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The definition of resistance

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ABSTRACT

The study of resistance has exploded during recent years and the field has broadened in order to accommodate more issues. The broadened scope of resistance studies is fruitful, yet the embracing of resistance's complex character has led to a situation where the current research on resistance does not offer the appropriate tools to analyze the multiple and often overlapping forms of resistance. It is in this scholarly context that this paper form a bridge between fields in its endeavor to illuminate the richness of 'resistance', while still providing tools – for example, definitions, paths and forms of resistance – for analyzing it.

KEYWORDS

Resistance; power; everyday resistance; constructive resistance; resistance formations

1. Introduction

This paper focuses on issues surrounding definitions of resistance. Not surprisingly, many articles in the *Journal of Political Power* address creative responses to power, as well as power's responses back. The study of resistance has exploded during recent years and the field has become more complex and broadened in order to accommodate more issues. As Sherry B. Ortner has pinpointed, resistance was 'Once upon a time, . . . a relatively unambiguous category, half of the seemingly simple binary, domination versus resistance. Domination was a relatively fixed and institutionalized form of power; resistance was essentially organized opposition to power institutionalized in this way' (Ortner 1995, p. 174). This focus on collective dissent has, by time, been complemented with an outline of hidden agency. As stated by Mani Shutzberg, 'the word "resistance" has been associated with "contentious politics", (however, the discussion on) "everday resistance" – significantly widens the inclusion criteria of what counts as resistance' (Shutzberg 2021, p. 51).

The sustained focus on either collective resistance (identity, framing, resource mobilization or strategy) or the forces of the 'everyday' and often hidden resistance is currently being negotiated by social science scholars, who are gradually identifying new forms of resistance on the spectrum between revolutionary uprisings and everyday forms of 'hidden' dissent (e.g. Butz and Ripmeester 1999, Malmvig 2016). It could be argued that in the contemporary situation, resistance is to be treated as an umbrella concept that contains forms of everyday, serial and organized resistance as well as the connection between these. In addition, the winding path of resistance studies and its interactions with different paradigms has led to that power and resistance are now 'widely seen as

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“entangled” rather than simply opposed.’ (Chandra 2015, p. 564; see e.g. Haynes and Prakash 1992). Over and above this, we must acknowledge feminist explorations, post-humanist research and decolonial texts that often revolve implicitly around resistance.

The broadened scope of resistance studies is fruitful, yet the embracing of resistance’s complex character has led to a situation where: ‘there has been a rapid proliferation of scholarship on resistance but little consensus on its definition’ (Hollander and Einwohner 2004, p. 533). Or in other words, the current scholarly production on resistance does not offer an appropriate overview over the field’s rich understanding of multiple and often overlapping forms of resistance. It is in this scholarly context that this paper attempts to form a bridge between fields in its endeavor to illuminate the richness of ‘resistance’, while still providing tools – for example, definitions, paths and forms of resistance – for analyzing it. I offer the readers an overview of the field and the interesting nexuses that should be embarked upon when studying resistance. Such reconceptualization will be useful for scholars who aim to study a wide range of dissent from everyday protests and organized events to social revolutions (cf. Chandra 2015).

The paper proceeds as follows: firstly, a discussion on power sheds new light upon the concept of resistance. Secondly, I take a detour and display some central dimensions of resistance. Among other things, I elaborate upon ‘who resists’ as well as the intentional–unintentional nexus. Next, I present a new categorization of different forms of resistance and, thereafter, elaborate on how these different forms of resistance entangle. Finally, some concluding notions are presented.

2. Different forms of power and their relation to resistance

By early social science scholars, power was understood as either the military strength of the state or the mere capacity of individuals and groups to persuade others to act on their will. Recent power theories, however, have drawn attention to the fact that power is not (mainly) about capacity but also about relationships. Power, from this perspective, can shape what actors desire or are aware of (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014; Baaz *et al.* 2017). It is the kind of power that Mark Haugaard (2012, 2021) addresses when adding a fourth dimension of power to those that have been previously formulated by, for example, Steven Lukes and Robert Dahl. This dimension of power refers to the socialization of citizens, which, as described by Michel Foucault (1991), either takes place intentionally through education and supervision or more subtly through competition for status (e.g. Bourdieu 1986, Elias 1995, Haugaard 2012, 2021).

The technologies of normalization, as referred to by Foucault as ‘disciplinary power’, involve the production of a norm, disciplinary practices and processes of self-improvement. Another concept introduced by Foucault in the 1970s – governmentality – in contrary, concerns ‘techniques and procedures for directing human behavior’ (Foucault 1997, p. 82). Governmentality, as an analytical perspective, recognizes the diversity and multitude of the governing instances and how different authorities govern in various sites and in relation to various objectives. Biopolitics, as a particular approach to the analysis of these arts of governing, highlights the molding of populations through various discourses and according to different understandings of what is desirable (Rose *et al.* 2006). To this can be added, what Nikolas Rose has coined as, ‘ethopolitics’,

a concept that illuminates the ways in which governing sometimes builds on different moral discourses. Rose states that biopower collectivizes and socializes while discipline individualizes and normalizes. Ethopolitics, however, concerns itself with ethical considerations and different self-managing strategies that are used by subjects to judge themselves, but also act upon themselves to improve themselves (Rose 2001). When analyzing the current politics, Rose draws the conclusion that ‘contemporary biopolitics is ethopolitics’ (Rose 2001, p. 2).

