-Olympics or related groups beyond the host city, or even with transnational civil society organizations like Greenpeace or Amnesty International. More broadly, NOlympics Anywhere is part of the new wave of activism that exists "beyond borders," in parallel with the global justice movement that emerged from the 1990s as a call for greater social equality in response to economic globalization, human rights injustices and environmental destruction.

## **Opposition to the Tokyo 2020 Olympics**

Surveying the immense output of discourse already produced (Amano and Ukai 2019; Hangorin no

Kai 2019a; 2020 Orinpikku Saigai Okotowari Renrakukai 2019), criticisms of Tokyo 2020 can be classified into issues that are specific to Japan and Tokyo or into issues that are related to the Olympics in general.

The main opposition to Tokyo 2020 pivots on concerns over Fukushima and lingering radiation risks as well as what activists decry as the “myth” of the “reconstruction Olympics,” an organizer slogan that claims the Games will help Tōhoku (northeast Japan) recover from the 2011 disaster while glossing over other issues and actually benefitting only Tokyo. Other identifiable criticisms of the upcoming Games include many that are made about the Olympics in general (Boykoff 2011), such as the commercialization, elitism, and wastefulness of hosting. Further dominant strands are nationalism (that is, the Games encourage nationalism), health concerns (for athletes, volunteers and staff, and spectators, especially in terms of construction worker safety, Tokyo’s summer heat, and the polluted water in the bay), gentrification and evictions of homeless and vulnerable communities (in Tokyo’s case, most notably at Meiji and Miyashita parks), discrimination (in terms of binary classifications of able and disabled, winner and loser, men and women), environmental issues (particularly the alleged use of timber from threatened rainforests), and fears over increased security and surveillance of the civil society. [2]

### **The Anti-2020 Protest Movement(s)**

Mirroring the dual nature of the discourse, the activism mobilizing against the 2020 Olympics is likewise both related to specific issues and to the more general stance of opposition to all Olympic Games.

Anti-2020 voices have emerged from a range of different groups and people, including parliamentary parties, scholars, far-left activists, former athletes, residents, architects and designers, environmental campaigners, small businesses, and even far-right figures. There was opposition also during the bid campaign, as there had been during the bid to host the 2016 Games, though the 2020 bid immediately took on a different scale and character as it came soon after Fukushima and Prime Minister Abe Shinzō made the much-quoted promise at the final IOC selection session that the Fukushima situation was “under control.” This was criticized by many anti-government movements, regardless of having a focus on the Olympics or not, as proof of the government’s dishonesty about Fukushima.

Together these various voices in the overall anti-2020 movement(s) form something similar to what Fine (1995, 129) calls a “bundle of narratives” and “idioculture” across myriad values and views. These groups and stakeholders are diverse and not always opposed to the 2020 Games in principle, let alone the concept of the Olympics. Many are single-issue groups and campaigns, related to specific aspects of the preparations for 2020 like a venue or design.

Within this idioculture, the movement studied here is conspicuous because of its fundamental opposition to the Olympics for both general reasons as well as those specific to Japan and Tokyo, and because of its transnational practices. [3] Its output and activities are also prodigious, far outstripping those of other opposition voices. For these reasons, I argue that it is more important than other Japanese groups and movements involved in the overall opposition to 2020.

The movement broadly comprises the following two groups.

Hangorin no Kai (literally, Anti-Olympics Group) focuses most prominently on homeless evictions and is one of the plaintiffs in a lawsuit launched in 2018 seeking compensation. [4] Some of its leading members are themselves homeless, though this is not an identity that exclusively defines

their activities: they were also, for example, involved with campaigning for the residents evicted from Kasumigaoka Apartments, a public housing complex near the New National Stadium. Hangorin no Kai's practices encompass talks and study groups, marches and protests, and also guerrilla actions and civil disobedience. It does not publish a gazette or print media, instead relying heavily on free online platforms for disseminating its materials. There are around ten main members who meet regularly, though its protests and rallies can attract up to 80 participants. Founded in January 2013, it grew loosely out of the homeless advocacy group Nojiren (Shibuya Free Association for the Right to Housing and Well-being of the Homeless) and the Minna no Miyashita Kōen o Naiki-ka Keikaku kara Mamoru Kai (Coalition to Protect Miyashita Park from Becoming Nike Park), which was central to the original protests against Shibuya City's redevelopment of Miyashita Park up to 2011, as well as a group protesting the 2020 bid, Tōkyō ni Orinpikku wa Iranai Netto 2020 (Tokyo No Olympics Network). Members felt that people were not doing enough to combat the threat of 2020 in the form of street protests. It swiftly established a reputation for lively, often parodic, marches and demonstrations. Two central figures in Hangorin no Kai said that the group is even seen sometimes as almost "extremist" by others in the movement; a patently inaccurate label in many ways, its associates have nonetheless been arrested and its events attract the heaviest police attention.

