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**Theorizing Resistance:
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Abstract

The point of departure in this article is that social science researchers have not been able to show how different representations (pictures, statements, images, practices) have different impacts on the practice of negotiating power. However, when alternative resisting discourses are strengthened, it might be due to that people "map" their mental representations against what they comprehend as more concrete representations – and generate a match. Those representations that are comprehended as concrete – persons, performances, images, etc. – are seen as evidence and are mapped to determine whether or not the spoken discourse is true or false. Following this logic, to be trustworthy a discourse must not only consist of statements but also be composed of what people interpret as representations that are more “real”. The use of words such as ‘evidence’ and ‘demonstration’ in interviews with Cambodian women politicians could then be seen as indications of the importance of concrete representations. These representations, for example women that have assumed a political identity and act successfully from it, can make an alternative discourse trustworthy

and the women politicians can then be perceived as a means of resistance. Or as one of my respondents expressed it herself: “It is a fight back”.

Introduction

This article will problematize current resistance theories through analysing the practices of everyday resistance of women politicians in Cambodia. During the last decades resistance theories have come into fashion, being of immediate importance to some of the most prominent academic disciplines today. For instance, resistance is a particularly important concept in post-colonial theory, referring to the ability and practices of the post-colonial subject to engage in resistance towards the colonial power. Also the poststructuralist position on subjectivity has put resistance back on the agenda. The question of agency is quite troublesome in many poststructuralist theories; the idea debated is that since human subjectivity is constructed through discourses, the individual is nothing but subjugated to those discourses. However, in contrary to this view, this article takes as a point of departure that discourses are not fixed but produced through conflicts and contestations and therefore sensitive to resistance. The subject is never decided; it is not a product of the discourses in society but is constantly reconstituted, a process that might include an active and reflecting attitude and the possibility of resistance by identifying and questioning the discourses that hail us into certain positions (Lenz Taguchi 2004: 16). This reasoning rhymes well with the thoughts by Jana Sawicki, who writes in her book *Disciplining Foucault*: “/.../ for Foucault, discourse is ambiguous and plurivocal. It is a site of conflict and contestation. Thus, women can adopt and adapt language to their own ends. They may not have total control over it but then neither do men” (Sawicki 1991: 1). However, in spite of the negotiability of discursive power, the poststructuralist notion of discursive, everyday resistance is a rather under-researched area. Considering that the power/resistance couplet penetrates all our lives making us all practitioners of subordination and resistance simultaneously this is rather surprising.

This article deals with resistance, taking the construction of discourse as a point of departure. The analysis of interviews with 35 women politicians in Cambodia, conducted between 1995 and 2007, revealed that practices of resistance were formulated from two prerequisites, namely: the construction of power and the construction of discourse. Taking the construction of power-loaded stereotypes and hierarchies as a starting-point,

resistance aimed at reloading, nuancing, or creating new images and concepts. In other words, the essentializing, naturalizing and ranking of various masculinities and femininities were resisted by women who not only added new categories, but also nuanced, enhanced and negotiated prevailing images. In order to fulfil these aims the respondents, at the next stage, used the construction of discourse; the fact that discourses are maintained by representations that are continually repeated becomes a means of resistance.

This article will then make visible how the constructions of power and discourses create certain kinds of discursive resistance. Especially, it will argue that social science researchers have not been able to show how different representations (pictures, statements, images and practices) have different impacts on the practice of negotiating power. In this, concretism and universalism will be promoted as two concepts that can help us to understand why and how certain representations are more effective than others in resisting power (Lilja 2008). As will be demonstrated, spoken statements, sounds, written words or images are different types of representations (that represent to other people certain concepts, ideas or feelings) that carry different meaning and create different effects when they are used for resistance.

Discourse theory, power and resistance

The concept of discourse has been promoted by Foucault, as well as by other twentieth-century philosophers. It remains at the heart of many contemporary discussions among post-structuralist researchers. As I will develop below, the concept provides us with an understanding of the production of shared meanings, which makes people who belong to the same society interpret the world in roughly the same way, and express themselves, their feelings and thoughts, in ways that will be understood by others. However, in all societies there are many meanings concerning a topic and more than one way of interpreting or representing it (Hall 1997a; Lilja 2008).

A discourse consists of a variety, or a body, of different representations that circulate and create meaning regarding the very same topic. Or as expressed by Hall: “Discourses are ways of referring to or constructing knowledge about a particular topic of practice: a cluster (or formation) of ideas, images and practices, which provide ways of talking about, forms of knowledge and conduct associated with, a particular topic” (Hall 1997a: 6). Discourses are produced at several different sites and circulated through several different practices. As discourses form and are

formed in the communication of daily life, they are not clearly defined processes but unstable, changeable ones; humans are both exposed to discourses and, at the same time, they take an active part in spreading their meanings (Hall 1997a).

Discourses are related to power, as they construct stereotypes that, in contrast to types, are not necessary for our ability to make sense the world. On the contrary, they reduce, even eliminate complexity as well as ignore interdependence and resist critical reflection by presenting what appear to be inevitable categories (Dyer 1993: 11–17; Peterson and Runyan 1993: 21–26; Skelton 2000: 186–187).

