Resistance with and against symbolic objects: Material targets of resistance and symbolic recruitment in the American Revolution, the anti-Apartheid movement, and Just Stop Oil protests[1]

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Abstract

This paper discusses the roles played by physical objects in resistance, drawing on three case studies: the dismantling of the statue of King George III during the American Revolution, the burning of passbooks by anti-apartheid activists in South Africa, and Just Stop Oil's destruction of petrol pumps in 2022. Drawing on the 'symbolic objects' approach to resistance and collective action (Gardner and Abrams, 2023a), we contend that the statue, the passbook and the petrol pump represent more than just passing features of the mise-en-scène of the act of resistance. Rather, the object takes on a life of its own, adopts new symbolic meanings, and emerges as a collaborator in resistance: something we term 'symbolic recruitment'. We contend that the activities enacted upon these objects transformed their social connotations, with new narratives, emotions and concepts coming to be attached to them. Across our three cases, we see forms of symbolic subversion taking place. The statue of King George III in New York, while initially standing for British monarchical power in the American colonies, was deconstructed and redeployed to oppose British rule. Passbooks in apartheid South Africa were a physical manifestation of the system of white domination; public passbook-burning protests recast the

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object as a symbol of Black liberation. The smashing of petrol pumps by UK-based climate movement Just Stop Oil transformed this banal object into a symbolic representation of ecocidal policymaking. Overall, we contend that resistant action 'against' symbolic objects offers 'hot' moments in which new meanings are formed, old meanings transformed, and semiotic alliances shifted, inducting them as prospective material collaborators in longer-running resistance struggles.

Introduction

Recent work in sociology, political science and material culture studies has brought increasing attention to the role of 'symbolic objects':

> 'powerful and potent signifiers' used by protesters and other sorts of contentious performers to 'present narratives, articulate symbolic arguments, and make proclamations […that] can divide and unite social groups, tell stories, make declarations, spark controversies, and even trigger violent upheavals' (Gardner and Abrams, 2023a: 14).

These objects speak to the all too understudied 'art' of resistance practices and social protest, tying together the creativity often inherent in resistance with the distinctly political dimensions of countering power. For resistance practitioners, this often involves using symbolic objects as components in—or inspiration for—artistic performances, or as cultural reservoirs that preserve and serve as further stimuli for ongoing chains of resistance.

In addition to serving as components in or stimulation for resistance practices, symbolic objects also notably feature as a common target of resistance practices. Although structures of power and control are often ethereal and disembodied, symbolic objects serve as material targets that concretize and express power relations, serving as moral and cultural resources from which political, social and ideological regimes draw. In service of power, they may stand in for actual figures (authoritarian leaders or past oppressors), declare the power of a dominant group, depict a coercive notion of the status quo, or even inspire fear by dint of their visual or aesthetic qualities.

Yet, in their efforts to challenge, negotiate or undermine extant power arrangements, resistant protagonists can assail these targets, undertaking their destruction, modification, or recontextualization in a way that queers, alters or neuters their affective, cultural and ideological dimensions, often in tandem with physically impactful changes to their material form. Such a

notion calls us to think of images such as government buildings reduced to ruins, burning flags, uniforms, documents and accoutrements of authoritarian oppression, traffic cone hats or satirical moustaches placed upon otherwise terrifying statues, graffiti tags on vast, towering walls, and artistic doodles superimposed upon official portraits. In targeting symbolic objects, resistance practitioners are able to simultaneously deprive the dominant order of an important enforcement device and construct a new, critical alternative to it. Thus, practitioners resist with and against symbolic objects by engaging in artistic performances that meaningfully alter the social world.

In this paper, we explore the dynamic role of symbolic objects as targets of resistance practices. Specifically, we examine how these targets' symbolic properties may be successfully seized-upon and symbolically 'recruited' by resisters, after which they become incorporated into further efforts to challenge the status quo. Having outlined the theoretical contribution of the paper, we hone in on three case studies in which symbolically potent physical objects became the target of resistance actions: the famous assault on New York City's King George III statue during the American Revolution (1776), the burning of racist passbooks in apartheid South Africa (1952-1986), and the smashing of petrol pumps by Just Stop Oil (2022). Through our analysis of each case study, we draw out in greater detail the interrelationships between those that resist and their material targets, illustrating ways in which these artful repertoires of resistance attached new meanings and connotations to the symbolic objects they protest against. Objects, from the powerful (for example, a statue of the monarch) to the everyday (for example, a petrol pump), are—in the process—transformed into artistic expressions of resistance to the very power they originally symbolised.

Each of the objects analysed in this paper had, prior to becoming the targets of acts of resistance, been associated with spheres of domination. However, the act of resistance liberates these objects of the dominant, unleashing their potential as physical 'players' on the side of resistance. Irrespective of the ultimate outcomes of a resistance struggle—be it overturning British rule in the American colonies, ending apartheid in South Africa, or potentially forcing the British government to end new oil and gas licences—the very act of recruiting an object into resistance has an emancipatory dimension to it. The symbolic object has itself been emancipated from its pre-ordained role in maintaining the dominant order, and comes to stand (in) for that emancipation, and potentially enable the further emancipation of other objects and individuals. Before engaging each

of our three case studies in turn, we first consider how symbolic objects may be conceptualised in relation to resistance studies.

Conceptualising Symbolic Objects in Resistance

Symbolic objects are material things that have the potential to manifest meanings, narratives, emotions and other substantive content through their appearance in the physical world. This potential arises from events or longer-running social processes through which 'the cultural or semiotic qualities of [such] objects become intertwined with their material properties,' rendering them 'imbued with power through their ability to reify abstract ideas, affording collectively held truths an "objective" reality in the world'; one that may then be wielded, contested or transformed through physical actions with or against them (Gardner and Abrams, 2023a: 2,6). Though there are certainly many symbolic objects in societies around the world and across history, it is important to note that the vast majority of objects do not possess these properties at any given point in time. Blank pieces of paper, grains of salt, and wire coathangers have been—for the greatest stretch of human history and across the greatest breadth of human cultures—simply objects. Yet, in certain contexts, even these raw material goods become intertwined with a deeper symbolism, becoming powerful elements in resistance against authoritarian overreach in China (blank paper, 2022), anticolonial resistance in India (salt, 1930), and the defence of women's rights in Poland (coathangers, 2016).

