

**Book Review: David Boarder Giles, *A Mass Conspiracy to Feed People: Food Not Bombs and the World-Class Waste of Global Cities*. Duke University Press Books, 2021. ISBN-13: 978-1478014416 (paperback). 320 Pages. \$28.95.**

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*A Mass Conspiracy to Feed People: Food Not Bombs and the World-Class Waste of Global Cities* is both a primer and call for action on food injustice in the modern capitalist city. In this recently published book, David Boarder Giles, Lecturer in Anthropology in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Deakin University, delves into the multiple ways that capitalism manufactures both waste and scarcity simultaneously. Giles achieves this by telling the story of Food Not Bombs (FNB), an anarchist direct-action group that converts food waste into meals for those who need them. Giles deliberately organizes his argument to unfold as a three-course meal, first dealing with waste, then cities, and finally political organization (Giles 2021, 21). Giles intertwines his own lived experiences with FNB alongside a critique of the so-called “global cities” that perform the command functions of global capitalism to create a tool kit to navigate capitalism’s wastes, urban transformation, and political resistance (Giles 2021, 4). By doing this, Giles creates a compelling argument for a type of anticapitalistic political organizing in the name of food justice during a time when it is needed most.

The first part of Giles’s book, “Abject Capital,” outlines the life of what he calls “abject capital,” or “those once-commodities that are still useful but that are more profitable to throw away than to sell” (Giles 2021, 5). Giles makes the argument that, since the market tends towards overproduction, capitalist production is constantly making both active and abject capital (Giles 2021, 53). In this sense, even though abject capital is

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not sold, “it is put to work in order to establish the conditions for other goods to realize their value” (Giles 2021, 52). In other words, waste manufactures scarcity. However, Giles points out that the life of abject capital does not end at the dumpster, but rather it can be used to create and sustain other non-market counterpublics, such as FNB (Giles 2021, 22).

In the second part, “World-Class Cities, World-Class Waste,” Giles explores the implications of certain strategies used by municipalities to privilege a particular kind of commerce-friendly public life. Notably, Giles looks at the anti-homelessness measures that seek to punish public food sharing. Giles argues that these prohibitions against public food sharing act as “an instrument with which to remake life in the image and interest of the global city” (Giles 2021, 22). All other circulation of abject capital, particularly wasted food, must take place within marginal spaces in a city that are out of sight from what Giles terms the “market-public,” or the “collectivity of people implicated in economic circulation” (Giles 2021, 71). Therefore, keeping waste out of view from the market-public is essential to ensuring the creation and reproduction of the boundaries that both include and exclude certain people from the market-public.

In the third and final part, “Slow Insurrection,” Giles examines how new forms of resistance emerge from the exclusions created by the market-public. Giles makes the argument that the exclusion of the people and places that make up counterpublics are the very conditions that enable political resistances, such as FNB, to appear (Giles 2021, 6). These people share what Giles calls “illiberal embodiments,” or the “larger assemblage composed of enfleshments, affects, practices, or hexeis that confound liberal recognition and incorporation and yet meaningfully organize participants’ social worlds” (Giles 2021, 223). In other words, embodiments that go against the existing liberal social contract. Giles also looks at how city governments work to keep the abject capital used by FNB out of public circulation.

Giles has created a compelling argument for change in our food system that leaves little to critique. One of his most compelling points is the creation of the counterpublic. Giles outlines the processes and social implications through which the exclusions that makeup counterpublics are created in a greatly comprehensive way. After reading, there was no doubt in my mind regarding how capitalism enforces and recreates food inequality. The “mass conspiracy” framework Giles utilizes to tell the story of FNB and its actions is a great way to portray how others, or the market-public, view these kinds of organizations. People who engage with FNB and similar organizations are often seen as delinquents (or punks, as Giles frequently states throughout the book) and criminals, when they are

really just feeding people. Yet, in true conspiracy spirit, these people are also working to expose the inequalities that capitalism enforces and create new alternatives to the current system. To quote Giles, “FNB makes publicly thinkable and practically viable, on a very local scale, an alternative economy” (Giles 2021, 247). Another aspect of Giles’s work that I enjoyed was his use of a mixture of scholarly disciplines alongside ethnographic details. Giles skillfully crafted an argument that can be used in the fields of Anthropology, Political Science, Sociology, and more. This structure, along with the ethnographic anecdotes and quotes from people he encountered, makes the book and its arguments particularly convincing.

Readers, especially those interested in grassroots organizations and anticapitalist transgression, will be moved by the work Giles has accomplished and put together in this vivid and compelling book. I specifically enjoyed when Giles stated that, “The paradox of the grassroots organizer is that they often feel equally frantic about the urgency of their work and helpless to make a difference” (Giles 2021, 248). Giles follows with the reminder that FNB’s persistence and impact on the people involved are “an end in themselves” (Giles 2021, 249). Giles now recognizes that such caring labor is the “raw material of new political forms” that enables communities and economies to be built differently from those of the market-public (Giles 2021, 249-250). *A Mass Conspiracy to Feed People: Food Not Bombs and the World-Class Waste of Global Cities* does an incredible job of exposing the inequalities that are embedded in the current food system and how capitalism ensures the reproduction of those inequalities, along with providing hope and steps that can be taken towards more food secure future.

## REFERENCES

Giles, David Boarder. *A Mass Conspiracy to Feed People: Food Not Bombs and the World-Class Waste of Global Cities*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2021.