

Counter Accounts, Accountability and Governance

Darlene Himick and Eija Vinnari

Abstract

Counter accounts are alternative representations of the activities and impacts of organizations, industries or governance regimes. Often developed by activists or non-governmental organizations, their aim is to flag abuses of power and thereby rectify a state of affairs that is considered societally or ecologically harmful or otherwise undesirable. In this chapter, we examine extant counter accounting research from the perspective of accountability and governance. Somewhat surprisingly, there appears to be fairly little research on these themes. The link between accountability and counter accounts is either ignored or taken for granted, whereas the notion of governance is hardly addressed. Much future research potential thus exists. We envisage opportunities for further enquiry that investigates these linkages in more depth. This is especially so since, considering the state our planet is in, counter accounts contesting the neoliberal hegemony and the misfortune it spawns are likely to increase in both number and form.

Keywords: counter accounts; shadow accounts; external accounts; accountability; governance

Introduction

In this chapter, we explore whether, and if so, how, counter accounts are implicated in shaping accountability and governance. These accounts, which take a wide variety of forms including reports, stories, poetry, images, and more, are intended to provide a counter-narrative to powerful representations like traditional accounting, with its formally reported figures and narratives. Grounded in the notion of a multi-voiced, plural society, counter accounts aspire to introduce such pluralism into the governance and accountability of organizations, governments, and other powerful entities by bringing a diversity of views and impacts to light. This is hoped to result in the eradication or at least reduction of unequal power distribution, and the emancipation of marginalized constituencies on behalf of whom the counter accounts are produced.

The power of counter accounts is the way in which they engage people to pay attention to the alternative narratives which are otherwise hidden or silenced. Breaking free from formal accounting rules, including accounting standards, and structures, the creativity and freedom which counter accounts enjoy help them to garner attention and activate emotion in their audiences. Frequently created and mobilized by social activists, they provide alternative takes on rational, quantified events, re-framing them to include their impacts, including the suffering of humans and non-human animals, and the degradation of the environment. Their goal is to give voice to those who are sidelined in traditional dominant accounting narratives, and to hold such narratives up for scrutiny. In this way, they could be expected to be deeply implicated in shaping accountability and governance and, in the process, broadening understandings and perspectives.

This chapter proceeds as follows. We begin with an overview of the concept of counter accounts and its link to a multi-vocal, dialogical view of accounting, with a focus on how the concept has been mobilized in the academic accounting literature. The vast majority of counter accounts aim to hold actors to account for particular practices, and we review the ways in which counter accounts work to focus a lens on the accountability of powerful actors. Next follows a section on how counter accounts enact different forms of governance, through their ability to problematize existing governance structures, and how they incorporate differing views of effective governance. Finally, we end with their potential – both in the academic literature, and also in society – closing with suggestions for continued study.

What are counter accounts?

Counter accounts have been defined as alternative representations of organizations, industries or governance regimes, produced by civic society groups in order to rectify a state of affairs that is considered harmful or otherwise undesirable (Thomson et al., 2015). Such accounts first attracted the attention of social and environmental accounting researchers who had become disillusioned by corporate social responsibility (CSR) reporting. For years, CSR reporting was considered the way forward to help tame corporate and organizational misdeeds. According to its proponents, the social and environmental information provided in voluntary CSR reports will help financiers and other stakeholders undertake comprehensive evaluations of companies' overall performance, make appropriate decisions, and thereby gradually steer production and consumption onto a more sustainable track (see Gray et al., 2014a). Yet, despite having become a firmly institutionalized practice among multinational companies (Bebbington et al., 2014), voluntary CSR disclosures have largely failed to fulfill the societal expectations placed on them (Deegan et al., 2002; Adams, 2004; Cho et al., 2010).

A primary reason for this failure is that companies compile and publish CSR reports mainly for the purpose of image management, to guarantee their societal license to operate, which is why the reports highlight positive results while downplaying or omitting negative ones (e.g., Aerts & Cormier, 2009; Boiral, 2013; Milne et al., 2009). Moreover, it has been pointed out that the situation is unlikely to change due to conflicting institutional pressures that in effect compel companies to engage in organized hypocrisy by decoupling the promises made in their CSR reports from their proper actions (Cho et al., 2015). Criticism has also been levied at those who believe that voluntary CSR reporting would, in any way, shatter the foundations of the capitalist market economy (Gray et al., 2014a; Spence, 2009). These fundamental shortcomings in corporate reporting and action have given rise to the need for complementary sources of information, which contemporary scholars call counter accounts¹.

It is claimed that by offering additional information and portraying problematic issues in a different light, counter accounts are able to problematize and 'make "thinkable" and "governable" such issues that are currently regarded as "unthinkable" and "ungovernable" by those in power' (Dey et al., 2011, p. 66). In addition, critical accounting scholars prompted by similar concerns of societal power inequalities and the dominance of particular worldviews see counter accounts as having potential to foster pluralistic democracy, which 'recognizes and addresses differentials in power, beliefs and desires of constituencies' (Brown et al., 2015, p. 627; see also Brown and Dillard, 2015; Gallhofer et al., 2015). Brown and Dillard

(2013), for instance, maintain that the often-used consensus-oriented models of democracy entail a risk that those in a privileged socio-economic position end up dominating and imposing their own viewpoints in both broader societal discussions and corporate stakeholder engagement processes. The authors perceive various forms of counter accounts as potentially effective media for giving marginalized constituencies visibility and voice, thereby enhancing the pluralist quality of such debates and perhaps even facilitating the emancipation of such constituencies. Likewise, Lehman et al. (2016, p. 44) point out that counter accounts could offer 'a way of challenging prevailing official positions' by providing new knowledge and alternative visibilities to the dominant neoliberal representation.

Counter accounts have also been defined with reference to the core concepts of traditional accounting, namely information, users and decisions. While the traditional purpose of conventional accounting is to provide investors and creditors with predominantly quantitative and financial information about economic entities for the purposes of decision-making and assessing management's accountability (Accounting Principles Board, 1970; International Accounting Standards Board, 2010), counter accounts may contain also qualitative and non-financial information concerning entire industries or governance regimes, for a broad range of constituencies who can utilize this information for making not only economic decisions but also moral and political ones (Vinnari & Laine, 2017). In practice, counter accounts can assume a variety of forms, such as one-off written reports, videos, or a longer-term campaign including a range of materials. Often cited examples from the early 2000s include the 'Other Shell Report', published by the Friends of the Earth as a response to Shell's report 'People, Planet and Profit', and the 'British American Tobacco: The Other Report to Society', published by the Action on Smoking and Health, as an alternative perspective on the tobacco company's social auditing initiative and associated disclosures (see Thomson et al., 2015).

Counter accounts can be categorized in various ways. An early typology is offered by Dey (2003), who distinguishes between silent accounts and shadow accounts. A *silent* account refers to an alternative representation of organizational activities, compiled from the information produced and published by a focal organization, serving the purpose of presenting the organization in a different light. Although silent accounts may sound reformist rather than radical, their advantage lies in the fact that the organization in question cannot easily deflect accusations by claiming that the data upon which the account is based, is false. A *shadow* account, in turn, refers to the disclosure of information that has been gathered from sources external to the organization under scrutiny. The purpose of shadow accounts is to fill in gaps in organizational reporting and challenge aspects that the organization may have misrepresented. In other words, shadow accounts are more radical in their aspirations than silent accounts, but because they rely on information produced outside the organization, they might become subject to allegations of data misrepresentation.