The study of symbolic objects draws on a rich tapestry of work on material culture and symbolic politics, illuminating the intricate interplay between an object's cultural or semiotic attributes and its material properties. This fusion of symbolic qualities with tangible, material impact gives rise to the remarkable richness of symbolic objects. Their scope includes a great range of artifacts, places/spaces, and persons, insofar as these serve as containers for cultural meanings, myths, declarations, or narratives. Research on symbolic objects may encompass the full range of work on their production, materiality, physical uses in protest, re-presentation in art, and comprehension in an array of cultural contexts. Despite the ubiquity and potency of symbolic objects in contentious politics, the field remains at an elementary stage (Abrams and Gardner, 2023b).

Symbolic objects may convey meanings as open-ended as a vague 'empty' signification of resistance, or may constitute complex, multi-layered

tapestries of conflicting meanings whose interpretations differ among resistant protagonists, opponents, bystanders, observers, and authority figures. The meanings of such objects may be ubiquitous and well established, or tend to draw on deeply embedded cultural transcripts to obtain different meanings among different audiences. Here, we might point to examples such as the commercially reproduced image of Che Guevara (Selbin, 2023), which continues to resonate with anti-authoritarians globally, to colonially contested objects such as feathered headdresses in the US (Dobroski, 2023), or to the simultaneously culturally specific and mass-reproduced spectacle of the self-immolating body of Thích Quảng Đức in 1963 Vietnam (Zuev, 2023).

In the context of resistance studies, symbolic objects may be situated within the broader realm of 'arts' of resistance: a diverse array of creative expressions and cultural practices (such as visual performances, musical, digital and physical works) [*SI Introduction citation*]. Resistance studies scholars emphasise how artistic forms serve as potent instruments in struggles against oppressive political systems and social injustices, manifest in the form of resistant acts such as direct action, quotidian acts of resistance, and constructive alternatives to prevailing norms (see for example, Baaz et al. 2016; Hogue, 2016; Hussein and MacKenzie, 2017; Johansson and Vinthagen 2016). Here, artistic expression serves as a potent force against multifaceted systems of oppression that intersect along various axes, (for instance, ability, gender age, sexuality, race/ethnicity, and class).

Despite burgeoning research on resistant artistic expression and creative contentious performances, objects have seen a comparative neglect. This is despite the fact that objects often play a vital role in social and political struggles. In the realm of contentious politics, various objects possessed of substantial symbolic importance—the extent to which they are understood to be bound up with socio-cultural, emotional and political stakes—are prevalent features of case studies, and we have shown how better attention to their various roles in contention can significantly contribute to our understanding of such episodes (Gardner and Abrams, 2023a; 2023b). In our past work, we have illustrated how objects may appear as 'resources to be mobilized […] vital components in movement strategies […] structuring elements of movement cultures, or props in actors' repertoires of contention'. They are used in a variety of ways, including as physical items held or displayed during protests, as representations of unity and solidarity, or as potent declarations of a group's cause or identity. The presence of these objects can be powerful, and as they

become associated with specific causes or ideas, they can be appropriated for use in different contexts. This often results in objects acquiring a complexity that transcends the boundaries of their original invocation, one that offers further utility in other social and political contexts. They may even form a part of a cause's 'strategic toolbox' (Slosarski, 2023:39), through which carefully crafted actions are accomplished. Conversely, objects can act as stimuli for further action, evoking emotions and driving episodes of struggle.

Yet, we also contend that the study of symbolic objects is considerably enriched by a broader approach than that offered by the contentious politics perspective alone. Considered from the point of view of resistance studies, symbolic objects may be approached with greater analytic scope, drawing attention to the intersection between personal experiences of action and wider shared legacies and transcripts that underpin how people navigate social oppression.

Past studies have shown how symbolic objects may play a critical role in the practice of resistance (Abrams and Gardner, 2023a). On the one hand, they constitute the raw materials from which artistic resisters may draw to augment their own agency. On the other, they may also become complicit in the practice of resistant action. Objects alone may come to stand in for certain narratives, or sound a dissonant note in social discourse, disrupting the presentation of reality purported by the powerful (Gardner and Abrams, 2023b). They can come to generate rich feelings and emotions which may have an influence on how political subjects (Atata and Omobowale, 2023; Accornero, Carvalho and Ramos Pinto, 2023), radical partisans (Dirik, 2023), or regime functionaries (Dukes, 2023) interpret their own political situation and what is at stake in a given resistance struggle. They may render resistance newly visible (Slosarski, 2023; Nagle, 2023; Zuev 2023), or lend it a sense of protective obscurity or strategic ambiguity (Selbin, 2023; Thomassen and Riisgaard 2023). Yet, this is only a proverbial toe in the water of the vast reservoir of resistant action. In particular, we believe that there is much to be gained by examining the dynamics of symbolic objects as *targets* of resistant action. This may arise through, for example, their alteration, appropriation, incapacitation, destruction, or even attempted restoration. It is to this subject that we devote our energies in this paper.

In what follows, we draw out one common thread that runs across the otherwise quite different resistance struggles in this paper: the capacity of resisters to engage in the symbolic recruitment of targeted objects,

attaching new meanings to them that help support resistance efforts. Rather than resisting only *against* the symbolic objects of the dominant order, the phenomenon of symbolic recruitment enables counter-hegemonic forces to simultaneously resist *with* and *against* these symbolic objects.

Before we discuss this phenomenon further, it should be clarified that we do not expect every instance in which resistant protagonists target symbolic objects to be ones in which those objects are symbolically recruited into a given resistance struggle. Rather, we suggest that resisting 'against' an object invites the possibility of also resisting with it. Whether or not this possibility is actualized depends on a complex web of causal factors, including: the intentionality of the activists concerned; the presence or absence of witnesses who may transmit subjective recollections of the acts in question; the capacity of a given object to become polysemous, as determined by its material capacity and pre-existing symbolic importance (see Abrams and Gardner 2023b). Hence, we are describing a common-enough but not ever-present phenomenon: it constitutes a regularity of many resistance struggles, but not a rule.

With the above caveat issued, we now offer an indicative description—in general terms—how resistant protagonists may carry out the symbolic recruitment of a targeted object.

This phenomenon played out quite differently across the cases discussed in this paper. The most explicit instance of symbolic recruitment comes in the first of our cases: the assault on the statue of King George III in New York City. As we shall see in the next section, American revolutionaries employed no subtlety in their efforts to change the symbolic association of the statue, literally melting it down into bullets and firing them at their opponents. The battle-ready figure of King George would soon be killing his own men, not merely figuratively but quite literally piercing their chests and shattering their bones. Yet, other instances of symbolic recruitment hold-back from any physical transubstantiation until the very last minute. Such was the case for South Africans, who leant new meaning to their racist apartheid passbooks by building a new ritual of resistance: their immolation. This powerful object-performance became regularized in South African resistance struggles through careful re-staging intended to evoke connections to a longer history of struggle and collective memories of racist oppression.