As suggested by Foucault, the various forms of power sketched above hint at corresponding forms of resistance. For example, disciplinary power builds on hierarchies, which consist of different parts/positions/identities where some are ranked above others. Merging the parts of a hierarchy (e.g. my respondents in Palestine suggested the fusing of “men” and “women” into “humans”), as a strategy of resistance, undermines the possibility of ranking one part over others. This gives rise to a paradox. This is because one of the most frequently criticized effects of discursive, disciplinary power, which rests upon hierarchization, is that the multiplicity disappears as everybody normalizes towards one out of many alternative types of individuals. Still, the reduction of multiplicity may also work against disciplinary power. Sameness is thus both an effect of power and a strategy that undermines it (Lilja 2008).

More generally, we must discuss the relationality between power and resistance and how resistance emerges in relation to power. Or as expressed by Malmvig (2016, p. 263), ‘the chain metaphor might be expanded to include the power resistance relation, in so far as power and resistance circulate together and are mutually constitutive’. I would say that resistance is sometimes parasitic on power or a reaction against it. At other times, however, the affirmative role of resistance – and sometimes even resistance supremacy, which evokes new creative responses and forms of power – must be acknowledged (Checchi 2021). That resistance evokes power, has among others, been illuminated by Judith Howard and Hollander (1997), who conclude that ‘women who challenge low performance expectations by contributing assertively to group discussions can experience a “backlash” reaction because their behavior is perceived as illegitimate’. Power’s responses to feminist resistance can be exemplified by ‘incels’ – that is, straight, ‘involuntarily celibate’ men who subscribe to notions of white supremacy, which is expressed on different internet pages along with violent actions (Lilja and Johansson 2018).

The close relationship between power and resistance, then, implies that resistance not only challenges or provokes power but sometimes ends up supporting power. For example, when a few people opt out and refuse to cooperate, these few differing ‘others’, who are deviating from the norm, expose themselves to the risk of being defined as abnormal. By behaving differently, they contribute to establishing what is normal in relation to the deviant. Thus, it is not always the case that a practice of resistance actually have the expected outcome, but it might instead turn out to consolidate the power relation that is at stake (Lilja 2008, 2021). In line with what Foucault has stated, resistance sometimes even reinforces existing power relations and power’s ‘existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations’ (Foucault 1990, p. 95, Lilja

2008, 2018). To this can be added that some forms of covert resistance seemingly contain an interesting mix of resistance and compliance, which co-exist ‘dialectically’ (Shutzberg 2020).

A final reflection, in regard to power, is that it has changed by time. Identifiable leaders and power centers have, during the last decades, been substituted by power as a fluid and often unidentifiable, relational dynamic, in which diffuseness make it hard to resist. One example of this could be neoliberalism, where nodes and practices hybridize and merge with other practices, discourses and institutions, which makes it hard to characterize (Povinelli 2011, p. 1). This has implications for how to resist and with what effects.

3. Who resist?

Another issue at stake when unpacking the concept of resistance is *who* resists. There are different positions in this matter – not least in postcolonial and decolonial studies. Despite the common ground, postcolonialism and decolonial thinking have different approaches to the ‘subalterns’. As stated by Gallien (2020, p. 33): ‘if postcolonial critique produced studies *about* the systemic subjugation of subalternized people, decolonial studies focus on the production of alternative discourses *with* and *from* a subaltern perspective’ (cf. Manning 2021). This implies that decolonial theory suggests a construction of alternative knowledge from specific subject positions, which are vantage points that provide us with unique perspectives and, in the very same move, resist and/or diversify hegemonic truth-telling. This is contrary to postcolonial accounts of power, in which the term ‘subaltern’ is used to depict marginalized groups – the ‘lower classes’ and agency. This can be exemplified by the book *Selected subaltern studies*, in which Ranajit Guha claims that subaltern classes and groups are ‘constituting the mass of the labouring population (...) – that is, the people’ (Guha 1988, p. 40; cf., 1983, Guha and Spivak 1988).

However, there are postcolonial scholars, who connect “subalternity” with resistance. When using the concept, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) discusses subalterns’ room of agency, while Homi Bhabha (1984) proposes the notion of a ‘third space’, which, according to Butz and Ripmeester (1999), is necessary to pay attention to ‘if we are to understand the full range of subaltern survival tactics’. Uday Chandra (2015) also includes a subaltern position in his definition of resistance, suggesting that to resist is to minimally,

apprehend the conditions of one’s subordination, to endure or withstand those conditions in everyday life, and to act with sufficient intention and purpose to negotiate power relations from below in order to rework them in a more favorable or emancipatory direction (Chandra 2015, p. 565).