A comprehensive typology of counter accounts has been developed by Thomson et al. (2015) building on previous research in accounting and social movement studies. The typology consists of four categories of counter accounts²: systematic, partisan, contra-governing, and dialogic. The types are distinguished on the basis of 'differences in the underlying intentions, values and rationalities of those producing the accounts' (Thomson et al., 2015, p. 813). *Systematic* counter accounts question some

aspects of a target organization's activities, for instance by submitting evidence of environmental harm to appropriate regulatory authorities. *Partisan* external accounts, in turn, aim at transforming particular technologies, organizational conduct or elements of the dominant governance regime that are condemned by the actor(s) producing the counter account. Although partisan counter accounts may resemble systematic accounts, a major difference is that partisan counter accounts weave emotional narratives among factual evidence with the aim of emphasizing the morally and ethically questionable aspects of organizational or institutional action. Partisan counter accounts are confrontational in the sense that they are employed to 'antagonize and de-legitimate elements within the existing governance regime' (Thomson et al., 2015, p. 814). In contrast, *contra-governing* accounts do not focus on a specific technology, organization or element of the governance regime, but instead aim to critique, challenge and ultimately radically transform the entire governance regime. Such accounts aim to 'critique the fundamental knowledge base (ideology) of those in power' (Thomson et al., 2015, p. 814) and to replace it with their own ideology. Finally, *dialogic* counter accounts underscore the necessity of opening up discussions, listening to multiple voices and acknowledging the diversity of potentially irreconcilable viewpoints associated with a particular issue. The major difference between dialogic accounts and the three other types of counter accounts is that the producers of the former call for multiple accounts related to an issue and employ such accounts to identify common ground as a basis for initiating cooperation, rather than conflict.

To summarize, the main purpose of counter accounts is to problematize organizational or institutional conduct that is perceived to emanate from unequal power configurations and to have harmful social or environmental impacts. Counter accounts are compiled by actors who are external to an organization and beyond its control, with the aim of initiating debate and discussion that will result in the emancipation of marginalized groups and, hopefully, lead society towards socially and environmentally beneficial forms of organizing.

Studies of counter accounts and counter accounts as studies

The literature on counter accounts has approached the topic from a variety of angles. Some studies have investigated the counter accounts produced by activists and others, using these accounts as empirical examples of the phenomenon from a variety of theoretical standpoints. Other studies have themselves constructed their own counter accounts. Other research has remained at a conceptual level, arguing for the increased use of these accounts to bring a more democratic lens or provide pathways for participation in otherwise marginalized issues, or perhaps offering suggestions on what needs to change for counter accounts to have more impact.

Studies of counter accounts

A key question in research on counter accounts pertains to their emancipatory intent and potential. An early paper in this theme is Gallhofer et al. (2006), which examines this potential in the case of online reporting. In their study, emancipation is understood in a broad sense, as the challenging of the hegemonic positions held by governments, large companies and associated institutions to promote

democratic principles and practices for the benefit of citizens (ibid., p. 682). The authors noted that at the time, some of the positive potential of online reporting was being realized in that it helped activist organizations engaged in a counter hegemonic struggle to produce and disseminate a wealth of material, contact other NGOs and reach a wide audience to broaden deliberation on proposals or strategies. On the other hand, that potential was also impeded by the increasing colonization of the internet by anti-democratic states and commercial interests. These findings anticipate what is well established today (spring 2022); that the internet, especially social media, provide tools for both hegemonic and counter hegemonic forces.

Apostol (2015) continues on the theme of emancipation, analysing the role of civil society's counter accounts in facilitating democratic change. Empirically speaking, she examines the popular protests and counter accounting campaigns that emerged as a response to a Canadian mining company's plans to open a gold mine in Romania, a project strongly supported by the Romanian state. Civil society groups produced counter accounts that contested the purported economic benefits while laying out the various ways in which the mine would produce destructive impacts on ecosystems and biodiversity, historical artefacts and other cultural heritage, as well as the local community who would need to move away from the village. Apostol argues that the counter accounts had many positive impacts, such as revealing the unbalanced representation of the project in the company's reports, bringing out the voice of the locals resisting the mine, initiating public discussion on the social, cultural and environmental problems associated with the mine, and showing how the Romanian state sided with the company. Yet, unfortunately but not unexpectedly, the counter accounts did not result in the company withdrawing from its plans or the Romanian state changing its viewpoint in this respect.

Similar small-scale emancipatory effects have been found by Laine and Vinnari (2017), who focus on the societal dynamics and effects associated with animal rights activists' counter accounts compiled on behalf of farmed animals. With these accounts, the activists sought to show and question the ways in which animal production violates the animals' rights and welfare. In practice, the counter accounts took the form of, among other things, secretly filmed videos from Finnish piggeries. In theoretical terms, Laine and Vinnari (2017) combine Thomson et al.'s (2015) typology of counter accounts with Discourse Theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Laclau, 2005) to analyze interview and documentary data. They find that although the counter accounts were to some extent able to rearticulate the meaning of animal production in the Finnish context, their societal impacts remained rather small-scale; public discussion emerged for a moment and meat consumption decreased marginally. Laine and Vinnari (2017) suggest that one potential reason for this might be the dominant societal groups' dismissal of the counter accounts and those groups' attempts to constitute the activists' identity as irresponsible, militant and negligent, resulting in a polarized situation where the parties harbor an antagonistic relationship towards each other.

The mechanism by which counter accounts are expected to produce emancipatory effects has also been awarded attention. Vinnari and Laine (2017) examine the moral mechanism of counter accounts in their case study of animal rights' activists counter accounts of the animal industry (empirically related to Laine & Vinnari, 2017, reviewed above). Drawing on a combination of media studies and critical

(semiotic) discourse analysis, they find that the emancipatory and transformative potential of counter accounts is associated with their ability to act as a form of moral and political education. This is because they repeatedly suggest to their audiences how to feel about, and act publicly/politically on, the suffering of an oppressed group. In relation to the small-scale effects noted by Laine & Vinnari (2017), the authors suggest that in order to engender transformative political action, counter accounts would need to explicate the moral case against a harmful practice, articulate a clear vision of the sought-after future as well as evolve over time in terms of both mode and content.

In the same vein, Himick and Ruff (2020) analyze how social movement activists' counter accounts frame profitmaking or profits and how those accounts give rise to action in multiple case settings. Informed by framing theory, the authors examine counter accounts of profit produced by the UK abolition movement, by the Médecines Sans Frontières access to essential medicines campaign and by Brigitte Bardot Foundation's opposition to the Canadian seal hunt. In the empirical cases examined, counter accounts sought to emancipate, respectively, colonial slaves from a life of drudgery under violent oppression, poor individuals from the power of rich pharmaceutical companies and non-human animals from unnecessary death through an arguably recreational activity. Similar to Vinnari & Laine (2017), Himick and Ruff (2020) find that the activists reframe profit for the purpose of making visible the suffering of distant others, eliciting moral outrage on behalf of these oppressed groups, and, ultimately, achieving a more just society. They remind readers that all framings are necessarily incomplete, and accounting is no exception; in this case it allows outsiders to challenge conventional interpretations of profit and illustrate how accounting can be utilized as an apparently rational tool for 'emancipation at a distance' (p. 700).