Okotowa Link was founded in January 2017. [5] It is quite different in terms of structure, style, and membership, with a more comprehensive, network-like character and, as such, a broader focus that encompasses the full gamut of Olympics issues. It is more academic and educational, organizing regular symposia and study groups, publishing booklets, and only occasionally holding rallies and marches. Though less strident, two interviewed members said that Okotowa Link's network is informal enough for people to form different "teams" to work on individual issues and projects within the general framework of anti-2020 activism. There are some 20 core members who attend the main meetings, bringing with them their own networks and causes, and, by pooling resources, its events often attract 100-200 attendees.

I situate Hangorin no Kai and Okotowa Link as one interlinked yet loose social movement, though this categorization is imperfect and it is also often necessary and illuminating to separate the groups. The activists, too, are aware of the differences and tensions between their diverging practices and focuses. Nevertheless, many are involved across both groups, which also directly co-organize various events together. Even for events organized individually, each other's representatives will attend, give speeches, and distribute leaflets, and the slogans used in a march may relate to their respective causes. One germane encapsulation of the "movement" is a book, *The Anti-Olympic Manifesto* (Ogasawara and Yamamoto, 2016), which brings together the network of activists and scholars (from various fields) to contribute essays and translations on the various issues related to Olympics discourse, and is one of the movement's most significant achievements to date (not to mention, one of the most notable early academic interventions in Japanese on the 2020 Games).

The anti-2020 movement conforms to Boykoff's (2017, 175) categorization as "actions orchestrated by political groups that strategically use the Olympics to amplify their dissent." At times, the Olympics seem less the main "platform for protest" than just the latest part of a wider, longer-running campaign against anti-homeless policies, nationalism, nuclear power, and so on.

Boykoff (2011, 46), borrowing from Tarrow, defines some Olympics activism as "event coalitions" as opposed to campaigns that form a "convergence" of networked movements. In the case of the anti-2020 movement, "convergence" seems a particularly apt descriptor, given the presence of two main intertwined groups but also various other overlapping groups and causes. (By contrast, the local protest network that opposed the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics was arguably more like an event coalition because it did not last beyond the immediate moment of the Games, leaving behind a

paper trail but relatively little else concrete.) Activists have formed discrete support groups for certain legal cases (arrested members, court cases, and so on) or campaigns (such as evictions and park closures in Shibuya), while the movement's network also encompasses infoshops, homeless and day laborer advocacy groups in Shibuya, San'ya, and Osaka's Kamagasaki (Airin), as well as activists campaigning against the emperor system, police stop-and-frisk tactics, the arms trade in Japan, the controversial relocation of Tsukiji Market, and many other causes. The movement is a bold, if at times somewhat convoluted, confluence of activism. This networked nature of the movement, though, spread across the two core interlinked groups while also readily intersecting with other related organizations, makes the anti-2020 movement open to alliances with various partners and is key to its ability to adopt transnational approaches.

## **Origins of Transnationalism in the Anti-2020 Movement**

During the bid campaign, activists realized that the struggle was not only about blocking the Games coming to Tokyo but also about opposing the Olympics anywhere, because the key issues were shared by cities, even if the details differed. This epiphany prompted them to announce an appeal online for international solidarity and start trying to contact activists from Madrid and Istanbul, the other two cities bidding for the 2020 Games.

Ichimura Misako, a leading member of Hangorin no Kai, then went to Rio during the 2016 Games to link up with local activists at a week of anti-Olympics protests, meetings, and presentations—an experience that she told me proved eye-opening in showing her that a transnational approach was key to developing the Tokyo campaign. She also launched Hangorin no Kai's Planetary No Olympics Network project before her trip as a way of linking up global movements. She has since continued to play arguably the most central, indefatigable role in organizing transnational activities among people in Tokyo, Seoul, LA, Paris, and beyond.

While the personal efforts of Ichimura and another veteran activist, Ogawa Tetsuo, have meant that Hangorin no Kai is the group within the movement most overtly engaged with overseas peers, even the founding statement of Okotowa Link emphasizes its transnational commitment (and, accordingly, was translated internally into English): "Our anti-Olympics movement for 2020 summer in Tokyo, stands together with those in Rio (2016 summer), in Pyeongchang (2018 winter) and in Beijing (2022 winter). [The] modern Olympics, when seen globally, have lacked [the] full support of the hosting civil societies, which fact encourages us to cherish the international anti-Olympics solidarity" (2020 Orinpikku Saigai Okotowari Renrakukai 2017). [6]

## **Types of Transnational Activities**

The transnational activities of the Tokyo campaigners have taken a number of forms: networking with activists based overseas, including Japanese activists in France and America; promoting the efforts and output of peers as an act of solidarity and information-sharing, especially through social media and other online platforms; hosting overseas visitors from anti-Olympics campaigns when they come to Tokyo (trips that Japanese activists often at least partly fund) and teaching them about the contexts for the Japanese protests; organizing joint actions and demonstrations; and translations of materials and discourse, from social media content through to long articles or full statements—both translating the movement's own content from Japanese into English (and sometimes also other languages like Korean), and materials from peers or other international sources into Japanese.