This definition aims to avoid more postmodern attempts to include the notion of subalternity into any situation in which subjects feel deprived of power (Chibber 2006, Chandra 2015).

Overall, in much postcolonialism and decolonial thinking, resistance is carried out by subjects who are marked by the postcolonial situation. Subalternity, however, is not always part of the definition of resistance. Johansson and Vinthagen (2013, p. 36) focus on resistance as a practice, while omitting the subject:

there is no point in tying ‘resistance’ to the subject. (...) acts of resistance are, like any other acts, done by someone since all acts have actors and rely on some form of agency. Thus, yes, subalterns do resist, but the resistance is not an attribute of the subaltern subject.

Resistance, from this perspective, is not primarily interesting as ‘originating’ from within the subject; rather it arises in a combination of subjectivity, relationships and contexts (Johansson and Vinthagen 2013). The complexity of the resister is also displayed in Shutzberg’s discussion on Swedish physicians’ everyday resistance when writing sickness certifications:

The point is that the specific form taken by GPs’ (general practitioners) resistance, as routine and covert, is not solely explained by their powerlessness, or that it is possible despite their power. Rather, it is because they do have some kind of power and influence over the sickness certification process to begin with, that they resort to such means. (Shutzberg 2020, p. 8)

Shutzberg’s analysis illuminates the complexity of the resister’s position and how sometimes one must have a certain status or power to act subversively. Likewise, Kristin Wiksell (2021) suggests that to include the label of subalternity in the definition of resistance, would be to ignore bleary acts of resistance in complex relationships. In addition, locating the subject of resistance might be less interesting when embracing resistance as ‘circulating’; that is, resistance knots that are spread over time and space, at varying densities and in a close interaction with power. Foucault states: ‘Are there no great radical ruptures, massive binary divisions, then? Occasionally, yes. But more often one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance’ (Foucault 1990, p. 96). Or as expressed by Malmvig (2016, p. 263) ‘power is not possessed over others, or located in a specific place; rather it circulates as in a chain, never being here or there’. In addition, the singular position of ‘subalterns’ rarely exists as most individuals are both powerful and powerless at the same time within different relations (Baaz *et al.* 2016).

The above indicates that resistance sometimes emanates from ‘subaltern’ positions; however, at other times dissent is carried out in solidarity with others and/or more generally in favor of, among other things, gender equality or climate change mitigation – thus, not by subjects who commonly can be regarded as ‘subalterns’. In addition, in studies of resistance as discursive, subversive, mobile and creative points, which are reiterated within strategic fields of relations of power, it becomes less interesting to locate the subjects of resistance (Malmvig 2016).

However, if resistance is stripped from subalternity, relations of inequality also tend to disappear in the understandings of dissent. Removing ‘subalternity’ opens up for resistance to be seen as a ‘power struggle’, ‘counter-power’ or a matching of ‘forces’ (Vinthagen and Lilja 2007). I would like to suggest that it is the acts that should be in focus when researching resistance. Despite this, in order to understand resistance, it matters *who* performs it. The act of resistance must always be put in context and the power relations that are involved must be interrogated. To avoid ending up researching power struggles, resistance should be analyzed when exercised in and against asymmetrical situations.

4. The intention of resistance

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) have illuminated, from a literature review, some of the core questions that are often addressed in studies of dissent – among them are whether or not resistance must be intentional. In regard to this, Chandra also demands some kind of intention, suggesting that, ‘subalterns who resist the status quo may not be fully aware of *all* the implications of their actions, but, in pragmatic terms, they act as rational agents with sufficient intention and purpose’ (Chandra 2015, p. 565). In a similar vein, Scott (2019, p. xi) claims that everyday resistance ‘succeeds by systematically concealing intentions or, in fact, misrepresenting intentions as loyal and allegiant’. The ‘intent’ of the resister is often difficult to distinguish, still, Scott argues that it is important to do so, in order to establish what are to be considered as acts of resistance. Asef Bayat (2000), who has proposed a competing concept, ‘quiet encroachment’, which resembles everyday resistance, argues that:

Scott makes it clear that resistance is an intentional act. In Weberian tradition, he takes the meaning of action as a crucial element. This intentionality, while significant in itself, obviously leaves out many types of individual and collective activities whose intended and unintended consequences do not correspond. In Cairo or Tehran, for example, many poor families tap electricity and running water illegally from the municipality despite their awareness of their illegal behavior. Yet, they do not steal urban services in order to express their defiance vis-a-vis the authorities. Rather, they do it because they feel the necessity of those services for a decent life; because they find no other way to acquire them. But these very mundane acts when continued are followed by significant changes in the urban structure, social policy and in the actors’ own lives. Hence, the significance of the unintended consequences of agents’ daily activities. In fact, many authors in the resistance paradigm have simply abandoned intent and meaning, focusing instead eclectically on both intended and unintended practices as manifestation of ‘resistance’. (Bayat 2000, p. 543)

Bayat argues that instead of excluding resistance, of which its intentions we cannot secure, what we should investigate is its sometimes-far-reaching effects.