Research that examines counter accounts produced by activists and others is very diverse in terms of empirical settings and theoretical perspectives. Perkiss, et. al. (2020) examine how Nestlé's child labour practices are both presented (as Goffman's frontstage) and critiqued (by activist-generated counter accounts). In this view of counter accounts, emancipation is connected to questioning and problematizing a corporate organization's legitimacy. The counter account is a tool, used to question the organization's legitimacy, in a way that is to some degree a challenge to the established order. An interesting aspect to their study is the extension to the 'counter- to the counter-accounts', in which Nestlé responds to its critics, partly by controlling certain media narratives. These corporate responses demonstrate the potential limits to the emancipatory *identity* of the counter account if powerful actors can themselves also draw upon the same strategies as the activists who seek change.

The issue of how, through what media or material means, counter accounts are produced or disseminated, is an important topic, and one which is linked with emancipation as it provides a venue to level the playing field against the corporative control of narratives. For instance, in today's digital era, social media is a means for dissemination that provides cost-effective access to wide audiences, contributing to democratizing the construction of narratives around a cause. In contrast to official media accounts, which we have seen can be used strategically by corporations to control the narrative, online forums still have much potential for counter account dissemination (Perkiss, et. al, 2021). These online

forums facilitate new counter accounts as well as responses to counter accounts (see also Lowe et. al., 2012 for a discussion of the potential of the Internet, and particularly digitized open data).

In line with research that studies the forum in which the counter accounts are produced is the idea that not all participants in a debate have equal access to information in different forums. In other words, it is important to acknowledge the lack of information available to those outside the organization when considering how available counter accounts are as a strategy. Sikka (2011), for instance, calls for the use of counter accounts, particularly pointing to how citizens can participate more deeply in corroborating corporate claims. However, given the 'selective disclosures' which are 'bolted on to financial reports' (p. 824), it is imperative to strengthen the ways in which counter accounts could be produced in the first place. While civil society organizations elevate the human rights agenda through these accounts, more could be done to strengthen the availability of information they need to do so. In his study on Chad and Cameroon, Sikka (2011) suggests concrete actions, such as placing freedom of information laws on corporations (which are increasingly displacing the state – an entity already subject to freedom of information regulation), so that they are required to publish their investor agreements and enhance the ability to scrutinize their practices as well as enhance the accountability of corporations. Given how much counter accounts depend upon providing information and countering information, their emancipatory potential is constrained in the face of dominant interests who control that information.

But in the absence of regulation, as Deegan (2017, p. 75) notes, it is difficult to see how this will emerge. Deegan suggests the development of 'practice sets' (p. 84) within the classroom, presenting counter accounts to learners. This would assist in showing them that for many areas of operation there are potentially multiple perspectives. Counter accounts as a strategy are, thus, nested within broader forms of struggle and reform.

But even if activists, or those outside the organization, get access to the information they need, or find more democratic venues to disseminate their counter accounts, there still remains the issue around whether the account genuinely confronts the dominant entity in a way that holds them to account and creates the demand for a response. Pupovac and Moerman (2020), for instance, take two separate accounts about the Niger delta oil spills: Shell's CSR reports and Friends of the Earth's counter account. They show, using the concept of the spectacle as used by Debord (1967), how these two accounts can confront one another – in the theatre. Setting up the two as actors on stage, their paper illustrates how accounts need the space to truly respond to moral critique; and also how those for whom civic society organizations like the Friends of Earth speak for also need to be 'on stage' to be part of the dialogue. It is not enough to create a counter account. The way in which they are used, the strength with which they confront the hegemony that they seek to alter, are crucial for their emancipatory potential.

Studies that are counter-accounts

As mentioned further above, counter accounts are also used as research method by scholars with an emancipatory intent. Some of these studies focus on individual companies or industries, while others target entire governance regimes such as neoliberal capitalism. To begin with the first group, Boiral (2013) produces a counter account of energy and mining firms' Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) -based

sustainability reports that had been rated A or A+ by the organization. He finds that those reports are significantly biased towards reporting positive events as some 90 per cent of the significant negatives that took place during the reporting period were omitted from the firms' reports. In addition, his analysis indicates that the majority of the pictures included in the reports can be conceptualized as simulacra that are disconnected from the actual effects of the firms' operations. Boiral (2013) concludes that counter accounts are necessary to reveal discrepancies in firms' sustainability reports and flag flaws in the transparency of information provided. In broader terms, he considers such accounts necessary so that we can 'emancipate ourselves from the hegemonic discourse conveyed in sustainability reporting' (p. 1045).

In constructing counter accounts, scholars can themselves participate in challenging dominant narratives. Such work can generate meaningful comparisons between corporate claims and other forms of knowledge. For instance, Talbot and Boiral (2018) create their own counter account by comparing a select group of company-produced climate reports, against the GRI method these companies should have used in their reporting. Using the concept of counter account as a challenge to corporate impression management, they revealed the disclosure of noncompliant information, the legitimation of negative information through neutralizing or obfuscating it, as well as enhancement of positive performance. Contrasted with this disclosure-focused work is academic counter accounts created through interviews of labour rights NGOs. Islam, et al. (2021) create counter accounts by interviewing asking NGOs about the narratives produced by multi-national corporations (MNCs) operating in Bangladesh around the time of the Tarzeen fire and the Rana Plaza collapse (the period covering 2012-2014). By putting the MNCs account to the representatives of these NGOs, the authors uncovered the counter account which challenged the MNCs' moral power and, consequently, their moral authority to determine what was 'acceptable' labour-oriented human rights.

A study that well demonstrates the usefulness of scholarly counter accounts is Ylönen and Laine (2015), which constructs a counter account of how a major Finnish pulp and paper company used transfer pricing to gain considerable tax benefits. In this case, the counter account is produced on behalf of the Finnish government, which did not receive the tax income due to it, and, ultimately, on behalf the citizens who either are deprived of certain public services due to lack of public funds or have to pay more taxes to compensate for the corporation's tax planning activities. The company's silence on these arrangements is contrasted with its purported commitment to accurate and transparent communication, to the highest ethical principles and, therefore, to being a role model willing to engage in an open dialogue with its stakeholders. Ylönen and Laine (2015) point out that counter accounts created by scholars to challenge corporate hegemony are particularly significant in areas such as financial accounting and taxation, which require professional knowledge, expertise and ethics.

Moving on to the group of scholarly counter accounts which targets entire governance regimes, Collison et al. (2010) also criticize Anglo-American neoliberal capitalism by offering a counter account of its socio-economic performance. In terms of empirics, the authors review and updates cross-sectional and longitudinal indicators on child mortality in wealthy nations and the relationship between these figures

and income inequality. They argue that the statistical correlation between hardnosed capitalism and increased child mortality strongly calls into question the claimed superiority of this variant of capitalism.