Different stereotypes are assigned different statuses and in this sense relate to the construction of hierarchies (Hall 1997b: 234–235). Discourses separate right from wrong, bad from the good and what ought to be said from what should remain silenced. It is a process in which borders are created and identity optimums produced, while other alternative images of identity are apparently rendered impossible. Thus in order to obtain status – to be rewarded and avoid disciplinary punishments – people tend to strive towards the same image of identity and promote the same knowledge. The norm of how and who to be becomes a guiding star (Lenz Taguchi 2004: 14–15). Desire, in this context, using the words of Braidotti, is an “ontological desire, the desire to be, the tendency of the subject to be, the predisposition of the subject towards being” (Braidotti 2003: 44). In this desire to become, some identity-positions are sought more than others and hierarchies reduce the manifoldness of different images of identity.

To change power, the discourses that construct stereotypes and hierarchies can be disputed through different resisting practices. For example, as a hierarchy consists of at least two parts of which one is ranked and has a higher status than the other, one strategy of resistance against a hierarchy would be to change the relationship between the images. This, for example, takes place by upgrading and enhancing the status assigned to subaltern groupings. Hall labels this trans-coding strategy “reversing the stereotypes” (Hall 1997b: 270–272; Lilja 2008). An additional practice that may contribute to the altering of the binary and ranked relationship between two images is adding yet other images. Just as multiplicity works against stereotypization, the introduction of a third part to a dual construction might also undermine the binary divide that provides the very base of hierarchy.

Thus to resist power – in the shape of hierarchies and stereotypes – we must negotiate the discourses. But how might this be done? Discourse is

built upon the repetition of different representations. For example, songs, lectures, images and painted bodies or clothes, are all representations or signs that represent to us different notions of gender, nationalism, race, etc. Therefore, Cambodian women could repeat different representations frequently or less frequently, repeat them differently or mix discourses together, in order to create manifoldness, nuances or the enhancement of different images. Some of these practices are discussed within post-structuralist or post-colonial research today. For example, according to Judith Butler, failures to repeat “correctly” enable the possibility of transformation (Butler 1999: 179). Homi Bhabha, on the other hand, seeks to describe the construction of cultural authority within conditions of inequity, arguing that: “At the point at which the precept attempts to objectify itself as a generalized knowledge or a normalizing, hegemonic practice, the hybrid strategy or discourse opens up a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal” (Bhabha 1996: 58). In this sense, hybridity implies that every concept the colonizer brings to the colonized will be interpreted, and thus reborn, in the light of the colonized culture (Childs and Williams 1997: 136).

Still there is a gap in the research on resistance when it comes to assessments of the different kinds of representations that are used in diverse resistance practices. Do women employ their identities, different practices, words or images in their everyday resistance? And what form then the most effective? Reviewing the interviews with women politicians it seems that what is read as concrete practices has more impact on the discourse than other representations, such as for example, statements. Still, both seem to be necessary in negotiating the discourses of power.

This argument demands an unpacking of the relationship between discourse and practice, two closely related concepts, between which one may see a number of linkages. First of all, as Hall (1992) points out, discourses shape our thoughts which we act in accordance with; in this sense, discourses form practices (Lilja 2008). Secondly, discourses concern the production of knowledge through language. They are then themselves produced through practice, i.e. the practice of producing meaning (Hall 1992: 291). Finally, a third connection between discourses and practices is that all social practices entail meaning. Therefore, all practices have a discursive aspect. Every hijab-wearing woman constitutes a representation within a religious, sometimes nationalistic discourse, a discourse that she is repeating and upholding by wearing the hijab. She is one representation amongst many forming an Islamic discourse. She, acting from her identity,

becomes a 'living representation' and a powerful means to strengthen a discourse, which implies that performed identities can be used to change or alter 'dominating discourses', for example, by strengthening alternative discourses (Lilja 2008).

The divide between discourse and practice invites us to return to resistance by Cambodian female politicians. Below I will draw together different arguments, unravelling how subalterns, in resistance, might use different representations, thereby creating different effects.

Concretism and resistance in Cambodia

Concretism and universalism are two concepts that might help us understand how different representations have different impact when used for resistance.

'Concretism' is helpful in exploring how practices, as concrete representations, compose means of resistance. Concretism denotes how certain representations are experienced as more concrete, that is, as more applicable, understandable, detailed or practical. These representations then make us experience the discourses as more graspable and comprehensible and make them easier to relate or identify with. Among its impacts, concretism can strengthen a discourse by making concrete what is expressed in more abstract terms. For instance, by exemplifying a historical account through giving it a face, a personal memory, the history becomes more concrete, more comprehensible for the reader and the discourse may therefore gain in currency. Concretism may also involve the art of making complex matters understandable. This can be illustrated by the way in which maps reduce countries, states, infrastructure and nations into a clear and well-arranged paper image, thus visualizing discourses and strengthening them, as well as containing their own stories about time and space (Lilja 2008; Trenter 2000: 50–63). Concretism is, as I will show below, a useful concept in analyzing performances of resistance of female Cambodian politicians. Some politically active women and men invited me into their homes to tell their narratives about the obstacles and advantages of being Cambodian women politicians. Foremost they suffered from the discourses that do not recognize women as political actors. Several interviewees repeated that people in general regard men as the optimum in a public setting, while the ranked and stereotyped image of "women" fails to correspond to the image of a politician. One male politician said:

One problem is that men do not think that women have any capacity. They think women are morally weak. Women should stay home. Politics is the men's work. ... People in Cambodia don't believe in women. This is especially the case in politics; also in the National Assembly people do not believe in women politicians.