In a recent text, Scott develops his thoughts on ‘intention’, where he now suggests that for resistance studies, it is mainly the audience’s construction of intention that matters: ‘The poacher may be only interested in rabbit stew but when all his neighbours see it as a just use of the common lands, then it becomes, socially, an act of everyday resistance’ (Scott *et al.* 2019, p. xi). In this case, resistance is not always a practice that responds to power’s disposition, but how it is read still reveals the topography of dominant social and material relations. From this perspective, intent is important not only in regard to the resisters’ purpose but also when understood, constructed and located by others.

As stated Johansson and Vinthagen (2013, 2015) take the reasoning of intent one step further by omitting the subject from the act of resistance, thereby positioning themselves in contrast to Scott. The advantages arising from excluding the intention of the resister to resist could be critically discussed. However, I would suggest that we cannot deny that the intent of resistance is sometimes ambiguous, unknown or non-political (Baaz *et al.* 2016, Baaz and Lilja forthcoming). The discursive messiness of various contexts, in which resistance takes place, provides some room for subjects to draw on discourses other than the dominant (preferred) meaning without being sure about it and/or potentially viewing this differently afterwards (Hall 1997). For example, when my colleague and I interviewed employees who work by the hour (and get their assignments via SMS –

‘SMS-employees’), at different nursing homes during the Covid-19 pandemic, the intentions to break the rules by going to work with a runny nose were not always straightforwardly intentional but rather decisions that were built on rule-shopping between various rationales. Our interviews revealed how competing stories around the ‘runny noses’ gave room for different logics, which justified ‘sickness presence’ at work. The discursive messiness in which ‘pre-pandemic’ discourses co-existed with covid-related discourses, provided the SMS-employees with some room to maneuver in order to rationalize their actions, even though this meant breaking the recommendations of the state. The resistance of SMS-employees displays that the idea of intent – as an act with a distinct purpose – is not applicable. Still, the interviews indicate that they carried out resistance against state regulations, as their acting, among other things, attracted different sanctions. Public shaming on social media was only one corrective and disciplinary punishment directed towards their behavior, which ‘required modification’ (Foucault 1991, pp. 177–184). In addition, the employees actively tried to avoid coughing and sniffing in front of their co-workers, and this ‘hiding’ indicates that they were challenging norms and protocols.

From the above follows that resistance can be intentional or unintentional. It can challenge and transform relations of power, or fail to do so, ‘as we know all too well, (resistance sometimes) fail to alter existing social arrangements in particular instances, but the *failure of resistance* ought to be differentiated from the *failure to resist*’ (Chandra 2015, p. 565). Resistance may also create, strengthen or reinforce power.

5. Forms of resistance: avoidance, breaking and constructive resistance

As suggested above, resistance is currently and primarily discussed within ‘contentious politics’, social movement studies, the emerging field of ‘nonviolent action’ studies or studies of ‘civil resistance’ (McAdam et al., 2001; Tilly and Tarrow, 2006 Vinthagen 2015). The field of social movement studies has sustained a focus on the collective, and ‘contentious politics’ often excludes acts by small groups or individuals from what the scholars of this perspective count as an ‘events’ (see e.g. Ackerman and Kruegler 1994, McAdam et al. 2001, Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, Baaz 2021). Thus, it has been suggested that individuals only gain meaning within ‘contentious politics’ when they participate in collective action, either as participants, leaders or organizers in collectively organized events. Overall, it has been pinpointed that this school of thought explicitly limits the scope of contention to forms that display ‘public, collective interaction’ (McAdam et al. 2001, p. 4; see e.g. Castells 1997, Melucci 1996, Baaz 2021, Lilja 2022b, 2021). What is attended to, here, is loud resistance pockets, which cause problems for power centers and institutions by their refusal to collaborate or embrace the public narratives.

As stated above, a parallel trend that complements the focus on organized and collective actions has been the literature on the ‘everyday’. According to Scott, for example, the form of resistance depends on the form of power and those who claim that “‘real resistance’ is organized, principled, and has revolutionary implications . . . overlook entirely the vital role of power relations in constraining forms of resistance’ (Scott 1989, p. 51). Instead, everyday resistance appears as ‘undercover’ and hidden in order for resisters to protest but avoid the disciplinary punishments that come with

protesting. A whole world of invisible politics is revealed through this research perspective; virtually everyone who is subordinated by some power is participating in politics through ‘mundane or petty acts by circumventing, negotiating, manipulating, or undermining hegemonic power in their family, workplace, or neighborhood’ (Kasbari and Vinthagen 2020). This literature on more subtle forms of resistance has been further elaborated within the ‘local turn’ in peacebuilding (Duffield 2001, Richmond 2010, 2011, Mac Ginty 2013, Richmond and Mac Ginty 2014, Hughes *et al.* 2015) as well as by the researchers who adhere to ‘resistance studies’ (see e.g. Odysseos *et al.* 2016, Iñiguez de Heredia 2018, Johansson and Vinthagen 2019, Lilja 2021).

