read as a genealogy (although Gopal does not term it thus herself). The book forms a history of the how the present came to be. Reading Insurgent Empire in conversation with Lisa Lowe’s Intimacies of Four Continents (2015) provides further reflection on the temporal mobilities of resistant subjects. For Lowe critically interrogates the colonial archive to unpack how ‘race’ became a marker of coloniality, noting how this ‘unsettles the apparent closure of the liberal politics, society, and culture that establish the universal […] while the peoples who created the conditions of possibility for that freedom are forgotten’ (2015: 7).

There is a political imperative to thinking through how the conditions of what is made possible now, is shaped by the in/actions of the past. Genealogy shatters the illusion of linear temporality, and to bring awareness to those moments where other things might have been, might now be. Lowe reflects upon this though the past conditional temporality, attending to ‘what could have been’ (2015: 40) is to demonstrate, that the present could have been, and therefore could still be, otherwise. Indeed, as Griffin and McDonagh argue, present protesters are increasingly turning to the past ‘to help both inform and justify their actions in the present’ (2019: 7). As Gopal highlights how resistance of colonial subjects shaped British dissent, she retraces a line that has been purposefully absent in the established (and establishment’s) history of British Empire.

Returning to June 2020, and the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston. Movements against the celebration of Empire are mobilising, and accounts of such resistances are travelling almost instantly and globally via social media. As the Black Lives Matter movement rises, and (some of) the symbols of Empire fall, how do we work to sustain any hopeful trajectory? In the context of the rise of the far right, the slanderous attacks, and death threats that Gopal herself is receiving, how can or should we work to make more progressive futures not just possible, but a reality? Gopal demonstrates that part of the work of the future is to hold onto the presence of the past. That the culmination of the British Empire was not the result of a benevolent conscience of the colonisers, but instead driven by the agency and resistance of colonial subjects themselves.

Declaration of conflicting interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Note
1. International African Opinion was the journal of the International African Service Bureau, which developed in response to Mussolini invading Ethiopia in 1935, and the labour rebellions in the British West Indies.

References
Awcock H (2020) New protest history: exploring the historical geographies and geographical histories of resistance through gender, practice, and materiality. Geography Compass 14(6): e12491.
Griffin CJ and McDonagh B (2018) Remembering protest. In: Griffin CJ and McDonagh B (eds) Remembering Protest in Britain Since 1500: Memory, Materiality and the Landscape. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–25.
Griffin P (2018) Making usable pasts: collaboration, labour and activism in the archive. Area 50: 501–508.
Lowe L (2015) The Intimacies of Four Continents. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Stoler AL (2008) Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Priyamvada Gopal, Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent. London: Verso, 2019; 624 pp. 9781784784126, £25 (Hardback)

Colonial testimony and the spaces of anticolonial critique
Reviewed by: David Nally, University of Cambridge, UK
DOI: 10.1177/20438206211005685
It is possible to recognise colonialism as a formative, indeed potent, social force without conceding that its power was ever absolute. Even in situations of radical oppression, when human beings are relentlessly and ruthlessly degraded and abused, resourceful subjects find ways of defying and resisting the will of their oppressor. In her extraordinary book, *Insurgent Empires* (2019), Priyamvada Gopal insists that resistance in the colonies needs to be reckoned with not only to sharpen our conceptual tools for imagining ‘modes of constructive agency’ (Bignall, 2010), but equally as a critical step towards recognising the formative contributions of the colonised to notions of liberty, freedom, democracy, and justice. Through a striking variety of genres – petitions, pamphlets, letters, ceremonies, memorials and speeches (p. 87) – colonised subjects articulated grievances and raised demands that challenged imperial authority and helped to awaken metropolitan sympathies. These forms of public rebuke made visible an alternative social reality – a world of maimings, beatings, torture, rape, starvation and disease – that shattered the cosy conceit that empire was a selfless venture done to ‘benefit the natives’.

In certain situations, then, outrage could be weaponised and used in ways that were directly generative of anti-imperial thought and activism. For instance, Gopal observes (pp. 209–244) that Asian and African activists who travelled to London were able to articulate criticisms and expose injustices in ways that would have been difficult in the colonies because of anti-sedition legislation. This reminds us of the fundamental importance of geography to both the generation and consumption of deviant or rebellious forms of knowledge. Anticolonial critique might be composed and expressed in coffeehouses, bars, editorial rooms, and town squares. It might be broadcast in dancehalls, festivals, fairs, and at sites of worship. Dissent might equally be expressed on the human body itself: the injured, sick, starved, confined, pauperised, and insane might under certain conditions incite a critique of the social norms and political practices that created what Agamben (1998) terms ‘bare life’. But a full account of dissent as *situated practice* must also recognise the opportunities for an oppositional politics to flourish within the spaces of governance itself (cf. Kearns and Nally, 2019).