According to Bergström and Boréus (2000: 226), discourses decide not only what can be said but also suggest different subject positions, i.e. the who of saying what. The “caring, peaceful woman” and the “strong man” are only two of the subject positions that women and men respectively are assumed to inhabit and speak from (Lilja 2008). In addition, women are generally perceived through the gendered discourses that regard women as “mentally weaker”. One woman said: “Women in Cambodian society are seen as inferior to men. They are considered mentally weaker. This view is stronger in the rural areas than in the towns. Women are not equals. Men see themselves as the intelligent actors”.

The meaning established regarding women's mental weakness is taken for granted, and few reflect upon how it is constructed. However, discourses are seldom coherent but fragmented, opposed and in conflict with other discourses and the interviewed women politicians repeatedly resisted the gendered discourses in various ways. Some of the respondents argued in favour of the repetition of new emancipatory “truths” as an effective strategy of resistance – for example, reversing a low-status image of women by restating the notion that “Women are good politicians” - responsible, capable, good speakers, understanding and brilliant. These were the terms by which the respondents referred to female politicians; women were implied to be active, strong and knowledgeable. One woman said: “A good leader is a person with his/her heart in the right place and with an education. If women get an education they are better leaders than men, as they know more than men and have their heart in the right place”. Another woman said: “In National Assembly people are treated equally whether they are men or women. People respect politicians. They think women understand people better as they take care of basic needs, domestic duties, etc., at the same time as they are politicians”. From this point of view, women are assumed to more clearly understand issues such as poverty and education. Their responsibilities in the home are thus seen as advantageous to their role as politicians. Or in other words: “The skills attributed to

women in the domestic sphere are considered valuable in rebuilding the nation” (McGrew, Frieson and Chan 2004: 11).

Using discourse theory, an interpretation of the above quotations might then be that the women are trying to negotiate their power relations – the stereotypes and hierarchies – through the repetition of a new “truth” about women’s capacity. Resistance by repetition involves an on-going acknowledgement of the existence of an ‘Otherness’ in order to make space for precisely this ‘Otherness’. However, critical respondents occasionally questioned the effectiveness of this strategy vis-à-vis more concrete practices of resistance. When speaking about repetitions as a possible strategy of resistance, one female Member of Parliament (MP) concluded: “I do not think it is good to repeat; because if you say something too many times, they kind of ignore it. It is not a good strategy for me. In fact, I will not use that. I just do what I believe”. The argument was that, while the repetition of new emancipatory “truths” may be ignored, visible, more concrete, representations more easily disturb the maintenance of the andocentric social order. Or, as the old fairy tale about the child and the wolf expresses it, if you repeat something too many times, people may stop listening. While the child keeps screaming: “the wolf is coming”, in the end nobody reacts. But as soon as people stop listening, the wolf appears. Repetition may thus have the undesired effect of being ignored as “just the same old story”. However, this type of cynical distancing may be countered and disrupted by what is interpreted as evidence: concrete representations (Lilja 2008). The MP, quoted above, also talked about the difference between merely speaking and actual practice:

[It is] like the case of a woman, afraid to get divorced from a man and that the man also says that: ‘Oh! This woman cannot get away from me, you know, she is so submissive and all that’. [Then] the only thing is to just go, and they believe you. But if you do not go, they do not do anything. They just abuse you more.

This quotation, through an illustrative metaphor, expresses how “abstract” discourses about women’s political advantages may have more impact if they are made concrete by visible examples. The message is: Do not talk about it. Just show them! Then they believe you!

Drawing on the theme of resistance, concretism should be considered a strategy that might be used to alter hierarchical, stereotyping

discourses about women's political abilities; concrete representations may contradict the spoken discourse to such an extent that the latter must be questioned. This is exemplified when high-ranked, capable female politicians visit rural areas where the dominant discourse describes women as non-political. In the tension between discourse and practice, women's election speeches come to attract the voters who have had difficulties to conceptualize a woman politician. One female politician said: "In one way it is an advantage to be a woman. People just do not believe that women can be politicians. Therefore everyone comes to listen to you. They want to see how a female candidate acts. They think, 'is it possible? Can a woman really be a politician?'" Another woman made a similar comment about people's perceptions of female politicians: "They are surprised and accepting". The insights that emerge from these narratives include how "women" and "politicians" are constructed as two non overlapping or corresponding categories. On the contrary, the quotations imply how female politicians in Cambodia, at least in the perception of some, fail to correspond to any of the images of society. To understand this we can take as a point of departure Mary Douglas's outline of ambiguous things, the "in-betweens", which fail to fall neatly into any category, but instead appear threatening as they shake the cultural order (Douglas 1966). However, I would like to argue to take Douglas's reasoning a step further, in that the women quoted above not only represent something "in-between" (Hall 1997b: 236). Instead these women, their existences, directly question and contradict the discourse of women as non-political. We can thereby surmise that divergent representations, from a resistance perspective, inevitably require an exploration. It must be underlined that whilst doing discourse analysis, it is not enough to state that a discourse consists of different representations, such as sounds, written words, images, musical notes, statements and body language, but one must separate and discuss the different meanings and impacts of these different representations (Lilja 2008).