Lehman et al. (2016) continue the critique of neoliberalism by compiling counter accounts in the form of immigrant narratives of their lived experiences. More specifically, the authors' aim is to reveal the social imbalances and inequalities associated with neoliberal immigration policies of the USA, Canada and the UK. The authors find that three countries' immigration policies are operationalized through the responsabilization of individuals, corporations and universities, with accounting technologies facilitating such responsabilization processes. As other entities are responsabilized, the authority of immigration policies shifts away from elected and civil officials. The immigrants in turn learn to internalize fear as they become subject to surveillance and classification, which divides them into wanted and unwanted based on their capacity to contribute to the economy. These scholarly counter accounts therefore make visible the darker side of immigration policies that privilege the productive capacity of immigrants over their social and moral agency.

Finally, Andrew and Baker (2020) explore the transformative potential of a new form of data, leaked documents, as a form of counter accounting. They do this by producing a shadow account of the nature of neoliberal hegemony based on documents published by Wikileaks as part of the public scandal titled "Cablegate". These documents revealed private communications between various United States Embassy officials concerning Chevron Nigeria between 2002 and 2010, illustrating how local communities' resistance towards the continuation of oil production in Nigeria was overpowered and silenced by the state-capital nexus involving both government and business actors. Andrew and Baker (2020) claim that leaked documents hold potential to be used as a basis for counter accounts to challenge powerful hegemonic coalitions or, in the words of Mouffe (2018, p. 4), to 're-politicize and radicalize democracy'.

What do counter accounts have to do with accountability?

In this section we will examine how the relationship between counter accounts and accountability has been addressed in prior research. Overall, we note that the majority of counter accounting studies do not engage with the theme of accountability, expect in passing, and many of those that do seem to take the concept and its connection to counter accounting for granted. Hence, only a handful of studies in our sample offer theorized notions of accountability and/or in-depth reflections on the accountability mechanism associated with counter accounts. In what follows, first we provide examples of articles that provide fairly straightforward definitions of accountability but still explain how they consider counter accounts to advance accountability and, second, we consider in more detail the studies that theorize accountability and/or reflect on how counter accounts might contribute to the discharge of accountability.

One of the posited linkages between counter accounts and accountability is the idea that such accounts intend to pressure companies to be more accountable to societal groups. This is illustrated by O'Sullivan and O'Dwyer's (2009) study, which concerns NGOs' counter accounting activities related to the initiation

and development of the Equator Principles, a set of social and environmental risk management guidelines for commercial banks' project finance activities. O'Sullivan and O'Dwyer (2009) define accountability in a broad sense with reference to Roberts and Scapens (1985, 447) as 'the giving and demanding of reasons of conduct'. They state that one of the key motivations for NGOs' counter accounts is 'a desire to hold organisations to account and force them to be more accountable for their actions' (p. 559). In the case they examined, various types of counter accounts were utilized by NGOs to, first, reveal the socially and ecologically harmful impacts of projects financed by commercial banks; second, pressure the banks to screen projects to be financed by applying the Equator Principles; and third, compel the banks to report on their activities in this respect in a transparent and holistic fashion. As a result of their longitudinal study of the dynamics between the NGOs and the banking sector, O'Sullivan and O'Dwyer (2009) conclude that although the NGOs' counter accounts set in motion the development of the guidelines, they were less successful in increasing accountability as the banks only agreed to a minimal level of disclosure.

Dynamics between stakeholders and business are also analyzed by Rodrigue (2014). However, whereas O'Sullivan and O'Dwyer (2009) examine counter accounts as a tool wielded by NGOs to increase societal awareness and pressure organizations to implement more comprehensive accountability mechanisms, Rodrigue (2014) combines academic inquiry of the dynamics of counter accounts with an evaluation of the type of accountability approach adopted by the focal company. In this respect, Rodrigue (2014) responds to Dey's (2007) call to form a comprehensive picture of organizational accountability by comparing the information provided by a Canadian forestry company with the information included in its stakeholders' counter accounts. Rodrigue (2014) defines accountability with reference to Gray et al. (1997) as 'the duty of an organization to provide an account of the actions for which it is held responsible in the eyes of its stakeholders' (Rodrigue, 2014, p. 122). Further, she mobilizes Unerman's (2007) idea of different types of accountability forming a continuum from holistic to strategic accountability.

Briefly, holistic accountability demands that a firm be accountable to all stakeholders impacted by its operations regardless of their importance to the firm, whereas strategic accountability extends only to those stakeholders that are considered important by the firm because they can have an impact on the achievement its objectives. In addition to identifying different patterns of information flows between stakeholders and the company, Rodrigue (2014) finds that the company's stance on accountability is mostly strategic as it reports selectively on aspects of its performance that are most relevant to its shareholders and rarely reacts to other stakeholders' counter accounts. Thus, also in this case counter accounts were perceived to have only a relatively small impact on improving an organization's accountability to a broader stakeholder base.

While the two studies reviewed above (O'Sullivan & O'Dwyer, 2009; Rodrigue, 2014) examine counter accounts intended to problematize the harmful practices of, respectively, an industry and a single company, Denedo et al. (2017) consider counter accounts that problematize the practices of not only businesses but also local and national government. Denedo et al. (2017) note as their starting point that one of the main drivers of counter accounts is the lack of accountability and governance systems

designed to protect human rights and the natural environment. In particular, counter accounts are devised by what the authors call alternative networks of accountability and governance, which use the accounts to problematize extant practices and to instigate intervention from the part of power holders. Interestingly, although accountability is mentioned often, the authors do not define it in any way.

In empirical terms, Denedo et al. (2017) examine international advocacy NGOs' counter accounting campaigns aimed at making visible accountability gaps exploited by multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, such as the lack of effective government regulation of the industry; to change harmful practices and bring about reforms of governance and accountability systems. Interestingly, the interviewed NGO representatives seem to have implicitly questioned the importance of accountability as an end in itself. They doubted that counter accounts and other forms of increased accountability would result in any significant change in the Niger Delta. Instead, they perceived a pressing need for NGOs to establish coalitions with power holders such as investors, judicial systems, and international rule enforcers (ibid., 1329) so as to initiate a comprehensive reform of the country's governance and accountability systems and thereby curb multinational oil companies' destructive practices.

As mentioned above, only a handful of papers offer theorized notions of accountability. One of these is Murphy and Moerman (2018), which discusses how "Strategic Law Suits Against Public Participation" (SLAPPs)³ effectively prevent the use of counter accounts and other forms of citizen participation in politically tuned public debates. The authors define accountability with reference to Bovens (2010), distinguishing between accountability as a mechanism and accountability as a virtue. Accountability as mechanism is an *ex post facto* process which consists of three stages: an actor's obligation to provide an account to explain their actions and decisions, the opportunity to question this actor about the account, and the judgement passed by the forum to whom the account is presented (ibid, p. 951). This type of accountability, which is discharged for instance via organizations' formal reports, is passive and backward-looking (ibid.) In contrast, accountability as a virtue is future-oriented and active as it calls for the *ex-ante* exercise of judgement, focusing on what should be done in each situation.