This latter activity alone marks the movement out as quite unusual among Japanese social



movements, which are typically monolingual. Of course, these translations are particularly valuable on a practical level for disseminating, but a transnational mindset influences the movement's language in a more fundamental way. Regardless of concrete efforts at exchange, the movement feels an urge to frame its ideas in bilingual or even multilingual ways. Though the transnational practices became more prominent from 2016 onward, Hangorin no Kai adopted the internationally recognized "No Olympics" name and slogan quite early, in 2014. And while this also reflects a wider Japanese-language shift, the movement consciously and liberally mixes the native Japanese word for Olympic (*gorin*) with the loanword (*orinpikku*). Similarly, materials like leaflets and placards as well as verbal slogans at demonstrations deliberately blend English and Japanese, even if not specifically targeting overseas groups, media, or citizens.

This emphasis on translation and multilingualism is not just about effective communication; it is also linked to the movement's engagement with overseas discourse. Even putting aside its importance as an encapsulation of the work of many of the key Japanese thinkers associated with the movement, *The Anti-Olympic Manifesto* is conspicuous among the many other recent books published on the Olympics (and the books published by the Nagano Games protest movement, for instance) for its ambitious range of translated articles by figures like Boykoff, supplemented by commentaries and introductions by local scholars to concepts such as celebration capitalism. In this way, the movement is seeking to ensure that its own ideas and circumstances are known outside Japan, and likewise the discourse and situations of anti-Olympics movements and thinkers around the world are available domestically.

The prolific anti-Olympics scholar (and former athlete) Jules Boykoff borrows from Naomi Klein's notion of disaster capitalism to describe the Games as "celebration capitalism." Identifying the Athens Games in 2004 as a turning point, Boykoff asserts that "hosting the Olympics is a celebratory spectacle that is more about economic benefit for the few than economic prosperity for the many" (Boykoff 2014, 2). The Games allow state actors to introduce strategies that ordinarily we would not accept, thriving on the social euphoria of the festival to privatize and commercialize public resources, increase security and policing, and militarize public space. In effect, the taxpayer subsidizes the commercialization and privatization of such sites: in Boykoff's pithy phrase, "the public pays and the private profits" (*ibid.*, 3).

Boykoff's theoretical model is frequently referenced by the Tokyo movement in its pamphlets and speeches, applying it directly to the circumstances it is fighting against. In particular, Suzuki (2016), who has also co-authored a paper on the eviction of Kasumigaoka Apartments residents due to the 2020 Olympics development, introduces celebration capitalism, along with the power of the civil society to resist, in an article included in *The Anti-Olympic Manifesto* accompanying his translation of an article by Boykoff. Elsewhere, Suzuki (2015) also outlines celebration capitalism in more detail. Though critiquing Boykoff for only covering a limited number of Games—omitting, for example, the Nagano Games, which would be of particular interest to a Japanese audience—and for inadequacies in how he distinguishes neoliberalism from celebration capitalism, Suzuki ends by speculating how celebration capitalism might be applied specifically to Tokyo 2020, not least the permissive attitude toward the Games' ever-increasing budget as well as the dangers of the real costs of 2020 being concealed within the "indirect" infrastructure developments that are often not part of the formal Games plan. Another scholar associated with the movement (and the co-editor of *The Anti-Olympic Manifesto*), Yamamoto Atsuhisa (2019) has memorably adapted Boykoff's model at a recent symposium, reclaiming its roots in Klein's disaster capitalism to demonstrate how 2020 is exploiting the spectacle and excitement of the Games to cover over the ongoing uncertainty in Fukushima and incomplete reconstruction in the northeast of Japan.