Our third case, that of the UK environmental movement Just Stop Oil's targeting of petrol pumps, constitutes an instance in which objects

Step 1: Target Selection

Resisters draw on their everyday experience to select an object which they feel stands in for some aspect of the power they wish to subvert. This decision may rest on a strategic or tactical justification, but may also be—to a greater or lesser extent—simply opportunistic or emotive.

Step 2: Action

Resisters employ some form of action against said object, that harms, critiques or questions the dominant order. Often, this involves the object's physical vandalism or destruction, but it may also involve its theft, creative modification, or contextual augmentation (as well as any combination of these factors). In each case, the object in question emerges symbolically changed in some way.

Step 3: Symbolic Association

The transformations enacted upon a targeted object (or class/group of objects) create novel connotations that imbue it with increased potential for use in resistance to the dominant order.

Step 4: Symbolic Recruitment

Resistant protagonists draw on concretized connotations to incorporate a targeted object into their broader repertoire of resistance, employing it as a component in, or stimulation for renewed resistant activity that undermines their opponents.

that represent the status quo only in a relatively banal fashion may still be recruited,[2] even in the absence of their possession by resistant protagonists, or their dramatic physical transformation. By consistently smashing (and hence disabling) the pumps, Just Stop Oil established the pumps as a prospective site of resistant action by surfacing popular anxieties associated with petrol

[2] We use 'banal' here with reference to Billig's (2012) conceptualization of the term: They are 'objects that are more or less unremarkable in the context of a given form of contention, so much so that their presence is commonly overlooked' (Gardner and Abrams, 2023b:32). Yet, this overlooked presence nonetheless contains within it a representation of the status quo, that distinguishes them from other objects also found within the wider category of 'everyday' objects we encounter in our lives.

shortages. Not only did this action serve to drive home the group's message that the United Kingdom is scarily dependant on oil, and associate this message with the previously banal sight of a petrol pump, it also established the pumps as a readily available site of resistant action for any prospective rebel who might wish to act in support of the group's goals. This was not the first time the group employed such a tactic. They had previously successfully sent the UK into a national panic over the connotations of a tin of soup, after throwing the contents of one can over the protective glass covering Van Gough's sunflowers.

Adopting a cross-contextual comparative approach allowed us to explore the multiple and complex roles played by symbolic objects in acts of resistance. The three case studies are productively different in terms of their temporal (ranging from the 18th to the 21st centuries), geographical (spanning three continents), and political contexts, allowing us to draw out some general points about how objects work in resistance. They also differ in terms of the constellations of power being opposed by each resistance movement: revolutionary secession from an imperial core; the refusal and subversion of white supremacism; resistance to a fossil fuel-based economy. The three case study objects—a statue, passbooks, and petrol pumps—also provide different insights. While apartheid passbooks were fully portable, and petrol pumps are practically entirely immobile, the statue of King George III was only movable with the application of collective force. Each of the three objects were the target of disparate acts: passbooks burnt, petrol pumps vandalised, the statue dismantled and repurposed. Each held different symbolic meanings—and intensities of meaning—prior to becoming the target of resistance, ranging from deep-seated anger directed toward passbooks to the previously banal petrol pump. Hence, the three case studies provide ample material for undertaking a cross-contextual analysis of objects in resistance.

In the remainder of this paper we draw on a combination of archival evidence, contemporary accounts and secondary literature to cover each case in turn,[3] explaining the empirical details of each event and drawing on it to enrich our understanding of how symbolic objects may be resisted 'with

[3] While relatively rich literatures exist in relation to two of our case studies (less so for Just Stop Oil due to its recentness), we were unable to find much work that analysed them from a symbolic objects perspective. Hence, archival evidence and contemporary accounts constitute the main resources used.

and against' through the phenomenon of symbolic recruitment. We have intentionally opted not to heavy handedly emphasize theoretical concordance in each case, in the hope that they speak clearly enough for themselves, and that other readers may approach them freely enough to find further patterns which we might have missed. Rather, we return to more explicit theorization in the conclusion.

Dismantling the Statue of King George III[4]

Johannes Adam Simon Oertel: Pulling Down the Statue of King George III, New York City.

In 1776, on the 9th of July, crowds gathered in the streets of New York. A mix of troops, politicos, and a great deal of passers-by were attending what promised to be a vitally important event: the reading of the burgeoning

[4] We are grateful to the anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for emphasising that figure is not the only popular depiction of these events. The painting in Figure 1 was made approximately 75 years after the events in question, and remains a famous rendition, but other renditions also exist. These include William Walcutt, 1857, *Pulling Down the Statue of George III at Bowling Green, July 9, 1776* (https://galleries.lafayette.edu/2019/01/02/william-walcutt-pulling-down-the-statue-of-george-iii-at-bowling-green-n-y-july-9-1776/), and, still later, Keith Shaw Williams, 1983, *Pulling Down the Statue of King George III, New York City, 1776* (https://emuseum.nyhistory.org/objects/11781/pulling-down-the-statue-of-king-george-iii-new-york-city-1).

nation's Declaration of Independence (US, 1776), which had been signed some five days earlier. Yet, when the declaration was read out loud, it became evident that the vast bulk of its text concerned one individual in particular, King George III of England, of whom it claimed:

> The history of the present King of Great Britain is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations, all having in direct object the establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States [...] A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people (US, 1776).

Across an array of 27 condemnatory accusations, the declaration systematically poured scorn on the King, squarely situating the coming revolution as a rejection of George's monarchical tyranny.

It was perhaps understandable then when the people of New York City responded to the declaration by targeting the closest approximation to the King: the litany of everyday objects bearing his insignia, such as bowls, jugs, cups and mugs, road signs, official papers, armaments, tavern signs, religious paraphernalia, and even fireplaces (Museum of the American Revolution, 2020). These were smashed, torn, burnt, modified, formed into effigy, or otherwise destroyed in a ritualistic rejection of the monarchy's symbolic dominion over its former American colonies. Yet, the inhabitants of downtown New York had no need for household objects to stand-in for the king: a short walk away, at the city's Bowling Green, King George himself was sat, upon a horse, sumptuously cast in lead and gold.

Equestrian statues, such as the 'George' of Bowling Green, have a long history in European culture, one that transcends millennia. They imply, in short, power, domination and conquest. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that, as the cataloguer and historian of equestrian statues, Kees Van Tilburg (n.d), notes, 'the majority of the portrayed equestrians were unpleasant people, to put it mildly. In quite a number of cases, they would nowadays not survive a hearing at the International Criminal Court unscathed.' Hence, time and again van Tilburg's catalogue records a recurrent historical pattern:

> The question is what to do with the statues of people once highly esteemed and celebrated, but now profoundly detested as a result of changing times, norms and ideas. It is a fact that these were almost always destroyed or removed. There are abundant examples.