Accountability as a virtue is also normative as it offers a set of standards for evaluating the actions of others in a public sphere where being accountable is considered, in itself, to be virtuous (ibid.) The mechanism through which Murphy and Moerman (2018) expect counter accounts to improve accountability is by 'problematizing self-serving and hegemonic organizational reporting' (p. 1775) and by promoting instead 'a civic ideal of transparency and accountability' (p. 1782). In particular, counter accounts are considered to offer an alternative accountability mechanism that enables the relative virtue of corporate behavior to be evaluated against civil society's norms (p. 1788). In empirical terms, the authors study SLAPPs brought by McDonald's to quell public resistance to its plans to open an outlet in an Australian suburb and find that SLAPPs are a threat to both accountability as a mechanism and accountability as a virtue.

An alternative theorization of accountability is employed in Perkiss et al. (2020), which considers the potential of Spotlight Accounting to 'improve the accountability propensity of contemporary CSR' (p.

399). Spotlight Accounting is, according to the authors, a form of counter accounting that relies on crowdsourcing to compile publicly available information about organizations' social responsibility on an online platform. Such information can be gathered by interested individuals from corporate CSR reports, official government reports, news media as well as silent and shadow accounts. In theoretical terms, Perkiss et al. (2020) see Spotlight Accounting as a 'third space' between conventional, company-focused financial accountability and critical dialogic accountability as envisioned by Dillard and Vinnari (2019).

Critical dialogic accounting is inspired by Mouffe's (2013) agonistic democracy, a political theory which considers deliberative, consensus-seeking approaches to democracy to be insufficient in contemporary (Western) democracies characterized by plurality of values and power differentials. In Mouffe's (2000; 2013) view, we should acknowledge such power differentials and the antagonisms stemming from irreconcilable viewpoints, while being open about the political nature of the decisions that ultimately need to be made. In this spirit, Dillard and Vinnari (2019) theorize critical dialogic accountability as an iterative process whereby an organization is considered to be accountable to all constituencies, human and non-human, affected by its activities. These constituencies' interests are represented by responsibility networks, which devise criteria that are then utilized to evaluate the organizations' activities based on disclosures emanating from the organization's accounting systems designed to accommodate each constituency's information needs. According to Perkiss et al. (2020), Spotlight Accounting adheres to some of these principles as it enables a plurality of stakeholders to create and view accounts of CSR. In empirical terms, the study engaged university students to collate information about selected companies and indicators on WikiRate, a non-profit platform where users can upload corporate data related to CSR and sustainability. As a result of their analysis, the authors note that the theoretical potential of this form of counter accounting was left largely unfulfilled due to obstacles in data accessibility, ambiguities in the scope of data covered, lack of benchmarks for materiality considerations, and the vast amount of effort required from the 'crowd' gathering the data. They conclude that due to paucity of other data sources, improved accountability through Spotlight Accounting requires improved corporate reporting. This is somewhat ironic as deficiencies in corporate reporting are one of the reasons why counter accounting emerged in the first place.

In contrast to the studies considered above, Gray et al. (2014b) explicitly challenge the taken-for-granted position of counter accounts as a mechanism for discharging accountability. Taking their cue from Wright's (2010) work on social transformation, Gray et al. explore the potential of social accounting and different types of accounts to this end. Based on many years of research, Wright (2010) differentiated between three main ways in which social change can take place: rupture, symbiotic transformation, and interstitial transformation. Of these, rupture refers to a revolution in a Marxist sense, whereby capitalist structures are more or less violently crushed; symbiotic transformation indicates reformist changes to alleviate the most harmful consequences of capitalism; and interstitial transformation refers to the construction of non-capitalist institutions within the niches of capitalism. According to Gray et al. (2014b), the social accounting project has thus far experimented mainly with symbiotic transformations, such as voluntary social and environmental reporting, which are easier for the powerful to accommodate but easily result in co-optation and a watering down of initial aims through selective reporting (Boiral, 2013) and representational techniques (Tregidga, Milne and Kearins,

2014). Those authors appear to agree with Wright's (2010) view that interstitial transformation holds the most promise in terms of attaining a more equal, democratic society, and call for more counter accounts and other interstitial accounts to further such development. However, they also point out that the position of such accounts in relation to accountability is ambiguous (Gray et al., 2014b, p. 270):

Those [accounts] of a more symbiotic intent appear to be motivated to help an entity develop and discharge its own accountability whilst those of more explicitly interstitial intent would seem to be engaged in some combination of speaking for/on behalf of those whose relationships demand an accountability; speaking for some notion of principle regarding such accountability; and/or directly and unequivocally seeking to speak truth to power. Whilst accountability remains clearly one part of the functioning of these accounts, it may actually be that accountability can no longer be seen as the *sine qua non* of some of these developmental forms of social accounting.

Unfortunately, Gray et al. (2014b) do not delve deeper into what the relationship between accountability and counter accounts – as well as interstitial accounts more broadly, could look like. To us this suggests an opportunity for further research, an issue that we will pick up again in the concluding section of this chapter.

How are counter accounts related to governance?

Governance is a term so broad in both scholarship and practice as to virtually escape definition (Pierre & Peters, 2000). Indeed, its 'structures, systems, and practices' (CAAF, 2021) include monitoring, reporting, and decision-making about all aspects of an organization. For the purposes of connecting counter accounts (in practice or research) to governance, we position these accounts in two ways. They can attempt to *change* existing governance practices into something which they believe will improve the condition of the issue they call attention to, or they can *use* existing governance practices to stake their claims.

Regarding *the use of counter accounts to transform existing governance structures*, in one of the only studies that expressly dealt with governance, Denedo, et. al., (2017, as previously discussed in the prior section) outline how the NGOs in Nigeria sought out the reform of certain aspects of the governance system related to oil and its exploration in that country. The NGOs decided upon counter accounts as a strategy to alter pre-existing governance systems, and found some success in reforming part of the regulatory structure, with one of their interviewees suggesting that the counter accounts 'galvanised companies to become a lot more serious about responding to concerns as they are raised.' (p. 1332. To those activists, a 'catalogue of harm to people and their natural environment,' (p. 1321) which had not been included in the corporate or governmental accounts of the Niger delta, was one way to address the lack of transparency. One of the ways in which governance was impacted, and, altered, was through the disruption of the political dynamics and power struggles around the governance of the oil reserves.

Problematic, though, was that despite an increase in transparency brought about by the catalogue of harm and related counter-accounts, the governance structure related to how resources were assigned to mitigate/prevent oil spills or remediate impacted lands and rivers, did not change. As Denedo, et. al.,

(2017) note, 'Better accounting for this problem allowed (NGOs) and other coalition partners to ask better questions about what had been done, but had not led to the resolution or remediation of the problematic consequences of oil spillage.' (p. 1333). For that to take place, the authors argued that the involvement of local communities in the governance practices that related to remediation – and not to transparency – was necessary.

This fascinating account drills down into the different manifestations of governance practices, hinting that some are more important for transformative action than others. It points to research that, we believe, is needed in order to begin to connect the dots between counter accounts and governance. As governance is broad, there are multiple ways in which it materializes, and this nuance can be captured with a look at where, and to what practice, a counter account is directed. Clearly, more research is warranted that examines how, and to what extent, actual governance practices and systems are either the target of counter accounts, or are changed or reinterpreted, in reaction to counter account production.