But celebration capitalism does more than just provide the movement or others with a neat slogan. Boykoff's main emphasis is on economics and security as well as how the Games fit into the

dynamics of global capitalism and neoliberalism through public-private partnerships. While many of the scholars associated with the movement have also discussed the Olympics spectacle and nationalist festiveness that are tenets of Boykoff's celebration capitalism (Ukai 2016), a more concrete and accessible application is the grassroots issues of evictions and local gentrification. As Boykoff writes, "with celebration capitalism, 'undesirables' who might taint the celebration are swept out of the way and special rules are instituted to undermine political dissent" (2014, 74). In the Tokyo movement's eyes, the treatment of the homeless and public housing residents at Meiji and Miyashita parks and Kasumigaoka Apartments fully confirms to Boykoff's assertion, as does the introduction of an anti-conspiracy law (Hangorin no Kai 2019a). Boykoff's translator and commentator in Japanese, Suzuki, agrees, highlighting the New National Stadium expansion that necessitated evictions from Meiji Park and Kasumigaoka Apartments as a major example of the "quiet progress" of celebration capitalism that must be challenged by citizens (2015, 70).

In this way, transnational anti-Olympics discourse is an interface bridging the idiosyncratic, unique, and local (in the case of 2020, such factors as Fukushima and the emperor system) with universal issues (nationalism, security, privatization of public space, gentrification, environmental destruction, labor exploitation, etc.). It can take small, local sites (Meiji Park, Miyashita Park) and contextualize them within other international struggles.

I will next examine the movement's transnational practices through four case studies.

### **Rio de Janeiro Fieldtrip**

Ichimura Misako's research trip to Rio de Janeiro in 2016 resulted in a study session in Tokyo upon her return as well as a bilingual (English and Japanese) zine-style booklet in which specific developments in Rio are compared and linked to those in Tokyo. Such analogizing is not unproblematic, given the gross differences in scale between the unrest and displacements in Rio and Tokyo, but Ichimura's framing is driven by her genuine attempt to show solidarity regardless of such specifics.

The booklet starts not with Rio but with an outline of the upcoming 2020 Games and the problems of evictions in the city and nationalism at schools, whereby children are encouraged to watch and support the 2020 Games (referred to by activists as "Olympic education"). [7] In the next sentence, the introduction jumps to general anti-Olympics arguments, before then turning to focus on Rio. When surveying Rio's "Olympic hell," Ichimura draws attention to gentrification in Rio through the exclusion of the homeless and street vendors. She also notes in the zine that she was able to share anti-2020 stickers with protest organizers, who surprised her with their knowledge and concern for the Meiji Park evictions: "It made me so happy. The numerous problems associated with the Olympics are happening in every host city, and people resisting the Olympics are paying attention across national boundaries." Likewise, Ichimura communicated to locals that "the struggles in Rio are heartening for people facing Olympic evictions in Tokyo" (Ichimura 2016, unpaginated). Her trip proved a chance to exchange knowledge and build contacts between Rio and Tokyo, but this was also a process of emotional investment in each other's situations.

Ichimura told me that her experiences in Rio taught her especially about the need to cultivate links across different communities. Whereas until then, her anti-Olympics activism had been largely rooted in the homeless community in Tokyo, she now saw the necessity of working with other movements related to feminism or education. More concretely, she noted, Okotowa Link's name was actually in part inspired by the "Olympic Calamity" slogan used at an anti-2016 protest Ichimura attended in Rio. [8]

## PyeongChang 2018 Joint Solidarity Activities

During PyeongChang 2018, activists from Hangorin no Kai and Okotowa Link traveled to South Korea to join locals for a protest and forum event in Seoul the day before the Winter Games started. And then on the actual opening, the Korean and Japanese activists demonstrated in the cold outside the gate of the main venue with multilingual banners carrying such messages as: “Olympics Kill the Poor” and “Reverse the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.”

Another symbolic yet physical connection between the two anti-Games struggles was provided by activists back in Tokyo: at the same time as the Opening Ceremony was taking place in Korea, large letters made from cardboard were temporarily attached to the hoarding around the Miyashita Park construction site, where a rough sleeper community had lived until the park was closed as part of the redevelopment of Shibuya for 2020 and beyond. The letters spelled out “NOlympics Anywhere,” embellished with handwritten messages in English, Korean, and Japanese, while a small number of members held a demonstration on the street in front of the hoarding.

A creative and parodic style of protest was also on display in this transnational venture, whereby the activists from the two countries later dressed up as ghosts and “paraded” around Gangneung, which was hosting the ice events, pretending to be the spirits of the trees felled for the development. This mirrored the “zombie” workshop that Japanese activists did on March 27, 2016, when they dressed up and roamed the streets around the New National Stadium as if the recently evicted had returned from the dead.

## Anti-Olympic Torch Handover

The Korean activists then came to Japan in November 2018 to bring the “Anti-Olympic Torch” to Tokyo. Also known as the Olympic Poverty Torch, this decidedly makeshift torch prop fashioned from a toilet plunger first appeared in Vancouver for the 2010 Games and has since passed through each host city, imitating the actual torch relay and accumulating fresh text and messages every time. It is a physical embodiment of the NOlympics Anywhere movement and message, spreading from city to city. (In this way, by receiving the torch, the Tokyo movement has been effectively anointed as the “official” anti-Olympics movement for 2020.)