Indeed, July 1776 was not the first time that New Yorkers had attempted to add King George III to the long list of endangered equestrian statues. The grandiose figure of George, dressed in roman garb and styled akin to the emperor Marcus Aurelius, had been subject to regular attempts at 'patriotic vandalism' of some sort or other during its approximate half-decade lifespan (Marks, 1981: 65). Constructed in 1770, it had scarcely been a year before it became necessary to surround the entire endeavour with a ten-foot protective fence. Yet, by July 9th, 1776, no fence could have saved the statue from its fate. A crowd—headed by soldiers and sailors well equipped for the task—descended upon the monument and cast ropes around its figure, heaving it onto the green before carrying out a public beheading and further dismemberment. Almost immediately after the statue had been felled and destroyed, its journey to rebirth began. The pieces were gathered, packed, and dispatched to an ersatz armory, where they were to become bullets for the revolutionary cause.

It would be easy to interpret the destruction of the statue, and its repurposing for armaments, to have been a series of relatively spontaneous events which came to imbue subsequent symbolic connotations coincidentally. Yet, the historical evidence from 1776 conveys instead the impression of a carefully staged performance, in which the statue (and hence, bullets) had been deliberately targeted, and creatively repurposed in order to symbolically further the revolutionary struggle, guided by conscious agents of the revolutionary cause. Take, for example, the account of events in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, on July 13th, 1776 (quoted in Sneff, 2016):

> On Wednesday last, the Declaration of Independence was read at the head of each brigade of the Continental army, posted at and near New-York, and every where received with loud huzzas, and the utmost demonstrations of joy. The same evening the equestrian statue of George III, which Tory pride and folly raised in the year 1770, was, by the sons of freedom, laid prostrate in the dirt, the just desert of an ungrateful tyrant! The lead wherewith this monument was made, is to be run into bullets.

The notion that the statue had been symbolically recruited for the revolutionary cause was not only to be found in the popular press. It was also the subject of discussion and strategizing among contemporary government officials (see McLachlan, 1976:280). The statue was carried in secret to

Litchfield, Connecticut—presumably for fear that it would be recaptured by Tory forces—by General Oliver Wolcott, who personally oversaw its smelting into a total of 42,088 bullets at an improvised facility set up in an apple orchard. These were then distributed among revolutionary forces on the frontlines (Buckley, 1907:14), with the explicit aspiration that their symbolic impression would be at least as meaningful as their military purpose (Wall, 1920:50).

What is especially apparent in the case of the King George statue's repurposing is a revolutionary bullets is a distinct process of carefully planned symbolic recruitment. The statue was identified by revolutionaries as a prospective target, then subject to a complex series of transformative actions which created new associations: the statue literally became part of the revolutionary arsenal. Revolutionary communications and myth-making then established these symbolic associations in the broader public sphere, connecting novel connotations not only to the bullets formed of the Bowling Green statue, but also to the array of other monarchical monuments equally fit for the smelter, now objects of anxiety for Tory loyalists. Indeed, Tories were evidently deeply affected by the whole affair: one redcoat captain even recounted how—upon hearing that the head of the statue had been separately carried off to be defiled and impaled on a spike—an elaborate heist was planned to regain the head and give it an honorable burial (Wall, 1920:52).

This would not be the last time King George's statue appeared on the stage of American politics. Its physical fragments became the stuff of local history and folktales; the visage of its destruction the muse of printmakers, etchers and painters. The very performance of George's downfall was itself re-staged in 1909, as part of a grand parade during the 'Hudson–Fulton Celebration', celebrating the 300th anniversary of colonial explorers first encountering New York City's Hudson River. In 2017, King George was once again torn from his horse, this time as part of the opening exhibit of the Philadelphia Museum of the American Revolution (Bellion, 2018:18-23). Even though it is no longer being physically melted down into bullets, King George's equestrian form remains a potent symbolic recruit of the American Revolution, and vital ammunition in its storytelling and mythmaking. As Wendy Bellion (2018:24, Bellion 2019) notes, the very construction of George's equestrian statue has become divorced from the assertion of Crown authority, and instead, a vital element in the apparatus of a 'perpetual iconoclasm,' through which the Revolution, and the American story, has been asserted.

The US is not the only example of revolutionaries of this period symbolically repurposing the accoutrements of the dominant order for the purpose of resistance and revolt. Indeed, American revolutionaries' tactics were readily imported by their French comrades a little more than a decade later when French revolutionaries embarked upon their own efforts to break from the feudal order. Appearing to take the American example to heart, revolutionaries set about targeting statues and other monarchical paraphernalia in order to—as one publication put it—establish 'revolution [in] the powerful language of symbols' (quoted in Idzerda 1954:16). The aspiration soon attracted legal force in those areas where revolutionaries came to hold authority, as seen in a decree issued by the Legislative Assembly in 1792:

> The sacred principles of liberty and equality will not permit the existence of monuments raised to ostentation, prejudice, and tyranny to continue to offend the eyes of the French people […and] the bronze in these monuments can be converted into cannon for the defense of *la patrie* […] All monuments containing traces of feudalism, of whatever nature, that still remain in churches, or other public places, and even those in private homes, shall, without the slightest delay, be destroyed (Idzerda 1954:16).

During this period, statues became fodder for all manner of republican rituals and professions of public faith. When, in 1793, Jean-Paul Marat was assassinated to much public outcry, a ritual was held 'to appease the spirit of Marat,' consisting of the burning of 'incense' formed from portraits of the old king, Louis XIII, and a bonfire smelt of monarchical statues. Similar scenes were even repeated in yearly fêtes celebrating the end of the French monarchy (Idzerda 1954:17).

What the smelting of King George III and these other instances of symbolic recruitment seen in the French case share is a systematic series of developments that successfully subvert the initial meanings attached to resisters' targets and create novel attributions that empowered political subjects seeking to claim novel rights in the face of prospective monarchical domination. More broadly, as Frank and Ristic (2020:554) note in their review of the phenomenon, similar acts of 'political iconoclasm [have] marked political shifts since ancient history.' Yet, the French and American revolutionary examples constitute a study of resistant action by the relatively

empowered: most resisters do not have revolutionary armies and incipient authorities at their disposal. We shall see in the case of South Africa how this process played out among a far more subaltern category of resistant actor.