Ireland hardly features in Gopal’s account of empire (the omission is addressed on p. 36), yet it is an interesting colony to consider these issues, particularly as they manifest in times of crises. The Great Irish Famine in the mid-1840s, for example, generated sustained critical scrutiny on the regulation of Ireland’s food supplies, landlord power, and the ministration of humanitarian relief (cf. Nally, 2011). While raising the question of independence and agitating for reforms could – and did – carry severe penalty (during the Famine several leaders of the nationalist ‘Young Ireland’ movement were arrested and convicted of treason), similar discussion could – and did – take place *within* the apparatus of the colonial state, where liberals and progressives deliberated on injustices and uncovered wrongdoings. These acts of exposure very often dramatised insurgent ideas that were often developed outside and beyond the recognised channels of politics.

To put some flesh on this thesis let me offer a few examples. On the 3rd of May 1849 Michael O’Shaughnessy, an assistant barrister from county Mayo, was called before a Select Committee inquiring into the ‘state of the poor laws’ in Ireland (British Parliament, 1849: 596). Initially questioned about the levying of ‘poor rates’, O’Shaughnessy was later pressed on whether he had seen any evidence of criminal activity arising from either ‘distress’ or ‘starvation’. O’Shaughnessy replied that he had, and then, after retrieving a notebook from his coat pocket, he proceeded to the read extracts from the trial of several destitute young men who were accused of petty crimes. These men, as O’Shaughnessy makes clear, willingly admitted their guilt, and openly appealed to be sentenced either to jail – where they would receive food and shelter as a matter of course – or to penal transportation to Van Diemen’s Land (British Parliament, 1849: 600). Pressed on whether this was a new class of crime O’Shaughnessy replied that ‘the desire to be transported was very unusual until the famine’ (British Parliament, 1849: 602). Asked whether he was sure that these young men really were faced with ‘no alternative’, O’Shaughnessy was once again emphatic: ‘I am satisfied of it; in passing along the roads, in going from one town to another, it was quite afflicting to see
the state of the children; they were nearly naked, with a few rags upon them, the hair standing on an end from poverty; their eyes sunken, their lips pallid, and nothing but the protruding bones of their little joints visible. I could not help exclaiming as I have passed them, “Am I living in a civilized country and part of the British empire?” (British Parliament, 1849: 602). Asked whether evictions had increased during the famine, O’Shaughnessy handed over returns for ejectments in Mayo from 1846–49. Pressed whether matters were ‘tending there to an extinction of the population?’ O’Shaughnessy answered with a laconic ‘Yes’ (British Parliament, 1849: 602).

One of the members of the Select Committee questioning O’Shaughnessy was English MP George Poulett Scrope (1797–1876). Scrope would later excerpt and republish much of the testimony of the young offenders as recounted by O’Shaughnessy (Scrope, 1849: 14–15). In the House of Commons, where he had already acquired a reputation as a supporter of Irish causes, Scrope courted outrage by naming landlords reported to have served eviction notices on their tenants. On the 15 February (HC Deb 15 February 1847, 89 col 1353) and then again on 17 May 1847, Scrope was accused of ‘abusing his privilege’ as a member of the House by attacking named individuals ‘under the cover of questions proposed to a Minister of the Crown’ (HC Deb 17 May 1847, 92, col 956). On several occasions Scrope defended the right of peasants to forcefully resist evictions. ‘Assassination’, he told the House, ‘[i]s a claim on the public for support and shelter’ (HC Deb 06 April 1846, 85, col 612). On at least two occasions Scrope stunningly suggested that legislation designed to repress terrorist agrarian organisations might be applied to landlords who were presently abusing persons and property in Ireland: ‘[F]or whether it was a case of agrarian outrage, or an offence committed by a member of the highest class in society, it was in his mind equally unjustifiable, and, being an illegal act, should be as much punishable by law…’ (HC Deb 22 March 1848, 97, col 858). In other speeches Scrope appealed to English common law – citing Justice William Blackstone (1723–1780) in support of the ‘law of necessity’ and against ‘overstraining the rights of property’ – but he also quoted from the suppressed republican weekly, The Irish Felon on the justness of using the produce of Ireland to feed the people of Ireland (HC Deb 29 July 1848, 100 col 979). Provisioning the people, Scrope insisted, was one of the ‘first functions of a government’, and the abrogation of this duty, he said, was the abrogation of the right to govern (HC Deb 06 April 1846, 85, col 612). Quite unusual for an MP at this time, Scrope also travelled to famine Ireland publishing his impressions in the Morning Chronicle and later compiling them in manuscript form. Here again Scrope fastened on the devastating effects of mass evictions. ‘At times a whole street in a village had been destroyed. I seemed to be tracking the course of an invading army’ (Scrope, 1849: 28–29). Scrope went on to charge the government with a policy of ‘extermination’, not by direct design but ‘by their deprivation of the means of living, of shelter, clothing, and of sufficiency of food’ (Scrope, 1849: 26).