An improvised “handover ceremony” was staged in front of the New National Stadium as the culmination of a fieldwork tour of the Meiji Park area where Tokyo activists guided around the Koreans (and a Japanese activist involved in the Paris anti-Olympics campaign). Rather than just outsiders coming to observe the situation in Tokyo, however, the event integrated visitors with the locals. Someone who used to live in the park attended, for example, as did a former Kasumigaoka Apartments resident, and both gave short speeches about their experiences and took part in the handover ceremony with the Koreans. This curious event was both provocative (everything was watched and recorded from across the street by many police officers) and tongue-in-cheek, especially the participation of a cross-dresser who staged a comic calligraphy performance in front of the stadium by writing the characters for “anti-Olympics” (*hangorin*) and then pretended to die. But it was also genuinely practical in terms of networking and education. It ended with an information-sharing session for the Olympics resistance activists from Tokyo, Paris, Seoul, and, by video link, LA. This was just one of several activities held over nearly a week, including a full-day tour of Tsukiji and the bayside venues by car to view the developments, during which the torch was openly carried by different attendees.

The torch has remained with the Tokyo movement ever since and, for example, was taken up to

Fukushima for the anniversary of the Great East Japan Earthquake in March 2019 when activists held a street protest locally, spoke at a talk, and visited such locations as the TEPCO-funded J-Village soccer venue, which will host the start of the actual torch relay in 2020. This is what Della Porta and Tarrow refer to as the domestication part of the transnational process: the transnational symbol of the anti-Olympics movement is taken to the very heart of the contested sites over the Tokyo Games, from the parks from where people have been evicted to the construction sites where workers have died, and the disaster zone that is still suffering from the effects of the Fukushima crisis.

This is also a specific learning from the activists' trip to South Korea, where they saw that the Anti-PyeongChang Olympics Alliance Action was taking the counter-torch around to link up with other movements, such as groups protesting military bases or discrimination against the disabled. "The Tokyo 2020 venues are not only in Tokyo, but the areas of Kantō, Tōhoku, and even Hokkaidō are being politically used by national policies," Ichimura said. "Since the [official] Olympic torch will travel around the country as a campaign to mobilize people, we wanted to learn from the Anti-PyeongChang Olympics Alliance Action and travel around 'extinguishing' the flame." [9]

### **International Anti-Olympics Week**

From July 20, 2019, an "international get-together" series of events was organized by Tokyo activists in Hangorin no Kai and Okotowa Link as well as other peers in their networks. It was, in the words of the participants themselves, a truly "unprecedented" transnational project (NOlympics LA 2019): hundreds of attendees across the week of events, including dozens of people from anti-Olympics movements in host cities past, present, and future around the world—from Nagano (1998), London (2012), Rio (2016), and Pyeongchang (2018) to Tokyo (2020), Paris (2024), LA (2028), and Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta (both potential bidders for the 2032 Games) as well as attendees from the Czech Republic, Hong Kong, and Osaka (which hosts a world expo in 2025). Some were involved in the planning from the early stages; others just joined in when they heard about the events. The participants encompassed grassroots activists, residents, researchers and students (including this author), journalists, and filmmakers. Particularly prominent attendees were the scholar Jules Boykoff and journalist Dave Zirin, who are both major figures in the Olympics field.

The main activities during the week were: a fieldwork tour of the New National Stadium and bay areas, which are the two main zones of the 2020 Olympics venues in Tokyo; a symposium at Waseda University with Jules Boykoff and Japanese speakers; a fieldwork trip to Fukushima; a press conference; a media workshop; the street protest in Shinjuku described at the start of this article; a teach-in for researchers and journalists; a seminar for activists on housing rights and environmental issues; and a final panel discussion led by activists. Some of the events were more performative, such as the streets protests and actions, but most were practical and functional, serving the purposes of sharing information and materials, education, and networking. The activities concluded with a "joint statement in solidarity" by five anti-Olympics groups that was prepared during the week and then formally agreed by attendees on the final day: not just a declaration that they stand with each other as brethren but rather an expression of an assertive, proactive stance demanding an end to the IOC itself (Hangorin no Kai 2019b, 52). Instead of giving up the struggle once the Games are over or the bid aborted, the joint statement is a commitment to a longer fight that is fundamentally transnational in nature. But it is not just about rejecting the Olympics for all cities; it is also about imagining alternatives to how our cities are run in terms of such things as housing, communities, and policing (Robertson 2019b). By the autumn, Hangorin no Kai had published a multilingual zine (ibid.) documenting the week's achievements, crowdsourcing the translations and writing from among its network.