Burning Apartheid Passbooks

As we outline at the start of this paper, symbolic objects can act as concrete and tangible representations of ethereal forms of power and control. Just as the term 'apartheid' allowed the system of racial domination that was in place in South Africa from 1948 to the early 1990s—itself an intensification, codification, and uniform application of forms of white supremacy that preceded it—to be abbreviated into a single word, the passbook allowed the entirety of this system to be metonymically compressed into a single object. As we discuss in this section, throughout the history of white domination in South Africa, a wide range of narratives, emotions, and connotations came to be attached to passbooks and to the public acts of protest undertaken with or against them. Under the apartheid regime, these expanded and became more acute, as the passbook came to stand for, and stand in for, apartheid itself. The brutality of the state, from everyday injustices to massacres, came to be written on to the passbook, making it not only a symbol of oppression but also a highly charged site for anti-apartheid resistance. For black South Africans living under apartheid, the destruction of one's passbook became 'an act of reclamation, self-assertion, fugitivity, and futurity', not just for the individual but for the community as a whole (Schoen, 2022: 45).

Passbook protests in southern Africa date as far back as the eighteenth century, often involving these documents being publicly burned, damaged, defaced, or discarded. During the Second Boer War (1899-1902), black workers in Transvaal and the Orange Free State burned their passbooks, demonstrating their opposition to racial repression in the Boer Republics (Mohlamme, 2000). Any hopes for a prospective improvement in racial equality arising from their incorporation into the British Empire were soon quelled, as British rule resulted in a more stringent enforcement of pass laws alongside a general deterioration of labour conditions for black workers. A petition sent to the administrators of the British colony of Transvaal in 1903 described the pass laws as 'tantamount to encouraging slavery or raising slavery from its grave' (Mohlamme 2000: 278). Alongside connotations of servitude, these events tied the passbook to experiences of both Boer oppression and British betrayal.

After the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, passbooks again featured prominently in antiracist protests, particularly in opposition to proposed plans to extend pass laws to include black women (Gasa, 2007). In 1913, around 600 women marched to the magistrate's court in Bloemfontein, demanding the extension of pass laws to women be repealed (Walker, 1982). Some handed their passes to the police, while others tore them up in front of officers, courting arrest in an attempt to '[break] the shackles of oppression by means of passive resistance' (Plaatje, 2007:95). The 1913 protest left a powerful legacy in black feminist memory in South Africa, influencing subsequent generations of women activists resisting domination at the intersection of race, class and gender (Walker, 1982). Another militant campaign emerged in 1919, this time led by socialist and communist organisations that were inspired by the 1917 Russian Revolution (Jeenah, 2021). At the time, passbooks primarily represented a system of regulating black labour, and so symbolised oppression at the intersection of race and class in South Africa's particular form of capitalism. At the rallies, demonstrations and strikes that epitomised this cycle of protest, the burning and otherwise destruction of passbooks formed a key spectacle. Both the women's protest of 1913 and the socialist-led campaign of 1919 attached new layers of meaning and narrative to the passbook and, in particular, to the action of destroying it as a means of public protest. Such acts emblemized calls for change which expressed not only antiracist resistance but also connoted race's intersection with class struggle and women's liberation. While anti-passbook activism occurred periodically in the following decades, the next major cycle of protest occurred with the beginning of apartheid.

Four years into National Party rule and the construction of the apartheid regime in South Africa, the Pass Laws Act of 1952 came into force (Hirson, 1988). The Act made it mandatory for the adult black population to carry passbooks at all times. Various objects of identification—such as documents, booklets or metal badges—had been implemented as means of surveilling and controlling black men by the Orange Free State, South African Republic, and Cape Colony prior to the formation of the South African Union in 1910. The Pass Laws Act of 1952 unified all such identifying documentation into a single passbook, homogenised its use across the state, extended this requirement to include black women as well as men, and heightened its enforcement (Breckenridge, 2005). Alongside fingerprints and photographic identification, the new passbook included each individual's employment and residential history, racial and ethnic identity, marital status, and legal rights.

On one level, the pass laws provided a simple pretext for police harassment and arrest: indeed, by the end of the decade, 'one out of every seven African men' were convicted of breaking this law every year (Clay, 1960: 7). However, as a 'mechanism for the complete control of the African population', the pass laws also represented a legal pillar for the apartheid system as a whole (Breckenridge, 2005: 83). Opposition to the new act was immediate and widespread, and it would draw on Southern Africans' longer history of anti-passbook resistance.

In June 1952, a coalition of movements led by the African National Congress (ANC) launched a 'Defiance Campaign', utilising various forms of civil disobedience aiming to force the government to repeal six new repressive laws that formed the basis of apartheid, including the Pass Laws Act (Hirson, 1988). Influenced by prior anti-pass contention, the extension of the pass laws to include black women became an important point of inflexion. A diverse array of women's anti-apartheid movements were founded—including white groups such as the Black Sash organisation—and these groups joined in coalition against the pass laws (Clay, 1960). Using a tactic of mass arrest, activists publicly and purposively broke the pass laws, leading to the South African state meting out 8,000 convictions in a four-month period.

In the years that followed, protest waxed and waned, reaching something of an apogee in 1960. On 21st March that year, a large crowd of demonstrators in the township of Sharpeville marched to the local police station, stating their refusal to continue carrying passbooks (Lodge, 2011). A wide range of individuals were present at the demonstration, ranging from the leaders and members of the local Pan Africanist Congress (PAC),[5] to those who were persuaded to join enroute to the station. The strategy advanced by some of its organisers was to hand in their passbooks to the police and hence court arrest; an act that, if also undertaken by enough fellow demonstrators, had the potential to overwhelm the police. However, as the crowd were pressed up against the wire fence, the police opened fire, killing 69 and injuring many more.

[5] An anti-apartheid movement that rejected the multiracialism of the ANC's Freedom Charter in favour of the 'establishment and maintenance of an Africanist socialist democracy, recognizing the primacy of the material and spiritual interests of the individual' (Raboroko, 1960).

The Shapeville Massacre sent shockwaves through South Africa, as well as further afield, and drew further attention to passbooks as a prospective site of contention. A sustained campaign of passbook-burning protests led by the ANC emerged in its wake. Chief Luthuli, president of the ANC from 1952 to 1967, responded by burning his own passbook, calling for all black South Africans to do the same. Other key figures in the ANC, such as Nelson Mandela and Duma Nokwe, did the same, as anti-pass protests spread through the country. Mandela (1994: 281) recalled in his autobiography:

> The massacre at Sharpeville created a new situation in the country […] We in the ANC had to make rapid adjustments to this new situation, and we did so. A small group of us […] held an all-night meeting in Johannesburg to plan a response. We knew we had to acknowledge the events in some way and give the people an outlet for their anger and grief. We conveyed our plans to Chief Luthuli, and he readily accepted them. On March 26, in Pretoria, the chief publicly burned his pass, calling on others to do the same. He announced a nationwide stay-at-home on March 28, a national Day of Mourning and protest for the atrocities at Sharpeville. In Orlando, Duma Nokwe and I then burned our passes before hundreds of people and dozens of press photographers. Two days later, on the twenty-eighth, the country responded magnificently as several hundred thousand Africans observed the chief's call. Only a truly mass organization could coordinate such activities, and the ANC did so.