Concerning the second mode of connection between governance and counter accounts, we can turn to the practices of corporate governance for a fruitful example of *how counter accounts can use governance practices themselves*. For instance, one of the classic mechanisms for corporate governance is the annual general meeting (AGM) which offers the opportunity for owners (and their proxies) to pose questions to management. This venue presents a physical and temporal space in which the accounts of management can be directly challenged, including via the presentation of alternative accounts. As Apostolides (2007) notes, mere attendance at or even outside an AGM by protest groups can often create headlines (p. 1279), and the opportunity to question the board at AGMs offers one of the few routes through which small private investors can make their views heard, often in the 'eager earshot of the press and other media, who focus on such debacles as newsworthy events.'

Some activist groups purchase shares (since only one share is needed for participation) and these 'protestor-shareholders' gain access to the AGM to raise their concerns including via the provision of counter narratives to the management account. *ShareAction*, an organization that advises shareholders and others to become engaged in a number of environmental and social issues and use their voice to effect change, expressly uses the AGM process as one of its protest tools, training volunteers to become 'AGM Activists.'⁴ For example, the fossil fuel divestment movement has recently begun to produce counter accounts related to the claims that companies make regarding their 'net zero' targets. Protesters at the British Petroleum (BP) London AGM targeted the company's claims made around moving to net zero by producing a counter account listing actions taken by BP that undermined the claim, (Hayhurst, 2021).

Another classic venue in which corporate governance is practiced is the board of directors – its composition, meeting procedures, and decision-making processes. By taking further the research that exposes the benefits of diversifying the composition of boards, a counter-accounts focus can highlight how such diversity opens the potential for new accounts to be produced and in what ways. This sort of focus turns the lens to not only the 'who' of the counter account (i.e. whether it is produced by

activists), but also to the 'where' of the counter account, in other words the venue in which the account is disseminated, which also influences whether the accounts themselves are written, verbal, visual, or other.

Finally, thinking about governance and counter accounts leads us to problematize the micro- and macro-levels at which governance operates. The practices we have identified are enacted at the organizational level all the way up to 'global governance' in which broad, international networks operate to govern transnationally. As Perkiss, et. al., (2020) ask, 'Might counter accounts be more effective if they were orientated to possibilities for global governance? Or, realistically, are different counter accounts, each tackling micro-level issues, needed in addition to addressing the global condition?' These questions support the need for researchers to begin to unravel the different governance structures, at various levels, exercised through a variety of practices, with which counter accounts interact.

Critiques of counter accounts

As we noted earlier, one of the main goals of counter account production is to transform some (undesirable) practice into something different. Further, there is a strongly emancipatory element to counter account production, under the belief that bringing transparency and information to misdeeds is the path toward outrage and reform. But some scholars have noted the weakness in this approach, suggesting that capitalism is highly skilled in 're-articulating' in ways that do not 'threaten the basic *modus operandi* of business and markets', (Spence, 2009, p. 224; see also Catchpole and Smyth, 2016). Taking a Gramscian approach, Spence (2009) suggests that as long as counter accounts operate within that existing structure where business can legitimately offer only superficial change to the status quo, the 'new order cannot quite be born' (p. 224). The task, then, is to avoid placing too much of the heavy lifting on the counter account, and instead pair it with a completely separate activity, that is, the formation of a countervailing power, which itself is distanced from the economic base that can so handily capture the narrative in ways that are so unthreatening to it.

Perhaps the opposite approach is also possible, in which activists work closely with the hegemony they wish to supplant. A good example of this approach is the study by Toms and Shepherd (2017), which looked at the campaign to regulate child labor during the nineteenth century British industrial revolution. They showed how the movement's 'Trojan horse' strategy included progressive business interests in its leadership, gaining access to their business records, and mounting their argument in concert with that group's interests. What is suggested here is a deep understanding of the complex and myriad forms that power can be take, for example, in that study it mattered whether the interests of capital were all aligned during a conflict, or whether they were pitted one against the other from within. In the latter case (as shown by Toms and Shepherd, 2017), a social movement might construct counter accounts in alliance with one of the competing factions, even gaining access to privileged information (like accounting information) by doing so.

Further, the scope of the counter account target can, at times, be seen as simply too broad and imprecise to directly challenge in meaningful ways. According to Li and McKernan (2016), counter,

shadow and silent accounts represent what Srnicek and Williams (2015, p.3) call 'folk-political thinking', or 'the fetishisation of local spaces, immediate actions, transient gestures, and particularisms of all kinds'. Echoing the views of Srnicek and Williams (2015), Li and McKernan (2016) claim that counter accounts and other alternative forms of accounting and activist campaigning might generate notable local effects but, being more symbolic than substantive, fail to instigate any systemic change in the battle to eradicate global capitalism. Suggesting that counter accounts themselves are problematic, Gallhofer (2018) briefly considers counter accounts through an ecofeminist lens and finds them dualist and anthropocentric. She argues that although counter accounts have brought to the fore the voices and views of marginalized groups affected by corporate actions, they reflect 'a problematic Western dualism (i.e. official reports/unofficial reports)' (p. 2120). Further, Gallhofer (2018) claims that counter accounts represent only human beings and such anthropocentrism is untenable from an ecofeminist perspective. As a solution, she calls for counter accounts that would try to represent the point of view of non-human beings, although this would necessitate an act of mediation. Although it is not our intention to engage in a critique of Gallhofer's (2018) claims, we would like to point out that the representation of non-human animals' viewpoint is precisely the point behind the animal rights activists' counter accounts reviewed further above (Laine & Vinnari, 2017; Vinnari & Laine, 2017; Himick & Ruff, 2019).

Will counter accounts save our planet (and us)? Some future research avenues

As far as we can tell, counter accounts maintain their position as part of a broad array of activist tactics. So long as human rights or animal rights are violated and human activities wipe out entire species and ecosystems while governments and companies wring their hands or simply do not care, there is a pressing need for accounts constructed 'for the other, by the other' (Dey et al., 2011, p. 64). The development of new technologies is likely to result in a proliferation of the forms assumed by counter accounts, prompting researchers to investigate these new forms.

As mentioned earlier, the majority of counter accounting studies do not take issue with accountability and of those that do, many seem to take the connection between counter accounts and accountability for granted. The only exception seems to be Gray et al. (2014b), who suggest that accountability might have something to do with counter accounts but is likely to play a smaller role than in the case of formal corporate reporting. Such observations can be drawn upon to provide plenty of opportunities for future research efforts. For one, scholars could try to construct a more nuanced typology of the different ways in which the relationship between such accounts and accountability is conceived or theorized, either explicitly or implicitly. The studies we have cited herein broadly suggest that counter accounts are expected to i) pressure or help an organization to be accountable to a broader stakeholder base; ii) discharge accountability on behalf of an organization; or iii) offer an alternative mechanism of accountability that enables public evaluation of organizational activities. All these are slightly different things, and therefore it might be interesting to examine these more deeply or determine whether more such conceptions can be identified.