In many ways, the week of activities felt like the culmination of the previous transnational efforts of the anti-Olympics movements around the world: passing on the anti-Olympic torch (which was a constant presence during the week); building on the online exchange that had already taken place; learning from earlier visits and trips to organize more ambitious activities; and using the events to engage with discourse like celebration capitalism, which was the central theme of the symposium. But it was not a grand finale—rather, the transnational activities continue, growing from what took place in Tokyo that summer and the knowledge bases and alliances that were fostered. There have been subsequent events and projects offline and online (notably a visit by Japan-based activists to their peers in LA for a series of events in December 2019), carrying on the exchange of information and solidarity as the global movement now looks to 2020 and beyond.

## **Reciprocal Activities Across a Transnational Network, Creating Autonomous Spaces**

What is paramount about these transnational activities is not only the joint nature of their organization, but their reciprocation and how they represent sustained attempts to build a transnational and transregional campaign. Ichimura's contact with Rio activists, for instance, resulted in the three-week "Rio 2016, PyeongChang 2018, and Tokyo 2020 Anti-Olympics International Solidarity Tour" in February and March 2017, involving visiting Brazilian and Korean activists who took part in talks and protests organized by Hangorin no Kai and Okotowa Link. In response to the actions by Korean and Japanese protesters against PyeongChang 2018, LA campaigners issued messages of support that echoed the main environmental grievances of the Koreans as well as the shared concerns about gentrification that lie at the core of their own campaign (NOlympics LA 2018). The multilingual traits are mutually imitated: this is not merely a tactic by a Japanese movement aware that Japanese-language messages will have little global reach. The American group has, for instance, protested to the IOC in September 2017 with banners of solidarity in French, Japanese, and English. After PyeongChang 2018, the South Korean activists continued to support and promote their Japanese peers' campaign, holding a boisterous protest in Seoul in March 2019 in which they distributed the Tokyo movement's materials.

As they participate in transnational practices, the members of the movement in Tokyo are connecting with global mega-event discourse and protest tactics. Together this forms what Della Porta and Tarrow call "transnational collective action" (2005, 2-3). The actions and practices are shared across groups and activists internationally; it is not just an accidental, ad hoc, temporary coalition or convergence organized as a gesture of solidarity. There is continuity, whereby slogans, resources, and know-how carry forward, including beyond 2020 to Paris in 2024 and LA in 2028. LA activists, for example, have launched a website, OlympicsWatch: "a transnational archive of content and ideas that challenge official and mainstream narratives about the Olympics." It is "heavily inspired" by RioOnWatch (a news website that emerged from opposition to the 2016 Olympics), but "also draws on the work of a number of platforms that have challenged mega-events around the globe, including Games Monitor from London, NOlympics LA, and the call for a Planetary No Olympics Network from Tokyo, among others" (OlympicsWatch, n.d.). It will eventually grow into an online platform sharing research and toolkits for future anti-Games campaigners and NOlympians to use.

In this way, the transnational practices embody the commons of the global anti-Olympics movement: just as the struggle over the disputed sites in Tokyo of Meiji and Miyashita parks are framed as a fight for the right to the city and for public land and the urban commons, the transnational network and joint activities represent an attempt to form a shared body of ideas, rights, practices, and resources. Reflecting the movements' concerns with the socially vulnerable and urban gentrification,

the transnational activities resist Olympics developments by creating bottom-up, flat, DIY, autonomous spaces that are accessible and flexible, and work to dismantle power structures: the struggle against the Olympics is not only a fight to preserve and create such spaces, but the struggle itself manifests one such autonomous space through its everyday practices (Hangorin no Kai 2019b, 51). In this sense, the movement is prefigurative; that is, it reflects its ideals and arguments in how the members live and behave, which boosts credibility and motivation. As Graeber has argued, in the “best tradition of direct action,” the “organization [is] the ideology” (2004, 84).

Such abstract aspirations aside, the practices have impacted individual participants in concrete ways. One interviewed activist from Okotowa Link said that, for him, the international exchange had clarified the “dangerous potential” the Japanese school system possesses for “mobilization by nationalist agendas like the Olympics,” whereby children are taught to support Japanese athletes during the sporting events. Similarly, a Hangorin no Kai activist said that interchange with visiting Korean and Brazilian peers taught her how unusual (and thus dangerous) “Olympic education” at schools in Japan was. Even for Okotowa Link, which is more domestically focused, the members benefited personally from the transnational activities. The visit to Korea to join protests there in February 2018 was inspiring and informative, two Okotowa Link interviewees said, who found it particularly revealing of their own shortcomings as a movement. “The local activists could organize and mobilize much faster than the Japanese counterparts,” they said, “and there were many more young people than in the Tokyo movement, including women.”