Above I have tried to briefly trace the interchange of ideas between colony and metropole, between testimony – which converts experience into evidence (Sangster, 2011) – and rights-claiming. The appropriation of governmental space for the purpose of anticolonial critique reminds us that, as Gopal (p. 453) says, criticism of empire was not only more pervasive than is generally admitted, it was also spread across a range of a sites which at times provided a fertile milieu for the elaboration of insurgent principles. Scrope was ridiculed for his efforts to draw attention to the plight of the Irish. In parliament he was jeered and branded a radical (‘This was the language of the clubs of France, but surely not of the English House of Commons’, barked one MP [HC Deb 16 February 1849, 102, col 783]), and his many publications on the Irish question earned him the mean sobriquet ‘Pamphlet Scrope’. Yet in his persistence Scrope not only helped to propagate and prolong subversive discussion, he also appropriated state space, and the privileges it afforded, to restate principles that were deemed treasonous when uttered from below.

Declaration of conflicting interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.
Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

References
Agamben G (1998) Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (Heller-Roazen D, Trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Bignall S (2010) Postcolonial Agency: Critique and Constructivism. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
British Parliament (1849) Eighth Report from the Select Committee on Poor Laws (Ireland); Together with Minutes of Evidence. Parliamentary Papers, 1849 (259) XV. London: HMSO.
Kearns G and Nally D (2019) An accumulated wrong: Roger Casement and the anticolonial moments within imperial governance. Journal of Historical Geography 64: 1–12.
Nally D (2011) Human Encumbrances: Political Violence and the Great Irish Famine. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
Sangster J (2011) Invoking experience as evidence. Canadian Historical Review 92(1): 135–161.
Scrope GP (1849) Some Notes of a Tour in England, Scotland, and Ireland: Made with a View to the Inquiry Whether Our Labouring Population Be Really Redundant? In Letters to the Editor of the “Morning Chronicle.” London: James Ridgway.

Priyamvada Gopal, Insurgent Empire: Anticolonial Resistance and British Dissent. London: Verso, 2019. ; 624 pp. 9781784784126, £25 (Hardback).

An insurgent empire of mediators and beyond
Reviewed by: Nuno Domingos and Ricardo Roque, Universidade de Lisboa, Instituto de Ciências Sociais, Portugal
DOI: 10.1177/20438206211005670

Priyamvada Gopal’s Insurgent Empire demonstrates that rebellions in the British colonies – from the Indian Mutiny of 1857 to the post-war Mau-Mau crisis of 1953 – contributed effectively to the political and intellectual making of freedom, equality, and ultimately to decolonization and the end of British imperial rule in the twentieth-century. Through the mediation of critical discourses voiced in the public sphere, local revolts against oppressive colonial regimes could change European self-serving constructs of imperialism; they could act subversively upon the fabrication of empire itself. Across the British Empire (in India, Egypt, Kenya, and in many other places not covered by this book) insurgen
cies were fundamental for the development of liberal modernity and global democracy. Self-emancipation did not rely on imperial benevolence, as some Eurocentric historiography might claim. It was an achievement of a multitude of anti-colonial struggles whose victories were not confined to the colonial terrains and that shaped liberal democracy in Europe and elsewhere. For Gopal, the very experience of fighting colonialism inspired broader struggles for freedom; and such struggles for freedom had significant autonomy from British liberal ideas. ‘Freedom and equality’, Gopal insightfully observes, ‘were not abstractions derived from Enlightenment – itself hardly a homogeneous intellectual formation – they were real and present aspirations shaped by the condition and experience of subjection and exploitation’ (p. 29). Thus, against imperial paternalism, the focus on the local political agency of individuals and movements allows for a non-Eurocentric counter narrative of liberal democracy and freedom. Insurgent actions also created conditions for an international dialogue; they opened up political fields and gave shape to critical public spheres in the imperial metropole, while allowing for the development of wider international resistance networks.

We see many merits in Gopal’s well-written and eloquently argued work. A few critical notes, however, are in order. In the following we raise some questions concerning the book’s privileged focus on what we see as mediations of resistance; and we conclude with brief comments on the contemporary significance of the volume.

The insurgent mediators
Gopal’s work is a political and intellectual history of anti-colonial resistance that places emphasis on the