Future research could also investigate if there is an association between the type of entity targeted by the counter account and the expectations regarding accountability. We could imagine that the role of

accountability would be clearer in the case of counter accounts that criticize individual organizations or industries, and less clear in the case of counter accounts that critique entire governance regimes. Moreover, as a complement to scholarly interpretations, it would be interesting to learn how the developers of counter accounts perceive accountability and its relationship to such accounts. For instance, Denedo et al. (2017) indicate that activists did not consider increased accountability a panacea; what they were trying to achieve was a more fundamental change in societal power configurations and regulatory institutions. Therefore, as also insinuated by Gray et al. (2014b), could it be that accountability only plays a minor role in the mechanism of change implied by counter accounts? This might suggest that 'accountability' as a formal mechanism is not given the weight by activists that it has within governance regimes that rely upon it to legitimate their actions, an idea in need of empirical investigation.

This leads to a more fundamental question for the counter accounting project, which is: how do we know if counter-accounts work or rather partly work? One problem with the literature has been its reluctance to get into the level of detail required in terms of discovering impact. As Dillard and Vinnari (2017, p. 102) note, the starting point is to clearly articulate the 'source and extent' of the injustice at issue. What would it mean, in a given setting, for an alternative account to be successful? If counter accounts are to have the future we predict, which is that they increase in scope and number, including through new venues and technologies, then an underlying issue will be to consider ways to compare and contrast their successes and their failures.

Future research could also pay attention to the way that governance is implicated in the production and use of counter accounts. The broad meaning and scope of governance means that researchers have a variety of potential settings in which counter accounts might play a role. For instance, is governance the *target* of the counter account? Or is it the *means* through which the counter account is disseminated? In the former case, it would be useful for research to pull out deeper understandings of how activists problematize particular governance practices, and what expertise they draw upon when producing the counter account. Do they engage with the technical and financial information that informs the governance practice, or do they create their own understandings of governance to try to completely transform how governance works? Work which investigates the latter (means) could contribute to our understandings of the venues, spaces and technologies through which counter accounts operate more broadly. It could purposely look for, and try to, theorize the choice of venues (in-person AGMs vs online petitions, for instance), and how these contribute to the kind of account which is produced, the way that the account becomes amenable to 'travel' (through whose agency, through what material means).

Another fruitful line of enquiry could be, as we mentioned earlier, to take as a focus the *level* of governance that is at issue. Some counter accounts are specifically aimed at the micro- while others are aimed at the macro-level of practice and procedure. For instance, whether an account aims to highlight how a single polluting instance was managed versus how an entire industry is governed, has implications for what kinds of accounts are even possible, what audiences those accounts are aimed at, the kinds of answers they present as possible and, moreover, what lessons can be learned.

Conclusion

Our hope in this Chapter has been to highlight the research origins of the counter accounts concept, and organize the current literature into roughly two lines of focus: those which have analyzed the accounts produced by some social movement, and those which have produced their own counter accounts. In addition, we have brought the concept back to the theme of this book. As counter to existing accounts, these narratives are intimately related to accounting and its formal, dominant representations of organizational events. As ways to bring new visibilities to organizational actions, they implicitly and explicitly demand accountability from those they target. And, as accounts which are aimed at, or disseminated through, the very means that govern organizations, they are connected to governance mechanisms and practices.

If we have one message to leave the reader, it is that, in parallel with the accounts themselves, the extant work on counter accounts is essentially in its infancy. As counter accounts proliferate by mean of new technologies, new forms of organizing, and new 'open' data sources, among other things, so will their presence around us, and the need for us all to understand more about them. Research will be confronted with multiple opportunities to further develop what we already know, through new theorizations of how counter accounts work, and through engaging with our knowledge from other fields and concepts. This is indeed a topic of growing importance where leadership and innovation to reach the next level are both warranted.

Acknowledgements: Darlene Himick wishes to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (Canada) for supporting this research. Eija Vinnari wishes to thank the Academy of Finland for supporting this research as part of a funded project on "Constructing accountability in business-stakeholder relationships: the role of CSR communication", research grant 324215.

NOTES

¹ Other, often synonymously used terms include social audits (Medawar, 1976; Harte & Owen, 1987), silent or shadow accounts (Dey, 2003) and external accounts (Thomson et al., 2015). For the sake of clarity, we use counter accounts as an umbrella term throughout the paper in line with its increase recognition in recent years.

² Throughout their discussion, Thomson et al. (2015) employ the term external accounts instead of counter accounts.

³ SLAPPs are civil law suits that target citizens or groups to undermine their efforts to influence public opinion, for instance by deterring their otherwise legal behaviours like protesting, distributing pamphlets, etc. SLAPPs are often brought by corporations with an economic interest in the outcome of the issue at stake. Their power comes not from their legal position, but from the way in which they exhaust the resources of the target in responding to the lawsuit. (Scott & Tollefson, 2010).

⁴ <https://shareaction.org/agm-activism/>

References

- Accounting Principles Board, (1970). Statement No. 4, basic concepts and accounting principles underlying financial statements or business enterprises, American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, New York. Paragraph 40.
- Adams, C.A. (2004), "The ethical, social and environmental reporting performance portrayal gap", *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 5, pp. 731-754.
- Aerts, W. and Cormier, D. (2009), "Media legitimacy and corporate environmental communication", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 34, No. 1, pp. 1-27.
- Andrew, J. and Baker, M. (2020), "The radical potential of leaks in the shadow accounting project: The case of US oil interests in Nigeria", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 82, 101101.
- Apostol, O. (2015). "A project for Romania? The role of the civil society's counter-accounts in facilitating democratic change in society", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 210-241.
- Apostolides, N. (2007), "Directors versus shareholders: Evaluating corporate governance in the UK using the AGM scorecard", *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, Vol. 15, No. 6, pp. 1277-1287.
- Bebbington, J., Unerman, J., and O'Dwyer, B. (2014), *Sustainability Accounting and Accountability*, Routledge, Abingdon.
- Boiral, O. (2013), "Sustainability reports as simulacra? A counter-account of A and A+ GRI reports", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 26, No. 7, pp. 1036-1071.
- Bovens, M. (2010), "Two concepts of accountability: accountability as a virtue and as a mechanism", *West European Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 1, pp. 946-967.
- Brown, J. and Dillard, J. (2013), "Agonizing over engagement: SEA and the "death of environmentalism" debates", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 1-18.
- Brown, J. and Dillard, J. (2015), "Dialogical accountings for stakeholders: on opening up and closing down participatory governance", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 52 No. 7, pp. 961-985.
- Brown, J., Dillard, J. and Hopper, T. (2015), "Accounting, accountants and accountability regimes in pluralistic societies", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 5, pp. 626-650.
- CAAF (2021). What is governance? <https://www.caaf-fcar.ca/en/oversight-concepts-and-context/what-is-oversight-and-how-does-it-relate-to-governance/what-is-governance>; accessed 22 October 2021.

Catchpole, L., & Smyth, S. (2016, September). "Accounting and social movements: An exploration of critical accounting praxis." *Accounting Forum* (Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 220-234).

Cho, C.H., Roberts, R.W. and Patten, D.M. (2010), "The language of US corporate environmental disclosure", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 35 No. 4, pp. 431-443.

Cho, C.H., Laine, M., Roberts, R.W. and Rodrigue, M. (2015), "Organized hypocrisy, organizational façades, and sustainability reporting", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 40, No. 1, pp. 78– 94.

Collison, D., Dey, C., Hannah, G. and Stevenson, L. (2010), "Anglo-American capitalism: the role and potential role of social accounting", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 8, pp. 956-981.