Similarly, the week of anti-Olympics activities in July 2019 gave both sides—visitors and locals—takeaways in terms of tactics and approaches. Organizing the seminal series of events was an exhausting experience for Tokyo activists, though one that taught them a lot about how to manage issues of language and scheduling (Hangorin no Kai 2019b, 50). For the visitors, “this one week showed the possibilities of global democratic action” (Gaffney 2019). At the final panel event, an activist from America particularly cited the opportunity to meet directly with people in Fukushima and see the sites there as powerful and inspiring for their own efforts against the 2028 Games. Likewise, the presence of the visitors boosted the Shinjuku march and its attendance and press coverage (by comparison, another Hangorin no Kai protest in Shinjuku on October 31 attracted a more modest number of around 30 participants).

In this way, we can see that what Della Porta and Tarrow call the externalization of the transnational movement is actually a mutual learning process: the Tokyo activists share and work with fellow NOlympians outside Japan, and those results are then carried forward to contribute to future movements—the next anti-Olympics campaign, of course, but also subsequent movements that the Tokyo activists organize locally.

## **Networked Social Movements**

Based on the case studies and assessment above, this transnational NOlympics Anywhere movement can be understood in terms of Castells’ notion of multimodal “networked social movements” that avoid formal structures and embrace a mix of platforms, particularly those online and in the streets of cities (2015, 249). Castells describes a “rhizomatic revolution” that is slow and unseen yet networked and always connected through nodes (ibid., 147). Castells proposes his model based on analysis of social movements that have emerged globally in the past few years: movements that eschew formal leadership and adopt technologies and a mix of platforms, and often occupy urban space as part of their practices. They are simultaneously local and global with a focus on solidarity and a sense of “togetherness.” They start online but end up occupying urban space, forming a “hybrid of cyber space and urban space [that] constitutes a third space [called] the space of

autonomy” (ibid., 249).

That space is the dual nature of the anti-2020 movement as both a Tokyo and a trans-city movement. The movement shuttles between an online and offline space; it is not simply that the former functions as a place for disseminating advance information about an event or for publishing images and videos about an activity in the latter, but rather the websites and social media accounts form a multidirectional and dynamic platform in their own right, releasing statements and translations, sharing content from peers, and appealing for support on issues. The streets and online sphere are equally important to this movement, and both serve to connect it with other groups in the anti-Olympics network and interact with them. It is, as Castells describes, a multimodal movement loosely networked across preexisting social networks as well as previously unconnected networks: a network of networks. The networked nature of the movement is both internal—networked within itself across the two main groups and others, and between online and offline tactics—as well as external, whereby the movement interconnects rhizomatically with other anti-Olympics movements around the world. This decentered structure allows movements to reshape and reform, to welcome new influences and allies, and to reduce their vulnerability to repression since their physical sites are few.

### **Problems with a Transnational Framing**

My emphasis on the transnationalism of the anti-2020 movement is not without problems, not least because, as members themselves admit, these transnational endeavors are heavily dependent on the initiative of certain individuals like Ichimura, building on their previous experience fighting the attempt to commercialize Miyashita Park as a Nike-sponsored facility (Cassegård 2014, 167–79).

The groups in the NOlympics Anywhere network are similar and share many facets, but they are also disparate: they vary in terms of their tactics and structures, the degree to which they reference ideological frameworks, and their memberships. While such differences arguably show the diverse nature of the movement, they can expose gaps in knowledge and sophistication. The LA activists, for example, launched a successful online crowdfunding campaign to raise money for their trip to Tokyo, whereas the Japanese movement usually obtains funds through its immediate network or merchandise sales. In general, NOlympics LA has a much more polished, media-savvy web presence, in contrast to the somewhat low-fi presentation of the Tokyo groups that can be confusing to newcomers. This is not wholly surprising, given that the NOlympics LA activists tend to be much younger than their Japanese counterparts—something, though, which rather reflects the wider state of social movements in Japan than a specific failing of the anti-2020 movement to attract younger generations.

The validity of equivalence between the Olympics struggles is another issue the movement is still navigating. Though the joint statement in solidarity (Hangorin no Kai 2019b, 52) claims that “the specifics may differ in scope and scale [. . .] the broad forces that the Olympics unleash wherever they take root are the same,” this can be problematized by suggesting it is disputable to equate the immense levels of violence and unrest in, say, Rio linked to the 2016 Olympics with the evictions caused by 2020 that, albeit very grave for the individuals involved, are much smaller in number.

