

EDITORIAL:

Some notes on the Journal of Resistance Studies and its exploration of “resistance”

Stellan Vinthagen

Our newly launched Journal of Resistance Studies is developing well. One seasoned editor claimed that the real challenge of creating a new academic journal is to succeed with the second issue. The first is always possible, but with the second issue there is the challenge of getting enough high-quality submissions to a journal that is still not established and known in the academic community. We are pleased to say we have managed well beyond what is needed. We received 60+ submissions; our list of reviewers with different specializations grows; the editorial committee is growing, and our South American editorial sub-committee is translating high quality articles from Spanish to English; we have received several thematic suggestions for future issues. All of this demonstrates that we started the journal and persist in a period of high interest in resistance studies. This trend also helps the journal practically. It is now possible to apply a longer production line, with longer time periods between the steps of submissions, reviews, revisions and publications. This is good for everyone involved. We also have been able to decide on a combination of thematic issues and general calls for papers in the future, encouraging a maximum interdisciplinary variation of publications on resistance. In summary, the situation looks promising. However, there is a major challenge that remains, one that will be the focus for next year and onwards: the sustainable economy of the JRS. So far we have given out the journal for free, both in print, during meetings and conferences, and digitally, via our website. We cannot continue like that. All journals rely on voluntary work for much of the production, primarily the writing of articles and the review work. However, every journal also needs to cover some unavoidable costs: layout, editorial management, coordi-

nation, proofreading, administration, and (if we want more than just a digital version on the Internet): printing and postage.

Between 2008 and 2013 the RESIST group at University of Gothenburg in collaboration with the global Resistance Studies Network produced an open access journal: the Resistance Studies Magazine (www.rsmag.org). At that time we chose open access because it is something we politically support and view as the future of public academia. Several members involved in the Resistance Studies Network were activists within groups working for open access and free and open software (FOSS). But the magazine proved difficult to maintain. It was indeed possible during periods, but not with the kind of high-quality and sustained regular production that a journal needs. With only voluntary work, digital production, and on-demand printing we were dependent on individuals and their (temporary) devotion to the project. It meant we lost people's interest and attention in (unavoidable) periods of repeated change of editorship and missing issues. Therefore we decided this time to do it in a more traditional way with subscriptions, but to begin with only for the printed copies. Thus, the printed copies of JRS will be subscription-based from issue number 1, 2016. How long we will be able to keep the digital versions open access, will depend on what economic solutions we can find.

There are great needs and excellent reasons of global solidarity for expanding freedom of information and the sharing of knowledge. Open access is a necessary resistance to the pay-walls and domination of profit-making publishing houses on the academic market. This is a practice constituting our commons and a resistance movement that is growing among librarians, academics, and activists. However, as we understand it, so far there are no viable models of how to do this without relying on commercial advertisement, voluntary work, external funding, or fee-based publication in which authors or institutions pay to be published. We do not see any of these solutions as sustainable – although they might be combined to make a model that could work in the future. We are in dialogue and in cooperation with different open access initiatives and are trying to develop ways to keep the Journal of Resistance Studies as an open access source in future, at least partly. In the meantime, however, we unfortunately will have to explore the conventional way, and we

will negotiate with a publishing corporation for a deal. The risk is then that also the digital versions of JRS will become subscription-based. If you have ideas of how to solve this dilemma, please let us know. We are still looking for options.

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The interest and discussions that our first issue of the Journal of Resistance Studies created motivate a further clarification of our conceptual and theoretical standpoints. Several people – among them authors – have asked what is included within “resistance studies,” and what is not. We as editors have also struggled to explain why we are not happy with article submissions that only refer to others within the (established) field of social movement studies, and do not mention “resistance.” Our repeated statements that “we are not yet another movement journal,” is not explanatory enough. The policy statement (published in the first issue and available on our website) gives a basic orientation. But it seems that it is necessary to say more. Since our starting point for the development of “resistance studies” has been a tentative definition of resistance as a subaltern practice that might undermine power, our understanding of “power” has been questioned. Firstly, this is only one possible definition. Other definitions are welcome, as long as they are explained, critically discussed, and refer to others and their related work.