The passbook burning protests of 1960 forced the government to briefly suspend police checks of passbooks (Tyler et al., 1960). Although temporary, this represented the first instance wherein anti-apartheid resistance forced the hand of the National Party since its imposition of apartheid. With this, the Sharpeville Massacre and the successful campaign of resistance it precipitated came to be inscribed onto the passbook and permanently associated with its symbolic destruction.

Most photographic evidence of passbook burning follows a specific routine: a crowd partially encircles a small makeshift bonfire, with arms outstretched toward the centre, passbooks unfurled (see figure 2). At times, ignited passbooks are held aloft; at others, they lie burning atop the fire. Luthuli's own passbook burning evokes more of a statesmanlike aesthetic, taking place indoors, his passbook resolutely placed into a porcelain bowl to be

Fig 2.

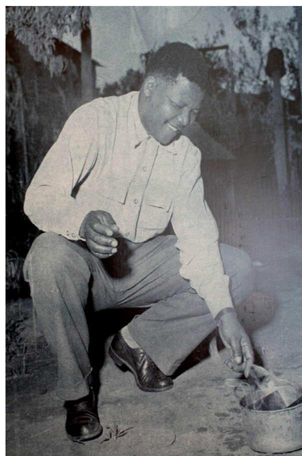

Fig 3.

set alight. Straddling the formal and informal versions of the performance, Mandela hunkered down on a dirt path in slacks and a white shirt, carefully destroying his passbook in a metal pot (see figure 3), demonstrating Luthuli's call for such pass-burnings to be undertaken 'in an orderly manner' (The Guardian, 1960). Pictures of these protest events evoke the potency of the act; an overcoming of fear, a symbolic ignition of the racist state, a knowing positioning of the self into the crossfire of apartheid's law enforcement, often literally. The materiality of the act is crucial, allowing for the media of resistance to be physically held, and for the smoke and heat from its combustion smelled and felt. Yet, photographic evidence of passbook burnings tends to omit the latter part of the performance: the passbook turning to ash, the ash disposed of or left to erode in the street, the fire's remains a reminder of the act of resistance for days after.

Throughout the history of anti-pass activism, passbooks are repeatedly linked to notions of slavery. Just as the writers of the 1903 petition to the British authorities in the Transvaal Colony saw enslavement in the pass laws, Chief Luthuli described the destruction of his own passbook in 1960 as an act of 'burning this system of slavery' (The Guardian, 1960). Dozens of placards at the 1956 women's anti-pass march in Pretoria read 'With passes we are slaves' (Serote, 2019:59). Under chattel slavery, the bodies of enslaved people were usually branded, burning a mark of identification—and ownership—into the skin. This somatic feature rendered the black body the property of the white owner, enforced and maintained through the law of the state. Correspondingly, the passbook spoke of ownership of black bodies by the

white state, through which various freedoms were restricted and made black labour subject to white capital. After 1952, the requirement for the passbook to be carried at all times rendered it somatic, a permanent feature of the black body under apartheid law. Unlike branding, however, the act of carrying the passbook was to be undertaken by its bearers, a state-mandated daily act of branding the self. As such, burning, destroying or refusing to carry the passbook represented an act of fugitivity (Schoen, 2022), a declaration of emancipation not only of the individual but for all those bound by the pass laws. Furthermore, with the passbook also being semiotically indexed (i.e. referring back) to slavery, its symbolic importance stretched temporally and geographically beyond the apartheid regime alone to include the broader history of the exploitation of African peoples. Overthrowing the passbook hence came to incorporate black liberation writ large.

Periodic anti-passbook protest continued until the pass laws were relaxed in 1986 (Schoen, 2022). Over the period that these laws were in place, destroying passbooks was rarely, if ever, focused solely on expressing opposition to the pass laws themselves, nor were these just a protest performance used to call for ending apartheid. Passbook destruction incorporated the liberation of both the individual and the collective, evoked revolutionary change, and subsumed a host of diverse connotations and narratives built up over time. These were both general and specific, from racial domination and its intersection with class, gender and colonialism to Sharpeville, forced eviction events, and everyday injustices. In tandem, passbook burning also invoked histories of organised resistance, Black power, and hope for liberation.

The case of South African passbooks shows how deeply dehumanising instruments of the status quo may nonetheless be transformed and recruited for resistant action through the careful employment of artful resistant performances. By publicly burning passbooks in acts of defiance to the Apartheid regime, a prop in the apparatus of apartheid became also a symbolic object within a broader repertoire of resistance, empowered with new narratives and emotions that evoked the refusal and subversion of the apartheid regime. This process of symbolic recruitment not only subverted the entirely negative connotations initially attached to the passbook, but contributed to a reconfiguration of solidarities among oppressed groups by fostering a collective identity and shared resistance among all those affected by the passbook system.

Just as we saw in the case of the statue of George III in the American Revolution, by altering the materiality of symbolic objects (melting, burning, etc), resistant actors can disrupt and challenge power structures *both* by targeting the objects that represent them *and* by constructing alternative narratives and meanings attached to those objects. Yet, in the South African case, we also see how such instances of symbolic recruitment may allow resistant communities to bridge the 'hidden transcripts' of the powerless with potent 'public scripts' of resistance (see: Scott 1990; Zuev 2023), drawing on symbolic associations made in the heat of active resistance.

Smashing Petrol Pumps

Just Stop Oil is a UK-based environmental movement that aims to draw government fossil fuel policy in line with the scientific evidence on climate change and its mitigation. It emerged in March 2022, declaring the beginning of a campaign of nonviolent resistant action that would continue until the UK government capitulated to its one demand: the immediate halting of 'all future licensing and consents for the exploration, development and production of fossil fuels' (JSO 2022a). The group's demand was formed in line with the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that an immediate and 'substantial reduction in fossil fuel use' is necessary in order to 'secure a liveable future' (IPCC 2022). In Just Stop Oil's own words, 'More oil is an act of war against small island states, an obscene injustice against the poor of the global south and an utter betrayal of our young people' (JSO 2022b). In October 2022, the UK Prime Minister Liz Truss announced a lifting of the ban on fracking for shale gas and a new round of oil and gas licensing. Although plans to reintroduce fracking were quickly abandoned, and Truss's premiership swiftly ended after her policies provoked a minor economic crisis, by the start of 2023, around 130 new oil and gas licenses had been issued, accompanied by an announcement of plans to build the first new UK coal mine in three decades (Campbell 2022; McSorley, Nevett and Rowlatt, 2022). In response, Just Stop Oil organised a range of dramatic and disruptive protest events, including bridge blockades (Gayle 2022a), scaling the gantries of the M25 motorway, blocking London's primary ring-road (BBC 2022), throwing tomato soup over Van Gogh's Sunflowers (Gayle 2022b), and—our focus here—smashing petrol pumps (Gayle 2022c).