While this research is important, I would like to suggest, in line with the Resistance Research Group (the RESIST research group, composed of Mikael Baaz, Michael Schulz, Mona Lilja and Stellan Vinthagen) that many of the resistance practices that we see today are neither public and mass-organized nor individual and hidden. Thus, the divide between research on organized resistance, on the one hand, and everyday resistance, on the other, must be bridged. First of all, everyday resistance is just one of many types of small-scaled or individual resistance practices (Lilja and Vinthagen 2018). Or in other words, individual, small-scaled practices are not necessarily hidden; for example, Greta Thunberg’s ‘School strike for the climate’, which occurred outside the Swedish Parliament, attracted huge interest, and photos of it – that extended the moment into the future – have been circulated globally (Barad 2008, Lenz Taguchi 2011, Lilja and Lilja 2018). In addition, organized resistance can also be ‘hidden’ and ‘subtle’ – a kind of ‘collective infrapolitics’ (cf. Mumby *et al.* 2017). This can be exemplified by different accounts of the Holocaust, which illuminate more hidden, but collective forms of resistance by Jews, such as illegal press, theater performances and the school system in the Warsaw ghetto (Mumby *et al.* 2017, p. 1164).

The above implies that the research strands that currently dominate the field of resistance studies – the research on hidden and everyday resistance and on public and organized resistance – do not cover the complex acts and relations of power and resistance that mark the contemporary situation. In order to properly capture different forms of resistance, some new paths need to be added. For example, individual resistance, which is not hidden or avoiding – and therefore does not fit neatly into what is conventionally seen as ‘everyday resistance’ – must be given space, in a similar way to those larger movements of dissent that fly under the radar and avoid all attention; the ones that appear hidden on the internet, among other places. All in all, I suggest that the field of resistance studies must be (re)categorized to embrace three major forms of avoidance resistance, as can be seen below (see Baaz 2021):

Avoidance resistance: The core logic of the concept of ‘everyday resistance’ is to avoid power repression through disguise in order to prevent being detected as ‘resistance’ (Scott 1989). Scott suggests that the key characteristic of everyday resistance is the ‘pervasive use of disguise’, where the concealment happens either through the anonymity of the protesters or the masking of the act itself (Scott 1989, p. 54). Everyday resistance is a form of resistance that encompasses infinite, complex compromises and it illuminates how resistance is contaminated with power. Still, as suggested above, the concept is rather limited in scope and, as it stands today, it excludes more collective forms of hidden

resistance. Hidden resistance, which shuns different power expressions, can be individually dispersed as well as collectively organized. Thus, the line that is often drawn between individual and collective forms of resistance should be dissolved and new forms of resistance explored (Baaz 2021).

Breaking resistance: This second category, ‘breaking’ resistance, operates according to a different logic than avoidance resistance (Vinthagen 2005, 2015, pp. 165–205, Baaz 2021). Breaking resistance does not avoid power relations and disciplinary punishments; rather, this resistance publicly challenges power directly, by, for example, non-cooperation, disobedience or interventions. ‘Power breaking’ resistance strategies refuse obedience or acceptance of rules, laws or orders (Vinthagen 2015). This form of resistance challenges orders, laws or rules by different institutions; for example, states or corporations, which are feeling threatened by the (risk of widespread) non-cooperation. Resistance that falls into this category would be, for example, protests, strikes, civil disobedience, road blockades, occupations, consumer boycotts or other (similar) actions (see Baaz 2021).

Resistance of this kind, as indicated previously, has mostly been discussed within fields that have maintained a focus on collective mobilizations; for example, ‘contentious politics’ or ‘social movement studies’ (Sharp 1973, Chenoweth and Stephan 2011, Vinthagen 2015). However, I suggest that individualized or small-scaled forms of resistance could also be seen as ‘breaking’. One example of individual, dispersed, yet staged resistance is Buddhist monks burning themselves to death in Tibet as a protest against Chinese occupation or the Tunisian vegetable vendor who set himself on fire and triggered the Arab Spring. These kinds of resistance practices do not fit the conventional understandings of ‘everyday resistance’ (while they are not ‘hidden’) but should, I suggest, be included into a broader category of ‘breaking resistance’ (see Lilja and Vinthagen 2018, Baaz 2021).