However, let us take our proposed definition as a point of departure. We as editors think this definition is indeed a workable starting point, and we want to explain why. To begin with, let us highlight some consequences of this tentative definition that is relevant to “power”: (1) resistance is always connected to power, and cannot be meaningfully understood in itself, separated from power. That means you cannot discuss “resistance” without also clarifying what kind of “power” it relates to. (2) This definition is valid for different theoretical and conceptual understandings of “power,” and the chosen form and understanding of “power” will have decisive consequences for what counts as “resistance.” Therefore, no one needs to subscribe to a particular theoretical framework in order to discuss resistance. This journal is looking for plurality and interdisciplinary approaches. (3) The definition is a general one but it can be – and should be – made contextual and specific when used in a study of power in a particular case, since power is never general,

but a particular constellation of forces, a combination of historical and contemporary techniques that are applied on concrete bodies situated in time/space, related to class, sexuality, race, gender, ability, or other decisive social categories. Thus, this definition renders both precision and pluralism for the field, or at least that is the aim of it.

The practice by a “subaltern” is included since” in our view power is about subordination, also when it is productive power we speak of. Inspired by Foucault, we from RESIST (the Resistance Studies Group at Gothenburg University) often use “power” to describe something that is an integral part of social life: relations of subordination. Thus, we use the general and relational concept of “power” to signify what some call “power over,” a force that creates subjugation and produces subjects integrated into formal or informal hierarchies, or rankings of positions. We are aware that others might use power as a more agency oriented concept of “power to” or “power with,” or even as “empowerment,” and we see no problem with the concept being used differently by people. But it then becomes necessary to explain what one means with power. For us, “power” is always a matter of relations of subordination or fixations of subjectivity or practice, i.e. a structuring of the space of possible being or behavior. And this entanglement with power is always present and cannot be escaped. Resistance, however, is also infused with power. Still power might be more or less problematic, more or less limiting, structuring, or constructing of subordination. Its effects or techniques might be reduced and undermined, and resistance is therefore potentially a liberation project, a matter of expanding the space of possible being or behavior. However, we do not think “liberation” is at all absolute. It is instead always emerging, a process of unfinished struggle. Yet we view (continuous) liberation as the potential seed of hope inhabiting resistance.

Since “power” is used in such varying ways, there might be a reason to choose an alternative concept, one that might clarify our understanding of “power” as inherently being-in-and-made-into relations of subordination. One alternative would be to instead use “domination.” Since all power relations subjectify, they also dominate. But in our understanding, Foucault uses “domination” as stable, crystallized, rigid, or frozen relations of the normal flow of power, which is a special case of power, a particular politico-ethical problem. Therefore “domination”

seems to be just an increased degree of the same power, one that is simply more of subjectification than what is practiced in the everyday and unavoidable form of negotiated flows of “power.” Thus, for those that are not as Foucaultian in their understanding of power, the definition might instead be interpreted like this: resistance is a subaltern practice that might undermine domination. We have not made up our mind here, and there might be other suitable alternative conceptualizations to use as well. We welcome submissions that explore the conceptual relations between power, resistance, and domination, which suggest alternative conceptual possibilities.

Ultimately, we need to recognize that the whole project of the Journal of Resistance Studies is to explore the field of “resistance” and its relations to “power” (or “domination”), and that no one of us yet knows what that terrain looks like, where it begins or ends, what it encompasses or does not. We attempt to forge a field at the same time as we explore it... this is not easy, but is necessary.