The meaning of different representations

Before moving on, let us make some conclusions from the above. Concrete representations might be viewed as discursive "counter-evidence" which might strengthen alternative discourses thereby challenging hegemonic claims. However, what is a concrete representation? And how might the concept of concretism together with "mapping" be a central site for understanding the nexus of representations and resistance? Let us remember what Hall calls a system of representation, i.e. a system "by

which all sorts of objects, people and events are correlated with a set of concepts or mental representations which we carry around in our heads” (Hall 1997a: 17). These concepts – which are about easily graspable things, such as chairs and tables but also about war, love or friendship – make us interpret the world meaningfully. Humans map what they hear/see/experience and make matches between a more abstract mental representation and the factual artefact, movement, etc. In other words, they recognise or map the thing/person/feeling corresponding to the abstract concept. In the recognition, the factual and the more abstract overlap and support each other.

We then have the mental representations as well as the things in the world – the people, objects or events. However, to make it more complex, these “things in the world” are also constructed and interpreted by us. Thus, it is in the nexus of two mental processes that the world becomes meaningful to us. In other words, we construct mental representations based on which we interpret concrete objects and map these interpretations with our mental representations. It is in a complex process and relationship between different mental processes in which we construct the things/persons/feelings that we think relate, correspond or overlap with our mental representations.

We might form clear concepts of people and places we have never seen, but have merely made up: angels, mermaids or God (Hall 1997a: 17). However, as these mental representations do not have what we believe are bodily matches, we are not quite convinced that they actually exist. Again it is about “evidences” and the importance of differing between different types of representations. In other words, we need to separate between two types of representations. First, those that form and maintain the concept (the mental representation) and secondly, those representations that match the concept in such a way that it counts as an actual real world match. For example, the concept of Santa Claus is maintained by sayings, narratives, and fairy-tales but also by the more concrete false masquerade Santa Clauses. We have never seen what we would consider the “real” Santa. This is due to that in the mapping process, when we interpret the masquerade Santa Clauses, there are a number of traits of the “false” Santa that do not match with our ideas of the mental representation of the “real” Santa Claus. As we have never found a perfect match, we do not believe in Santa Clause. There are then representations that form our concept of Santa, and there might be a representation (that we still have not seen) that in the mapping process, and in our interpretation, corresponds to all of our ideas about Santa. When both kinds of representations (the concept and the “real” object) exist in our

heads we believe in the discourse (about Santa, women politicians, etc.). From the above follows that we are constantly mapping our ideas – our mental representations – with the, by us interpreted, originals to assess differences and sameness.

This has implications for Cambodian women politicians. As stated previously, dominating discourses of gender in Cambodia regard women as non-political. However, as also has been shown, there also exists an opposing discourse reversing this truth; the image of “the superior woman politician” constitutes a new alternative image that refuses to occupy the lowest rung on the ladder. However, in order to make people believe in the alternative discourse that states that women politicians are brilliant politicians, there must be an actual match between the concept – the mental representation – of a superior woman politician and what we would interpret as a perfect concrete match with that image. In one interview, the following view was expressed:

I personally believe that the women become politically involved because they have some yearning, maybe they have been hurt for some reason. They have been what you called discriminated ... Becoming political is a kind of revenge, it is a proof of talent and skill that they are capable, that they are human resources that need to be given a value. So it is a demonstration. It is a fight back.

The woman talks about visible representations using “proof” as a key term. The concept of “proof” implies that we believe that certain representations actually have the weight to determine whether or not a discourse is “true”. There need to be concrete representations that people can interpret as “real”, thereby strengthening the mental representation of brilliant women politicians. In other words, only when people interpret visible representations of different gendered political images as “trustworthy”, more emancipatory gendered discourses can be perceived as true. Materializing an unexpected image, the appearance of a competent woman politician can then be interpreted in a way that it strengthens a resisting alternative political gendered discourse more than yet another statement “that women in fact can be politicians”. Resistance, then, must not only be about establishing an alternative, challenging discourse with spoken words, but also about confirming this discourse with concrete, matching, objects, practices or bodies. In this regard, more research must be done in order to

understand what characteristics of a women politician must prevail/be visible – in order to convince the readers in the mapping process.

This implies that we must move beyond simple discourse theory, because the complexity of mapping bodies' movements – the speeches, intimacy, proximity, moving, caring voices or foot movements – exceeds the capacity of this theoretical stance. Hereby, we must be inspired by Rosi (2002) and her "longing for material"; how, for example, certain aspects of the identification process such as proximity and interconnection are impossible to render within language. In other words, we must not forget how the "materialities of bodies, structures, landscapes, resources, etc., tend to disappear or take a back seat to practices of representation".