Debord, G. (1967). *The Society of the Spectacle*. Translation by Fredy Perlman and Jon Supak (Black and Red, 1970).

Deegan, C. (2017). "Twenty five years of social and environmental accounting research within Critical Perspectives of Accounting: Hits, misses and ways forward." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 43, 65-87.

Deegan, C., Rankin, M. and Tobin, J. (2002), "An examination of the corporate social and environmental disclosures of BHP from 1983-1997. A test of legitimacy theory", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 15 No. 3, pp. 312-343.

Denedo, M., Thomson, I. and Yonekura, A. (2017), "International advocacy NGOs, counter accounting, accountability and engagement", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 6, pp. 1309-1343.

Dey, C. (2003), "Corporate 'silent' and 'shadow' social accounts", *Social and Environmental Accountability Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 6–9.

Dey, C., Russell, S. & Thomson, I. (2011), "Exploring the potential of shadow accounts in problematising institutional conduct", in Osbourne, S. and Ball, A. (Eds.), *Social Accounting and Public Management: Accountability for the Common Good*, Routledge, Abingdon, pp. 64–75.

Dillard, J., & Vinnari, E. (2017). "A case study of critique: Critical perspectives on critical accounting." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 43, 88-109.

Dillard, J. and Vinnari, E. (2019), "Critical dialogical accountability: From accounting-based accountability to accountability-based accounting", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 62, pp. 16-38.

Gallhofer, S. (2018), "Going beyond western dualism: towards corporate nature responsibility reporting", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 8, pp. 2110-2134.

Gallhofer, S., Haslam, J., Monk, E. and Roberts, C. (2006), "The emancipatory potential of online reporting: the case of counter accounting", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 19, No. 5, pp. 681-718.

Gallhofer, S., Haslam, J. and Yonekura, A. (2015), "Accounting as differentiated universal for emancipatory praxis", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 5, pp. 846-874.

Gray, R. (1997), "The practice of silent accounting", in Zadek, S., Evans, R. & Pruzan, P. (Eds.) *Building Corporate Accountability: Emerging Practices in Social and Ethical Accounting, Auditing and Reporting*, Earthscan, London, pp. 201-217.

Gray, R., Adams, C. A. and Owen, D. (2014a), *Accountability, Social Responsibility and Sustainability. Accounting for Society and the Environment*. Peason, Harlow, UK.

Gray, R., Brennan, A. and Malpas, J. (2014b), "New accounts: Towards a reframing of social accounting", *Accounting Forum*, Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 258-273.

Gray, R., Owen, D. and Adams, C. (1996), *Accounting and Accountability: Changes and challenges in corporate social and environmental reporting*, Hemel Hempsted, Prectice Hall.

Harte, G. and Owen, D. (1987), "Fighting de-industrialisation: the role of local government social audits", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 123-141.

Hayhurst, R. (2021). "Picture post: anti-fracking campaigners join BP protest as AGM rejects tougher emission cuts." <https://drillordrop.com/2021/05/12/picture-post-anti-fracking-campaigners-join-bp-protest-as-agm-rejects-tougher-emission-cuts/>; accessed 19 October 2021.

Himick, D. and Ruff, K. (2020), "Counter accounts of profit: outrage to action through "just" calculation", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 33, No. 4, pp. 699-726.

International Accounting Standards Board. (2010), *The conceptual framework for financial reporting*, IFRS Publications Department, London.

Islam, M. A., Deegan, C., & Haque, S. (2021). "Corporate human rights performance and moral power: A study of retail MNCs' supply chains in Bangladesh." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 74, 102163.

Laclau, E. (2005), *On Populist Reason*, Verso, London.

Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. (1985), *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democracy*, Verso, London.

Laine, M. and Vinnari, E. (2017), "The transformative potential of counter accounts: a case study of animal rights activism", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 7, pp. 1481-1510.

Lehman, C., Annisette, M. and Agyemang, G. (2016), "Immigration and neoliberalism: three cases and counter accounts", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 1, pp. 43-79.

Li, Y. and McKernan, J. (2016), "Human rights, accounting, and the dialectic of equality and inequality", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 4, pp. 568-593.

Medawar, C. (1976), "The social audit: A political view", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 389-394.

Milne, M.J., Tregidga, H. and Walton, S. (2009), "Words not actions! The ideological role of sustainable development reporting", *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 8, pp. 1211-1257.

Mouffe, C. (2000), *The Democratic Paradox*, Verso Books, London.

Mouffe, C. (2013), *Agonistics: Thinking The World Politically*, Verso, London.

Murphy, D. and Moerman, L. (2018), "SLAPPING accountability out of the public sphere", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 6, pp. 1774-1793.

O'Sullivan, N. and O'Dwyer, B. (2009) "Stakeholder perspectives on a financial sector legitimation process. The case of NGOs and the Equator Principles", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 4, pp. 553-587.

Perkiss, S., Bayerlein, L. and Dean, B.A. (2020), "Facilitating accountability in corporate sustainability reporting through Spotlight Accounting", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 34(2), 397-420.

Perkiss, S., Bernardi, C., Dumay, J., & Haslam, J. (2020). "A sticky chocolate problem: Impression management and counter accounts in the shaping of corporate image." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 102229.

Pierre, J. and Peters, G. (2000), *Governance, Politics and the State*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Pupovac, S., and Moerman, L. (2020). "Bringing Shell and Friends of the Earth on stage: A one-act spectacle of oil spills in the Niger Delta." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 102264.

Roberts, J. and Scapens, R. (1985), "Accounting systems and systems of accountability -- understanding accounting practices in their organisational contexts," *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 443-456.

Rodrigue, M. (2014), "Contrasting realities: corporate environmental disclosure and stakeholder-released information", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp. 119-149.

Scott, M. and Tollefson, C. (2010), "Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation: The British Columbia experience", *Review of European Community & International Environmental Law*, Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 45-57.

Sikka, P. (2011). "Accounting for human rights: The challenge of globalization and foreign investment agreements." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 22(8), 811-827.

Spence, C. (2009), "Social accounting's emancipatory potential: A gramscian critique", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 205-227.

Srnicek, N. and Williams, A. (2015), *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*, Verso Books, London.

Talbot, D., and Boiral, O. (2018). "GHG reporting and impression management: An assessment of sustainability reports from the energy sector". *Journal of Business Ethics*, 147(2), 367-383.

Toms, S., & Shepherd, A. (2017). "Accounting and social conflict: Profit and regulated working time in the British Industrial Revolution." *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 49, 57-75.

Thomson, I., Dey, C. and Russell, S. (2015), "Activism, arenas and accounts in conflict over tobacco control", *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, Vol. 28, No. 5, pp. 809-845.

Tregidga, H., Milne, M. and Kearins, K. (2014), "(Re)presenting 'sustainable organizations'", *Accounting, Organizations & Society*, Vol. 39, pp. 477-494.

Vinnari, E. and Laine, M. (2017), "The moral mechanism of counter accounts: The case of industrial animal production", *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, Vol. 57, pp. 1-17.

Wright, E. O. (2010), *Envisioning Real Utopias*, Verso, New York.

Ylönen, M. and Laine, M. (2015), "For logistical reasons only? A case study of tax planning and corporate social responsibility reporting", *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, Vol. 33, pp. 5– 23.