The 2020 movement is flexible and tolerant, open to feedback from others (Tokyo activists, for instance, changed the organization of the housing seminar at the request of American visitors) and constantly striving to overcome the challenges it faces in terms of its limited resources. It acknowledges shortcomings and embraces a “motley” identity (Hangorin no Kai 2019b, 2, 25, 50). In the process, it is transcending its occasionally clumsy or haphazard approaches to form a

heterogeneous, autonomous space that also functions as a counterpoint to the bowdlerized visions of “diversity” espoused in the official publicity for the 2020 Games as well as by Shibuya City (Homma 2017; The Tokyo Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games, n.d.).

## Conclusions

This article has argued for the importance of the anti-2020 movement’s transnational activities, analyzing them through the models of Della Porta and Tarrow as well as Castells. These activities allow the movement to transcend its temporal and geographical limitations, and connect with a broader, more ambitious network of like-minded groups around the world. The process of engaging in this network produces accessible, diverse autonomous spaces where the participants can conduct practical tasks such as sharing knowledge and resources while also boosting each other’s effectiveness, without compromising their commitment to local concerns. The approaches they take are prefigurative in that they reflect the aspirations and ideologies of the movement through their very actions. And this DIY transnational network of diverse groups stands in stark contrast to the polished, expensively publicized “internationalism” of the official Olympic movement.

The data forming the basis for this article only go as far as the summer of 2019. The movement and its transnational network are busy with many more activities in the run-up to the Games in 2020. Since this study has been undertaken while the movement is still very much ongoing, its approach was largely empirical and made only modest attempts at applying analytical frameworks. Once the dust has settled after the 2020 Games, one hopes that further assessment will prove easier, including more theoretical study.

If we truly are living in a golden age of transnational activism, it is notable that the most prominent movements (Occupy, Fridays for Future, #MeToo, and so on) have so far had relatively little impact in Japan (Boyd 2019; Fahey 2018; Takahashi 2019). NOlympics Anywhere is potentially an anomaly in this respect. Tokyo activists’ bidirectional participation in the transnational movement of NOlympians not only contributes to anti-Olympics campaigns globally post-2020 but will also surely help build momentum and mobilization for subsequent local opposition in Japan to Expo 2025 in Osaka, the mooted bid by Sapporo for the 2030 Winter Games, and beyond.

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### **William Andrews**

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### **P.S.**

*This article is based on the original English version of a chapter published in German as “Anti-2020 als transnationale Bewegung: Die Schaffung autonomer Räume durch internationalen Protest und Solidarität” in NOlympics. Tōkyō 2020/1 in der Kritik, eds. Steffi Richter, Andreas Singler, Dorothea Mladenova, Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2020.*

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## Footnotes

[1] In keeping with the informal nature of the network and its component groups, it does not have an official name. For the purposes of convenience, this article uses the network's most prominent slogan as a label, which Robertson (2019b) also adopts. The activists may often refer to themselves as "NOlympians" (cf. Boykoff 2020).

[2] For a useful overview of the anti-2020 issues from left-wing perspectives, see issue 194 (April 2014) of *Impaction*, issue 1273 (December 2017) of *Kenchiku jānaru*, and the April 20 and September 7, 2018, and October 11, 2019 issues of *Shūkan kinyōbi*.

[3] To take just the prominent issue of Fukushima, which is possibly the most commonly shared grounds for anti-Olympics sentiments on the left in Japan, anti-2020 protest has somewhat surprisingly not fully converged with anti-nuclear activism, whose mainstream criticizes Prime Minister Abe Shinzō for "false claims" about Fukushima and continuing to push nuclear power despite the ongoing concerns with safety and the recovery operations, but does not overtly oppose the 2020 Games in and of themselves (Metropolitan Coalition Against Nukes 2019).

[4] Hangorin no Kai initially used the English name People Against the Olympics and later started to call itself No Olympics 2020, No Tokyo 2020, or even No Olympics in Tokyo 2020.

[5] Its name in full is 2020 Orinpikku Saigai Okotowari Renrakukai—literally, 2020 Olympics Disaster Liaison Group. In English, it has adopted a variety of names, including Another Olympics Disaster? No Thanks! and, most recently, No 2020 Olympics Disaster OkotowaLink. Its name is parodying the IOC, here rendered as the "International Okotowari Convention" (International No Thank You Convention).

[6] Translations of Japanese-language are the author's own, unless otherwise stated in the bibliography. Some sources, such as this one, are available in English prepared by the groups themselves. Minor modifications have been made to the English when necessary.

[7] For an explanation of the Olympics- and Paralympics-related curriculum at Tokyo schools, including its aims, Tokyo Metropolitan Government has published an official English-language video: [https://youtu.be/Sfa8Y\\_EVAPQ](https://youtu.be/Sfa8Y_EVAPQ).

[8] Personal email correspondence, July 2019.

[9] Ibid.