In late August 2022, Just Stop Oil activists smashed and spraypainted screens at seven petrol stations across London. Petrol stations in areas with

notably high levels of nitrogen dioxide air pollution resulting from petrol and diesel combustion were selected as targets for the action (Brogan 2021). Followed by photographers and videographers, the activists calmly and systematically shattered the pump displays, rendering them unusable. Spray paint was used to further block out the displays and to write 'no new oil' and 'JSO' on the side of the pumps (see figure 4). Many of the activists wore the group's characteristic orange high-vis jackets branded with the movement's logo. In several locations, they were joined by others blockading entry to the petrol station (JSO 2022d). Although air pollution levels caused around 4,000 deaths per year in Greater London alone (and approximately 40,000 across the UK), the group cited the far greater risk posed by climate breakdown as the focus of the petrol pump protest action.

According to Vinthagen (2015), resistance involves actions taken to protect the self and/or others from aggression, grounded in societal relations of power:

> Resistance speaks of aggression. We resist because we are attacked. This is not about inequality and social justice; it is more than that. It is about being attacked and defending ourselves and, what's more, trying to halt the aggression (Vinthagen, 2015: 14).

Likewise, Just Stop Oil activists perceive their actions as being in defence of themselves—and humanity—against climate-related aggression. In the group's own words, the UK's current fossil fuel trajectory will 'destroy families and communities', cause 'starvation and the slaughter of billions of the poor', render 'whole regions of the world […] uninhabitable', and precipitate an 'unavoidable collapse' of societies across the world (JSO 2022c; JSO 2023). In this way, the situation is understood to also put at risk the future of 'workers' rights, women's rights, all human rights' (JSO 2022c). Just Stop Oil activists do not tend to see the problem as one of ignorance or denialism of those in power, as Stephen Gingell, one of the petrol pump protest activists, stated: 'The brutal truth is [that] more burning of oil and gas is an act of genocide. The oil companies and the government know this. So why are they leading us into this slaughter?' (JSO 2022d). Hence, the smashing of petrol pumps was understood to be an act of defending humanity against the aggression of the state and fossil fuel companies.

Fig. 4

The fossil fuel industry wields considerable power in the UK. Acting transnationally, the industry has engaged in a concerted effort to restrain political action on climate change since the 1980s (Brulle, 2022), shifting in recent years from a tactic of denial to one of delay (Shue, 2023). British fossil fuel companies have been able to exert influence over UK government policymaking on energy and climate mitigation (Lockwood, Mitchell, and Hoggett, 2019); however, the nature and extent of this influence appear to be shaped in part by the political position of elites in Westminster (Hall & Taplin, 2007; Carter and Pearson, 2022). Rather than representing a case of pure corporate state capture (as found in the case of Australia: see Hall & Taplin, 2007; Lucas, 2021), the UK government and fossil fuel industry have tended to form a 'historical bloc', sharing a set of basic interests and acting in concert on the basis of these interests (Nyberg, Wright, and Kirk, 2018). As well as dampening restrictions on and opposition to the industry, this relationship has resulted in considerable financial support being provided to the industry. Through a mixture of taxation policy and direct funding, the government has provided around £10-12 million annually to UK-based fossil fuel companies, making it one of the most fossil fuel-subsidising countries in the OECD (Timperley, 2021; Horton 2023). Although the effects of fossil fuel influence will be—and are currently being—felt by

individual citizens as a result of climate change, this power exists outside of the everyday lives of most people. Even extreme weather events are relatively nebulous, their connection to fossil fuel combustion being inferential rather than experienced in the event itself. This relative obscurity poses a problem for the practice of resistance to fossil fuel hegemony.

The petrol pump is not an object commonly conceived of as symbolically representative of state and corporate power. On the contrary, it is a banal object: a 'marginal [thing] whose character, substance, impact, and scope can be fundamental for us, but whose existence we commonly neglect' (Makky, 2020: 95). Indeed, this banality plays an important social function in the maintenance of fossil fuel hegemony, its continuous usage unnoticeable, unremarkable, uneventful, a normal part of the landscape (Billig, 2012). By smashing petrol pumps as an act of resistance, Just Stop Oil were able to—at least briefly—transmogrify these objects, drawing attention to their role as a node in the continuation of an ecocidal system; a tangible, haptic object representing the power of fossil fuel companies, underwritten by state policy.

Throughout the history of the petrol pump, its otherwise unremarkable air has been periodically punctured by the spectre of fuel scarcity. The UK has experienced a number of oil shocks over time, and these have entered public memory as acute crises. In 1973, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed a fuel embargo on a range of Western states including the UK, reducing the supply of oil and precipitating sharp increases in prices (Issawi, 1978). This was a political shock as much as an economic one, as it called into question Western hegemony and prior assumptions about the power of Middle Eastern and North African states. However, the crisis seeped into public memory in the form of its primary experience by the population: long queues of vehicles outside petrol stations, panic-buying, fuel shortages, and inflation anxiety. Similar crises and shocks have occurred in the decades since, such as in the wake of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 (Verleger, 1990). During such crises, rapid inflation becomes visibly evident, publicly observable for consumers in real-time on fuel price displays. For these relatively brief periods, the petrol pump becomes a highly symbolically charged object, a point of direct contact between individual consumers and systemic, global crises. The emotions surrounding oil shocks, such as panic, anxiety and fear, have come to be attached to the petrol pump, submerged in public memory yet absent in the everyday (Ahmed, 2013). At times, the resurfacing of such emotions can themselves lead to short-term fuel shocks, as seen in September

2021 when fears of a fuel shortage produced a run on oil, producing a short-term shortfall in supply (Otte 2021). Hence, while the petrol pump mostly functions as a banal object, the spectre of scarcity can trigger a variety of latent emotional associations to quickly resurface (Phillips 2022).