The lived-experience of concrete signs – which can be mapped against the mental representation of that sign – is then of vital importance. In this aspect, this text is inspired by Mark Johnson (2007), whose work on the bodily basis of meaning is quite different from the social constructivist approach used in this article. Nevertheless, Johnson's suggestions in regard to different concepts can be taken as a point of departure in order to more clearly understand discourses. One understanding of Johnson's research might be that both the mental representations we carry round in our heads as well as the interpretations we make in regard to what we experience as concrete representations are divided into various parts, fields and details that can be mapped against each other. When we find familiarity between many of the parts and pieces of the concrete representation and our mental representations, the latter is proved; or to use the terminology of Michael Foucault: we believe they are true (Johnson 2007, Foucault 1975, 1993).

Thus, resistance is partly dependent upon the interpretation of concrete signs and the mapping process of interpreting the sign against prevailing discourses and mental representations. However, we should not underestimate that existence of resisting discourses or of mental representations are constructed to negotiate power (such as "the superior woman politician"); because, if there is no widespread mental representation of "a superior woman politician", there is no image to "prove". Instead the women, who try hard as politicians, run the risk of being compared with the image of a male politician: she is an in-between, that is, neither a male politician nor a woman. For example, one female MP interviewee described how women, who she experiences as outspoken and strong, were perceived in the National Assembly: "Sometimes, when you do like this (gesture of speaking), everyone looks at you: 'So brave, so intelligent, but not so nice to be around' ... Are you single too; no one will ask you to marry. 'Oh I'm

scared of a woman like that’’. Female politicians may then occasionally adopt the image of a politician “into which various characteristics of dominant masculinities (for example rationalism and individualism) are smuggled” (Monro 2005: 169). This might be an effective strategy to gain political power (e.g. Margaret Thatcher), but women’s mimicry of a political image may also evoke loathing. For example the phenomenon of male gender roles in a female body fills male politicians with aversion, as well as admiration; double feelings indicating ambivalence on how to respond to what is interpreted as a woman acting like a man (Lilja 2008). In this sense, the body of the female politician becomes, as Braidotti (2003: 44) expresses it: “an interface, a threshold, a field of intersecting material and symbolic forces, it is a surface where multiple codes (race, sex, class, age, etc.) are inscribed: it’s a cultural construction that capitalizes on the energies of a heterogeneous, discontinuous and unconscious nature”.

Concretism, in the analysis above, is then about using oneself and one’s body as a means of resistance. Yet a number of researchers have addressed the body as a means of resistance (cf. Butler 1999; Grosz and Robyn 1995). For example, in the edited volume *Negotiating at the Margins* (Davis and Fisher 1993) the first part “Negotiating the Body and its Adornments” deals with power struggles by exploring the body as a site of resistance. It shows, among other things, how women make resistance by surgically remaking their body or by using certain clothes either to construct a resisting sexual identity or to negotiate the boundaries of the appropriate dress. These are all examples of concretism that illustrate how the body can be seen as a site for challenging practices, thus letting the body serve as a tool for resistance.

Universalism

Above, the meaning of different kinds of representations has been discussed. To further understand the nexus between concretism and resistance and what concrete representation means in terms of resistance, the discussion now will introduce the concept of universalism.

One might easily assume and identify with universal norms, i.e. feelings, situations and destinies presented in more general, universally recognizable manners (cf. Hamilton 1997: 101). While all of us might relate to the unspecified concept of being in love, the unravelling of specific agendas, interests or struggles that might be involved in a love-relationship might not be recognised by everybody.

To make use of a more universal but still concrete approach is a strategy sometimes applied by aid organizations engaged in fund-raising for the Third World. Folkekirken, The Danish State Church, aired a television commercial in which a crying baby was accompanied by a black picture and a voice asking, "What do you do when your baby is crying?" The answer was, "you comfort it. Feed it. Give it love" (Westerdahl in Trenter 2000: 50–63). The strategy was to refer to universal values and feelings by playing on the audience's sympathy for their own children and thereby create feelings of solidarity. The idea is to get the giver a feeling of not being different from the aid receiver and thereby reduce the us-them dichotomy that often underpins stereotypization and alienation. This was done by a concrete representation that is easy to relate to, in this case the crying baby. Universalism is a simple mean for resistance; sameness emerges as the superior part and perceives the subalterns and their entangled culture through a new lens. By a simple move, by using simple representations (such as tears of an infant), difference slides into sameness (Lilja 2008).

For women politicians this implies that an effective role model should play on universalism, i.e. act in a way that is understood to be a general female manner – representing the dominating gender – and thus act in a way that women can relate to the role model. Other women must be able to recognize themselves and their female identity in the role model and see how a female "self" can be combined with political activities. Female gender is added to a political image of identity, showing women how to perform like "women" in a slightly different manner. Women are then bargaining and challenging power-loaded discourses and resist by using the very same discourse of gender as they oppose. Power and resistance thereby overlap and intertwine, existing simultaneously, inscribed on personal body spaces.