Constructive resistance: Power breaking resistance and avoidance resistance do not, however, capture all forms of resistance. I suggest that the category of constructive resistance could be added to the above categories. While many acts of dissent can be captured and understood as ‘oppositional resistance’, there are subversive practices that fall outside this kind of analytical framework. As developed below, resistance sometimes transcends the whole phenomenon of being against something; instead it constructs ‘alternative’ or ‘prefigurative’ social institutions or discourses (Vinthagen 2005, Vinthagen and Lilja 2007, 2007, Sørensen 2016, Koefoed 2017a, 2017b, Lilja 2021, Rigby 2021, Wiksell 2021). Thus, while some address oppositional resistance, another scholarship focuses on the constructive mode of resistance. Here, we find research that addresses the ‘building’ of alternative institutions, such as Koefoed’s research on the Kurdish movement in Turkey’s Kurdish region (Sørensen 2016, Koefoed 2017a). Yet, other scholars (Bleiker 2000, p. 276, Medina 2011, Lilja 2021) take another viewpoint by discussing the productive mode of resistance in terms of meaning-making. For example, postcolonial theorist Lily Ling (2019) suggests that the ‘West’ keeps producing local subjectivities globally, thereby asking for both an ‘epistemic disobedience’ and an ‘epistemic awakening’ to counter this kind of ‘epistemic violence’ (see Lilja and Baaz 2021).

Constructive resistance, more generally, could be seen as a response to power; a practice, ‘that might undermine different modes and aspects of power in their enactments, performances and constructions of alternatives’ (Koefoed 2017a, p. 39). As is argued by Malmvig (2016, p. 263):

(r)esistance in this sense needs to be more than just a mere refusal or a binary opposition to power that just affirms its negation. Resistance requires a creative or imaginative practice that furnishes other modes of being known, seen and conducted.

In this she draws on Foucault, who emphasizes that in order to be effective, resistance must be as productive, creative and mobile as power itself. In Malmvig’s research, this means discussing how ‘images re-iterate’ (Sontag 2003, p. 5) in creative, productive and subversive manners. According to Malmvig: ‘(r)esistance needs to do something more than just affirming power relations by “saying no” or “being against”’ (Malmvig 2016, p. 263). I suggest that what is referred to here is the constructive mode of resistance; resistance that moves beyond ‘oppositional’ forms of dissent in order to construct institutions, subject positions and norms.

I would like to add to the above by suggesting that constructive resistance – while creating, building and experimenting – could still contain elements of more conventional forms of protests, boycotts and civil disobedience. Thus, many practices of resistance contain both constructive and non-constructive elements (Sørensen 2016). For example, the #MeToo movement prevails as a ‘non-cooperative’ form of resistance; that is, resistance that breaks norms, rules, laws, regulations and order, sometimes in public and in confrontative ways. However, it could also be understood as a ‘constructive’ form of resistance, which, through placing stories of the sexual abuse in full view of the public, illuminated truths other than those that were being told at the time (see Lilja 2022a).

In summing up, this paper suggests that the current categorization of resistance must be broadened and added to in order to give us a more functional theoretical scaffolding. This includes displaying the constructive mode of resistance as well as illuminating hidden organized resistance and glaring individual resistance. However, it must be emphasized that the categories suggested above are theoretical constructions, and ‘out there’ they are neither clear cut nor strict; rather, they are blended, exist in combinations and added into an interesting mix.

6. Entanglements of organized, collective and individual resistance

Moreover, not only do we need to revisit the categories of resistance, but I would also argue that we lack research on the links, upscaling or sequences between various forms of resistance. Different forms of resistance evoke each other or transform into other dissent. For example, James Scott has illuminated how aggregated or cumulative political effects arise from many individuals carrying out small-scaled acts of resistance (Bayat 2013, p. 22; Baaz *et al.* 2017, Scott 1989):

Quiet unremitting guerrilla warfare [...] day-in and day-out [that] rarely make headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, thousands upon thousands of petty acts of insubordination and evasion create a political and economic

barrier reef of their own. And whenever [...] the ship of state runs aground on such a reef, attention is typically directed to the shipwreck itself and not the vast aggregation of actions which make it possible. (Scott 1989, p. 49)

By this quotation, Scott proposes that everyday resistance, when carried out by many, could be an impactful form of resistance. Among the examples provided by Scott is the case of the thousands of soldiers that silently and individually deserted the Confederate Army, and as such, according to Scott, contributed to the defeat of the southern states in the US Civil War. Thus, dispersed practices of resistance can lead to major transformations of society, when prevailing as serial, non-organized still collective phenomena. Collectiveness, in this case, emerges from a multitude of small resistance acts that are evoked by a particular context of power. It is the circulability and repetition of many individual acts, which together create a more collective mode of resistance that furnishes new and alternative understandings of dissent (other than the conventional ones).

The above illuminates how single practices of resistance are co-constitutive of collective dissent that goes beyond mere everyday or individual expressions. These single acts of resistance are often carried out by individuals who are ‘connected’ with other individuals by having perceived common interests or grievances, or sharing the same identity positions. It is loosely connected individuals who share the same knowledge and collectively challenge power (although not organized) (Foucault 1980).