Just Stop Oil fuel protests have been able to tap into these latent public anxieties connected to the petrol pump. As part of an earlier campaign, the group's blockades of oil terminals and tankers in April 2022 produced a small-scale fuel shortage (Gayle and Davies 2022), with some in the media reporting public panic, empty petrol stations, and long queues reminiscent of past oil crises (Dollimore 2022). In making the petrol pump itself the target of subsequent protest, the spectre of the closed petrol station was fully materialized, rather than looming as a prospective result of supply chain disruptions. However, during oil crises, petrol pump closures are signalled by the corporate signage erected by filling stations, connecting the problem to broader market forces beyond their—or perhaps anyone else's—control. In contrast, Just Stop Oil's systematically vandalised petrol pumps evoke a discursive framing that relates to government failure on fossil fuel policymaking, the normalised domination of an ecocidal industry, and of collective resistance to climate aggression. The petrol pump protest brought to the surface forms of public emotion and memory previously connected to oil shocks and attached them to a different form of global crisis: the climate and ecological emergency. It thus spoke not only of the present, but also of the future, providing a visual and affective prefiguration of the shocks expected as a result of climate breakdown; a revision of the 'oil crisis' narrative that displaces demand for fuel with impending—and unfolding—environmental catastrophe.

The case of Just Stop Oil's petrol station protest highlights the capacity of resistance practices to symbolically charge banal objects with novel symbolic associations. Smashed, spray-painted and inoperable, the vandalised petrol pumps speak of a dystopian future, punctured by public shocks and scarcity crises due to climate breakdown. However, perhaps they also connote an alternative future, wherein a transition to renewables leaves the petrol pump to fall into disuse and disrepair; a cenotaph to a defunct system. In this act of resistance, the petrol pumps themselves became complicit, representing not just the target of protest but a representation of opposition to fossil fuel hegemony, an unwitting symbolic recruit in the struggle for a just energy transition.

Resisting Against and With Objects

When individuals or groups engage in resistance, they often employ or target symbolic objects. Yet, the symbolic objects targeted by resistance practitioners may come to constitute much more than just passive recipients of resistant action. As each of our case studies illustrate, targeted objects may take on a new 'life of their own', emerging as a material and symbolic collaborator in acts of resistance. All objects have social lives, are imbued with multiple layers of meaning, and exist in networks of humans and non-humans. Indeed, in 'a world of interminable reference, an entity invariably comes to signal or be something beyond itself' (Knappett, 2002:115). However, resistance offers 'hot' moments in which new meanings are formed, old meanings are transformed, and semiotic alliances are shifted (Gardner and Abrams, 2023b). Perhaps most stark in this regard for our case studies is the capacity for the symbolic object to come to stand in opposition to the very thing it previously enforced: George III became revolutionary bullets; ignited passbooks revoked apartheid; smashed petrol pumps demanded an end to fossil fuels. This subversion of once hegemonic meanings brings to the fore critiques of the system reflective of resistant actors' positionality.

This symbolic recruitment of targeted objects into resistance practices varies in its longevity. The apartheid passbook came to be deeply entangled with resistance, from everyday transgressions (such as tampering with photographs and adjusting information) to their destruction in public protests (Schoen, 2022). In contrast, petrol pumps have not yet become a permanent emblem of climate breakdown, nor have the statues of George III at Somerset House, London or in Great Windsor Park, Berkshire attained a longstanding association with opposition to monarchical tyranny. A question remains, therefore, about the afterlife of symbolic connections built between objects and forms of resistance. This question certainly warrants further empirical investigation. At a more general level, there is much room to study the impact of immediate and subsequent responses to resistant action arising from various actors, including those holding social power such as political elites, the media, the corporate sphere, and the state. Many such responses may be reactionary in character: targets of resistance can be protected by the police or through new legislation, symbolic associations refuted or blurred by the media, and different official narratives proffered in political elite discourses. These responses—like other forms of repression—have highly variable outcomes, ranging from the amplification of the symbolic

importance of the object in question right the way to its successful symbolic 'demobilization', and the blunting of its utility for resisters. Yet, we also see plenty of examples in which powerful actors opt to disregard the act of resistance and redirect the conversation in ways that reduce its impact. These instances often have similar knock-on consequences for the objects involved.

Across our three cases, we see repeated references to collective emotions, beliefs, or imaginaries that become attached to the object in question. American revolutionaries came to consider the statue of George III as indicative of an entire unjust regime of domination that far outstripped the King's role in the conflict; apartheid passbooks evoked profound senses of anger, and Just Stop Oil's protest actions resurfaced latent public anxieties connected to the petrol pump. While these emotions continued to be attached to the objects in question (indeed, often emphasised and brought to the fore by those acting in resistance), new emotions were attached through the acts of resistance. In this respect, statues of King George became totems for collective resistance and prospective fodder for a revolutionary arsenal, burning passbooks spoke of liberatory hope, and smashed petrol pumps extended fears of fuel scarcity to climate anxiety. We believe the evidence in these cases may modestly contribute to filling 'a knowledge gap in the current literature on resistance by displaying not only how emotions make resistance possible, but also how emotions orient, embody, construct, or are the product of, resistance' (Baaz, Heikkinen and Lilja, 2019:128). Novel affective connotations arising from resistance—such as those discussed in this paper—not only impact external audiences but are also deeply meaningful for those engaged in resistance (Jasper, 2018). Elsewhere, we discuss how the targeting of symbolic objects in acts of resistance can also instigate further forms of resistance (Gardner and Abrams, 2023b), in the short term or in the form of longer running 'legacies of contention' (Abdel-Samad et.al. 2021: 49).

Likewise, the analysis of symbolic objects in this paper also connects with scholarship relating to the materiality of resistance and speaks to how 'material artefacts [may] stand out as agentic forces that merge with discourses and become transformative' (Johansson, Lilja, and Martinsson, 2018:7). While symbolic objects are a narrower category than 'material artefacts' (which resistance studies scholars consider to include, for example, online administrative systems), the case studies in this paper are certainly pertinent to this domain of analysis (Haraldsson and Lilja 2017). They further illustrate how material artefacts can (re)present domination and

hegemony in everyday life, punctuating landscapes and lives in the form of prominent statues, identity documents, and petrol pumps. When such objects become the target of resistance, they can be reconstituted in ways that produce positive transformative potential. Yet, as agentic forces, the impact of symbolic objects in resistance practices is dynamic and uncertain. The outcomes of such acts of resistance emerge out of the interactions between humans and nonhumans, generating precarious yet potentially powerful conjunctures.

Above all, however, we hope to have aided the field of resistance studies by delving into the intricate relationships between symbolic objects, acts and arts of resistance. By examining the transformative potential of targeted objects and the ways they can shift in meaning and significance through resistant action and artful performances, we hope to have shown how resisters may attach new meanings and connotations to the symbolic objects they protest against, transforming even everyday objects into powerful expressions of resistance to the very power they originally symbolized.

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