It is therefore a risk when female politicians normalize towards a norm created by what we might consider a Westernized and masculine perspective. At the same time as the female politician distances herself from the dominating female gender, women in general will have problems identifying themselves with her. As she no longer represents a generally held universal image of womanhood capable of creating the potential for identification, an us-them divide is created and her potential as role model is diminished (Lilja 2008). Thus concretism limits the emancipatory potential of concretism.

Conclusions

I have used the concepts of concretism and universalism to further develop the concept of everyday resistance. By applying the notion of concretism I showed how, in order to strengthen alternative resisting discourses, people must map their mental representations against what they comprehend as more concrete representations – and generate a match. Those representations that are comprehended as concrete – persons, performances, images, etc. – are seen as proof, and are mapped to determine whether or not the spoken discourse is true or false. In line with this logic, to be trustworthy a discourse must not only consist of statements but also be composed of what people interpret as more “real” representations. As my interview data suggests, concrete representations, i.e. women who have assumed a political identity and act successfully from it, can make an alternative discourse trustworthy. Consequently these women then can be considered as a means of resistance. Or as one of the respondents expressed it: “It is a fight back”.

Hence, my conclusion is that the manner in which people separate different signifiers of the representations and their interpretations of different representations, as well as how these are mapped against each other, is important in the analysis of resistance. In this respect, the concept of ‘universalism’ might also help us to understand resistance and its impact. Certain concrete representations (e.g. infant tears) force us to acknowledge how “we” experience concrete situations and practices in the same way as “they”; thereby these representations invoke sameness rather than difference. The us-them divide, as well as the hierarchies that this binary nourishes, are then dissolved. .

Women politicians can use the principle of universalism in order to become role models for other women. By leaning on to a “universal” image of femininity they tend to both strengthen this image as well as bargaining it whilst informing femininity with political know how. Power and resistance thereby intervene, overlap and hybridise while different images of identity, masculinity and femininity are brought to interface.

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The Multidimensionality of Resistance in Youth-Subcultural Studies

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Abstract

Much sociological research has focused on the *exertion* of power, while the subfield of subculture studies has preferred to engage in the study of *resistance* to power. Acknowledging recent conceptualizations of resistance (and Einwohner 2004; Raby 2005), this chapter considers the relevance of subcultural studies in theorizing resistance, specifically by highlighting three dimensions along which the concept may be mapped: passive – active; micro – macro; and overt – covert. Reviewing research from the 1970s through the 2000s to show examples, I develop a conceptualization of each dimension, treating them not as sets of binary pairs, but rather as continua that co-exist and overlap. My goal is to move beyond a typological approach to resistance by encouraging other resistance scholars to critically engage with these dimensions and to use, modify or reject them as we build a pragmatic theory of resistance's usefulness and consequences.

Introduction

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, power is realized as individuals compete to define the situations in which they act (Thomas 1923)¹. Power is understood as a process (rather than a “thing”) that comes into reality as humans interact with one another and try to affect how others define the world around them. From this perspective, power is therefore never fixed, but rather is always being negotiated or contested. As situations emerge, develop and morph, power is negotiated among social actors. Power shapes how we think, how we feel, and what we do, yet it is at the same time an abstraction, a concept that humans have created to make sense of our unequal access to material, cultural, social, economic, emotion and psychological resources. Taking a snapshot of power as it is realized in situations reveals its two-sided nature. On one side are those who have power or who are powerful. They may exert power explicitly through domination or force, or more subtly through “hegemony,” the idea that the powerful maintain their position by convincing others that *their* definition of the situation is natural and benevolent (see Gramsci 1971). On the other side are those with less power or the powerless, the ones impressed upon to think, feel or act in ways others want, whether they want to or not. Inasmuch as power is processual (i.e., constantly negotiated), it consists of both *exertion* and *resistance*.

According to Lilja and Vinthagen (cited in Kullenberg and Lehne 2008), social scientists have tended to focus on the exertion of power rather than resistance to it. Yet for several decades youth subculture scholars have tended toward resistance, studying the “underdogs” rather than those in control. Scholars of the 1960s counterculture saw resistance as representative of hope for the future (e.g. Marcuse 1969; 1970), while some current scholars see resistance as little more than an trite concept that legitimizes the consumptive practices of would-be rebels or as a useless remnant of subcultural “heroism” (see Weinzierl and Mugglegon 2003:6-9). Given these various ways in which resistance among subcultural youth has been theorized, that literature deserves closer attention by resistance scholars. My goal is to move beyond conceptualizations that simplify resistance as either passive or active, micro or macro, overt or covert.

1 Symbolic interactionism is a micro-sociological perspective and method (Blumer 1969) grounded in the belief that humans act based on the meanings they attribute to things around them, including people, objects and environments. The “definition of the situation” (Thomas 1923) is a kind of temporary agreement among people about the social meanings associated with both the context and the identities of those present.