Scott also suggests that the practice of everyday resistance may precedes riots, social movements and political parties. Thus, more invisible and individual resistance might develop into more visible, organized and large-scale forms. Moreover, the experience of collectively organized resistance, at least sometimes, stimulates and creates dispersed forms of resistance, where individuals carry out their own glaring or hidden everyday resistance (Lilja et al 2017). Among other things, my research in post-democratic and authoritarian societies grants glimpses into how organized forms of resistance encourage more individual forms of dissent – under the pressure of power. Interviews in Cambodia between 2017 and 2019 display how organized activists on the national level go to the local level in order to mobilize individual subjects to resist (Baaz, Lilja and Wallgren, forthcoming). One respondent said:

Today, they (organized civil society actors, my comment) work much more evidence-based, you go down to where the abuses are happening and somehow document and strengthen those individuals to pursue their issue. We see that our partner organizations choose strategies on grassroot level and strengthen individuals and drive their processes to influence decision makers at the local level. (Interview Phnom Penh, 2019, with an international civil society member, Baaz, Lilja and Wallgren, forthcoming).

Thus, civil society organizations increasingly turn to the rural districts in order to encourage individuals to carry out dispersed, non-organized resistance (e.g. through initiating local processes). Resistance in this packaging might be more effective given that non-organized local subjects are probably less monitored and harassed than organized Phnom Penh-based resistance. Thus, organized resistance networks encourage individual and hidden dissent (Baaz, Lilja and Wallgren, forthcoming).

Above, I have discussed some movements of upscaling and downscaling between individual and organized resistance; however, in practice, resistance is often more fluid and alternates between individual expressions and collective struggles. In this regard,

Bayat offers a theory of resistance that not only moves beyond Scott's, but also differs from the majority of existing theories on social movements. Not necessarily leading towards sustained mobilization – as studied and claimed by most social movement theory – rather, it might be a process that goes back to the original 'quiet encroachment' of individual families and persons, until the next immediate threat against (or major opportunity for) their gains and improved positions arises (Bayat 1997a, pp. 2–6, 12, 1997b, 2000; Baaz *et al.* 2017).

7. Resistance assembles

The above paints a complex, but probably incomplete, picture of resistance as an upscaling of, or alternation between, different forms of dissent. All in all, I would propose that more research, which interrogates the connections between different configurations of resistance, is warranted. However, it is not only how resistance creates resistance that must be further investigated. Also how different forms of resistance assemble – and must be understood in connection to other forms of resistance – should be further interrogated. Attempting to grasp different formations of resistance could be one way to encompass mobilizations that contain both collective actions *and* individual, everyday resistance (Lilja and Baaz 2021, Lilja 2022b). As Foucault states, most resistance acts, whatever form they take, are connected in that they address the same relations of power:

The specificity of these struggles, of these resistances of conduct, does not mean that they remained separate or isolated from each other, with their own partners, forms, dramaturgy, and distinct aim. In actual fact they are always, or almost always, linked to other conflicts and problems [...] So, these revolts of conduct may well be specific in their form and objective, but whatever the identifiable character of their specificity, they are never autonomous, they never remain autonomous. (Foucault 2009, pp. 196–197)

Different forms of resistance, then, despite their specificities, are not disbanded. This can be exemplified with the Palestinian struggle, which has developed in a specific area with its specific historical power relations. Palestinians are engaged in a wide variety of tactics and approaches to challenge the ongoing occupation. Overt and violent resistance co-exists with what Palestinians call *sumūd* – 'steadfastness' – which encompasses a broad range of actions that are directed at maintaining a Palestinian presence on the land (Richter-Devroe 2011, Ryan 2015). The various kinds of Palestinian resistance may be specific in their forms and objectives, but while understood in their particularity, they are never autonomous but should be read as a network in order to reveal the lattices, inter-linkages and so on (Foucault 2009). This can be exemplified with a quote from a leader of a popular community, who stated:

our woman is the midpoint in our society; her ability to take consideration of all elements and people needs in our society is her strongest tool. She is stronger than anyone else; she has a historical symbol in our history. She has taken an equal role as any man in our society. She has sacrificed her life, become a martyr, adviser, and coordinator like any other person in Palestine. She is the one who direct her children to stand up for their rights; she is the one who builds up the people's durability in our resistance. My mother always supports me and

directs me in my choice of action to free our land. (. . .) She loves her land and she don't want to lose our land. Tells us to go out and fight for your rights. (Interview with Mohamed, activist West Bank, 2013)

This citation demonstrates the long temporality around the land-struggle, but also the richness of what is counted as political acts – that is, becoming a martyr, giving advice, being a symbol, taking care of needs, encouraging others to resist and creating resistance subjectivities. Even though each act of resistance is played out separately, the quotation displays how they do not remain isolated from each other, with their own qualities. Indeed, as the acts of resistance emerge in the same historical setting and are responding to the same relations of power and violence, the acts are to be seen as resistance amassed. I suggest that specific forms of dissent occur in webs of different forms of resistances and power, which means that they are understandable in these connections (Baaz and Lilja 2022; Lilja 2022b).