In the quest for clarification, conceptual relations also matter. Therefore, in mapping the area of “resistance” it seems to be useful to describe its relation to other commonly used and related concepts, such as “agency,” “protest,” “contention,” or “social movements.” We would propose that “agency” is a wider concept that captures subjects’ capacity to do things, which might involve resistance but does not have to. “Agency” is thus a broader concept than “resistance.” On the other hand we suggest that “protest” and “social movements” are more precise concepts, capturing forms of resistance that are of a particular kind. “Protest” is not necessarily sustained in the way a movement is, and it signals a public, contentious quality or political intention with its practice— “to protest against something” is to call for attention to a wrong or problem, to demonstrate dissent or disagreement with the state of affairs, thus making that critique known to others. “Resistance” – in the tradition of James Scott, Asef Bayat, Michel de Certeau, Judith Butler, and Antonio Negri – does not necessarily have to do that. It might also be hidden or disguised, or a subtle change of everyday repetitions, or it might be driven by a desire for escape and survival that is not framed as “political” at all, in which the recognition by others of what one does is not wished for, and might even be something one actively tries to

avoid. While “protest” calls for attention, “everyday resistance” or other forms of evasion or disguised disruption does not necessarily do so. At the same time, both “protest” and “resistance” might be incidental collective events or individual eruptions of activity that are not necessarily coupled with communicative networks, collective identities, oppositional discourses, or sustained collective actions, as is often the case for definitions of “social movements.”

Another concept commonly used in the last 15 years is “contentious politics” – coined by Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly – a generic concept for all kinds of politics that are not routine processes (e.g. electoral politics in a liberal democracy) and involve struggles between groups, interests, and values (e.g. civil war, social movements, revolution, etc.). That, however, is still a concept that does not include the individual resistance or hidden and disguised forms of everyday resistance. It only recognizes resistance that is done with rational-political strategy in opposition to state power, and not desire-driven escape and circumvention, cultural discursive practices (aimed against non-state dominance), or the creation of alternative institutions, autonomous spaces, or subject formations, etc. As such it is a less encompassing concept compared to “resistance.”

Therefore, it seems that protest – as a generic term for all intentional and public resistance events – is broader than contentious politics since all contentious politics have to be a protest against something. But at the same time, protest is more limited than resistance. Thus, this is one way to model the conceptual relationships, according to how restrictive the categories are: agency > resistance > protest > contentious politics > social movement.

Naturally, we have no ambition to clarify these concepts in a final way. Settling the terms creates closed limitations of what submitting authors could write and claim. We want to demonstrate quite the opposite and open up the field for critical enquiry and debate, and yet we wish to avoid making the terms so broad that “everything and nothing” fits into “resistance” (which was a recurrent – and legitimate – critique of the field in the 1990s). Instead, we hope that our reflections will inspire and provoke further discussions, leading to more clarifications, understandings, and developments of possible conceptual toolboxes, as well

as disagreements, debates and explicit contradictions, which all healthy fields of studies need.

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Finally, on a more practical note: the Journal of Resistance Studies needs your active involvement in order to become the amazing space for exploration of resistance that it aims for. We have a need for all kinds of engagement. Although we have already a lot of submissions we want more, and especially encourage texts that take their starting point in new disciplines and theories where resistance is not normally discussed. We are excited about the thematic issue Gender, Development and Resistance (No. 2, 2016), developed by the guest editors Tiina Seppälä and Sara C. Motta (which received 30+ submissions). We also call for submissions of all kinds of relevant articles for our non-thematic issues in 2016 and onwards. We accept submissions the whole year around but do publish deadlines for coming issues on the website.

We also need more reviewers to add to our pool of experts in different fields. It is a challenge to take an interdisciplinary approach to resistance studies, which means we need people in many connecting fields. For the moment we especially need reviewers from queer studies, critical race studies, critical geography, history, pedagogics, and media and communication studies. There is also a need for additional active members in our editorial board. We are happy to already have the collaboration with our South American Editorial Committee and have an interest in developing relations with more regional editorial committees in the world. Let us know if you want be a part of our growing team. We are also looking for translators (Spanish-English primarily, but also other languages such as French, Arabic, German, etc.) as well as English-speaking proofreaders, which becomes particularly necessary when we editors are Scandinavians and Latin Americans.

Thank you for joining us in this exciting collaborative work. The Journal of Resistance Studies is only possible as a collective critical project.