Instead, I will reframe resistance by briefly considering three distinct dimensions as demonstrated in empirical subcultural research and suggest that they serve as sensitizing concepts for future resistance scholarship. Space does not allow for an exhaustive review, but still I hope to uncover what often appear to be implicit assumptions about the nature of resistance in subcultural research.

Three dimensions of resistance in empirical subcultural research

From “obnoxious” hair styles and clothes to burning cars and smashing corporate windows, subcultural youths revel in how uncomfortable mainstream folk become when confronted with resistance. But analytically speaking, is a hair style any more or less resistance than a violent protest? What is each resisting, how and why? Resistance is not the only concept we might use to frame the social objects and practices that are meaningful in subcultural youths’ lives. Their behaviors might as easily signify a pleasurable or playful phase of “rebellion” between childhood and adulthood, a moment of “deviance” from the norms of society, or a focused “contestation” directed against specific agents of control (Raby 2005). Their actions might instead represent a liminal aspect of their adolescence or a personal struggle with inequalities and injustices they experience in their everyday lives. Hollander and Einwohner (2004) argue that the core elements of resistance include opposition and action, yet scholars disagree about whether resistance must be intentional and/or recognized in order to qualify as such (see also Johansson 2008 on this point). While social scientists have considered a variety of behaviors as resistant, rebellious, deviant, or contentious, depending in part on their own academic and personal biases, I would contend that subculture studies has always implicitly recognized intent as a part of subcultural resistance. Either way, resistance and its sibling concepts are predicated on complex relationships between human actors and social environments.

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) and Raby (2005) have recently constructed typologies of resistance, boxes into which we can place moments of resistance and thus easily comprehend it. I find this approach problematic, not least because they develop mutually exclusive categories which do not necessarily represent the how the individuals involved might understand what is going on. I want to take a different track and suggest three *dimensions* of resistance:

passive – active
micro – macro
overt – covert

I use the term dimension in order to emphasize that instances of resistance occur on continua; these conceptual pairs are not binaries. Further, rather than place a would-be example of resistance into a box, this perspective recognizes that resistance may occur along multiple dimensions simultaneously. Thus these dimensions are not mutually exclusive, but may appear to be depending on how the researcher handles them.

Passive – Active

The passive – active dimension draws attention to the *intentions* that underlie youthful acts of resistance, rather than the consequences of those acts (see Hollander and Einwohner 2004 regarding intentionality). Theoretically, the more intentional an act of resistance is, the more agency is expressed by the individual or group.

At the passive end of the continuum we find theories of resistance linked to consumption, specifically resistance *through* consumption, which cultural studies work tends to refer to as resistance-as-appropriation. The consumptive aspects of youth-subcultural resistance were first theorized by the CCCS. On street corners, in dance halls, on the open road, and at weekend holiday spots, working-class youths created social spaces and stylistic practices that *to CCCS researchers* represented resistance to dominant culture. Their resistance, however, was “symbolic” rather than socio-economic (Clarke et al. 1976). The CCCS characterized youths’ resistance in relatively passive terms, as something rooted in both the working-class consciousness of their parents and an emerging youth consciousness based on middle-class patterns of consumption. A skinhead’s Doc Marten work boots, jeans, and suspenders, for example, represented an unconscious desire to reconstitute the traditional working-class community that was deteriorating around him (Clarke 1976a), while teddy boys’ practice of street-fighting in Edwardian suits—bought second-hand in thrift stores once they had gone out of style among the upper class—represented the ideological strain he felt between his desire for mainstream recognition, status, and respect on the one hand, and his mean street working-class roots on the other (Jefferson 1976). “Resistance through rituals,” the CCCS called it, but the rituals were framed as nothing more than appropriations of dominant cultural forms, where subculturalists reassembled mainstream

cultural objects with subversive meanings. In this light their resistance remained as impotent as it was spectacular, described as “magical” because it gave young people the illusion of fighting the system without much chance of improving their life-chances. Clarke, Jefferson, and Hebdige were especially quick to dismiss any concern with these young men’s intentions, primarily because they began with structuralist, neo-Marxian theories that led them to assume certain truths about ideology and culture. Resistance occurred “at the profoundly superficial level of appearances” (Hebdige 1979:17), ultimately failing to improve young people’s socio-economic lives.

Moving away from a pessimistic theory of resistance through consumption, we might look at Willis’ (1977) study of working-class “lads” in the British education system or Lowney’s (1995) study of a group of teenage Satanists in a small town in the American South. Willis showed through observational and interview data how the “lads” recognized that they were being sorted and educated according to middle-class teachers’ expectations for their future abilities and opportunities and therefore developed a subculture that supported and even valorized acts of “opposition to staff and exclusive distinction from [conforming students through] the three great consumer goods supplied by capitalism...clothes, cigarettes and alcohol” (Willis 1977:17). Lowney similarly focused on students’ “development of a Satanic style as an expression of their opposition to [the local dominant culture]” (Lowney 1995:477). Both studies emphasized how resistance was facilitated through specific acts of appropriation and ritual, yet they take us away from a passive view of resistance. Willis’ study does so by looking inside the everyday lives of these working-class youths, where we can begin to inductively derive a sense of intentionality in their behaviors, while Lowney’s probes the establishment and maintenance of a new self-concept that is validated by one’s subcultural peers. Their use of ethnographic methods, rather than the semiotic and rhetorical methods preferred among CCCS scholars, gives each study of resistance more internal validity because each is able to articulate both the meaning and target of resistance from the point of view of the young people themselves. Both studies identify a social-psychological dimension of resistance and demonstrate its significance for the young people’s sense of self, despite a lack of any social-status improvements in their everyday lives.