The same pattern reveals itself in Shutzberg's analysis of the Swedish health-care system. During the previous decade and a half, the influence of the Swedish Social Insurance Agency (SSIA) over the sick listing process has increased. Today, Swedish physicians experience that the SSIA is devaluing their judgments, by questioning as well as rejecting sickness benefit claims. The physicians, however, 'cunningly' resist the strategies of the SSIA by writing sickness certificates in particular ways; for example, by producing 'objective findings' (Shutzberg 2021). This could be understood as a hidden form of resistance, which aims at manipulating the systems as well as circumscribing SSIA's power over the sick listing process. In parallel to this covert strategy, however, Swedish physicians also write open and public debate articles in newspapers, in which they express their dissatisfaction with the current system and the treatment of medical certificates. The latter practice is hardly to be seen as 'covert resistance', but it is still connected to the hidden resistance of 'objective' sickness certificates; while different in character, both forms of resistance are a result of the same power relationship. Resistance to the issue of medical certificates is thus carried out in different ways, both loudly and covertly, but still involves the same struggle. What does it say about the hidden resistance that it is complemented with public protests? When analyzing different expressions of resistance together, we shed a new light upon the practices, settings and conditions of political undertakings. As Mumby *et al.* (2017, p. 1171) state: 'public and hidden practices of resistance often relate to and build on each other'. According to Courpasson (2017), 'resistance is more likely to produce the desired result when hidden and public forms of opposition occur within the same space, thus encompassing both private and public spheres of experience.' For example, interviews with Boeung Kak Lake (BKL) activists in Cambodia, revealed how 'hidden' resistance and the spreading disinformation have been a precondition for more visible political campaigns:

Often people from the authorities came around and tried to spy or scare them. (. . .) The top-secret things were not talked about at these occasions. Sometimes they planned for how to confuse the spies, by saying that next protest would take place on a Monday, and then they held the protests on the Tuesday. The authorities then had prepared for roadblocks and barriers on Monday, but since the protesters did not attend, they took them away again, and this opened up for protests the following day. (Interview with BKL activist, April 2019, Phnom Penh)

According to this respondent, governing authorities in Cambodia were monitoring the BKL resistance by sending infiltrators to the area. The BKL activists responded by hiding information about upcoming political mobilizations in order to be able to perform public resistance the next day. The public resistance was nourished by non-confrontational and covert expressions of dissent, in which disinformation was spread. The resistance of the BKL activists was then both hidden and visible; the former made the latter possible. Or as expressed by Courpasson (2017), there was a ‘mutual reinforcement of quiet and often anonymous expressions and public assertions of dissent and critique’ (Courpasson 2017, p. 1284). This implies that not only is more research warranted on how different forms of resistance encourage each other, but also on different forms of resistance and the linkages between these practices of dissent.

8. Concluding discussion

Previous research within the field of resistance studies has been novel and illuminated both collective as well as hidden resistance. However, as stated above, it has also established a binary divide between individual and hidden dissent versus organized, public action. The above text has both nuanced and complexified previous scholarly narratives on resistance. This, however, could be problematic. According to Chandra (2015, p. 565), defining resistance ‘too broadly stretches the concept to the extent that it includes ambiguous or ambivalent acts in everyday life’. However, in practice, a broad and complex conceptualizing of resistance is not such a big problem. Many studies of resistance limit themselves to specific situations, contexts or problems and the study of these gain from being situated in the broader context of complex power–resistance relations.

I suggest, in line with the work of Michel de Certeau (1984), that it is the resistance act that counts and not the intent or effect. Resistance is played out in asymmetrical contexts and might be parasitic on power and/or nourish as well as undermine it. This understanding of resistance must, however, be nuanced and specialized when looking into specific forms of resistance; for example, constructive resistance could be narrowed down to ‘practices that might undermine different modes and aspects of power in their enactments, performances and constructions of alternatives’ (cf. Koefoed 2017a, p. 43). Overall, resistance actively engages with power through a combination of avoidance, breaking resistance and/or the construction of alternative subjectivities, narratives and communities.

Moreover, resistance should be analyzed in its relation to associated forms of resistance. Different forms of resistance, which may look autonomous but are connected to each other, emerge from the same conflicts and power relations. Here, I propose the concept of resistance formations in order to capture both the process of resistance mobilizations as well as how different resistance practices, when amassed or entangled, take on a particular shape of their own. How are different practices of resistance repeated, entangled and patterned over time and could they be framed as a specific formation of resistance? How are different forms of resistance evoking each other?

By drawing on the above, my proposal is that more research that encompasses the complex nature of resistance is warranted. How are different forms of resistance evoke each other? We must also engage with the messy mixture of sometimes overlapping, everyday, organized, non-cooperative or constructive resistance, which together constitute different formations of entangled resistance.

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