The situational strength of opposition through identification highlights what young people negotiate every day “as they work through dominant and rupturing narratives attempting in different ways to secure particular forms of authority” (Giroux 1994). It is a mixture of socio-

economic and educational impotence and psychological well-being, a middle ground between the passive and active poles of resistance.

Over the last decade, a tradition of “post-subculture” scholarship has attended to the contemporary dimensions of youthful practices and concluded that consumption rather than resistance is their hallmark (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004; Huq 2006; Muggleton and Weinzierl 2003). Rave and club cultures of the 1990s, and others since, represent a new era of youth hedonism, reminiscent of the mods, yet academically framed in a way that celebrates a live-for-the-moment ideology before it bemoans youths’ failures to improve their lot in life. Examples of research that invoke a similar sense of ambivalence regarding consumption’s relationship with resistance include Brown (2007) and Kates and Belk (2001). What these studies miss — and inadvertently dismiss in their summary statements about youth cultures today — is fact that there remain subcultures that are explicitly framed in terms of intentional social change (see e.g., Haenfler 2004; Phillipov 2006; Schilt 2003). With such actively resistant subcultures in mind, the remaining two dimensions I discuss will be viewed as continua that are already oriented toward relatively active resistance.

Micro – Macro

Once the intent or activeness of resistance has been established, one needs to ask where and how that resistance is directed. In her review of resistance scholarship, Raby (2005) distinguished between individualistic (or “heroic”) and collective forms of active resistance, the former being relatively more “easily redefined or undermined” than the latter (p. 153). Rather than assume some simplified measure of resistance’s success or failure, which is impossible since different acts of resistance have different intents and outcomes, I want to consider how the micro – macro dimension highlights the embodiment and expression of resistance at various levels of society². Youth-subcultural scholars articulate micro – macro resistance through shared subcultural values, norms and beliefs, material and ritual culture, and/or collective identification.

Perhaps the most microscopic level of society is the social-psychological, where resistance is represented as an individual’s rational choice and consequential behavior. Some scholars have attempted to tap

² The micro – macro dimension could also be used to analyze resistance at different spatial/geographic scales or in different time frames, but space limits my discussion here to the social dimension.

into intent vis-à-vis resistance. For example, Leblanc's (2001) research on female punks focused "not only [on] resistant acts, but the subjective intent motivating these as well" (Leblanc 2001:18). But no choice is purely subjective. The choices punk girls make are rooted in socialization to the various small-group cultures in which they live (including punk) and thus their choices are couched in definitions about *what* should be resisted, *how*, and *why*. As a result, micro-oriented resistance can be perceived through singular instances of interaction. What readers see in Leblanc's analysis are not the motivations underlying behavior, but the self-conscious motives that account for why some girls become punk in the first place: refusal to adhere to normative gender and sex roles, including eroticism or demure behaviors, for example. In other words, while active resistance occurs at the micro-level of individual action and may be framed as social-psychological, it is supported by a meso-oriented subcultural "frame of reference" (Cohen 1955).

The meso-level of subculture refers to the stratum consisting of small groups, organizations, and social networks, which are held together through "communication interlocks" (Fine and Kleinman 1979) that may or may not be antagonistic to mainstream culture. Subculture scholars conceptualize meso-level resistance as that which targets peer and other identifiable groups. Returning to Lowney (1995), her analysis showed a collective, though informal, effort by members of the Coven to resist the overtly Christian and sports-oriented high school culture that marginalized them. Similarly, Haenfler's (2004) study of straightedge youth (who abstain from drugs, alcohol, tobacco and casual sex) highlighted how a shared emphasis on "clean living is symbolic of a deeper resistance to mainstream values [and] fosters a broader ideology that shapes straightedgers' gender relationships, sense of self, involvement in social change, and sense of community" (pp. 409-410). At the meso-level, resistance is practiced and celebrated in spectacular rituals such as music concerts, as well as mundane activities such as hanging out together at school or on the weekends. Meso-oriented analyses also call attention to how resistance may represent conflicts and contestations among young people's overlapping social networks and even among competing groups of subculturalists (see Haenfler 2004:429-430), as well over collective identity and the policing of subcultural boundaries (e.g., Williams and Copes 2005; Williams 2006). The meso-level of culture, in short, functions to solidify a frame of reference that will take subculture participants through their everyday lives, assisting them

in moments of micro-oriented resistance, and in some cases helping them frame macro-oriented resistance as well

Macro-oriented resistance, which emphasizes issues of power and inequality at the institutional level of society, was first theorized by Merton (1938), who argued that “rebellion occurs when emancipation from the reigning standards, due to... marginalist perspectives, leads to the attempt to introduce a ‘new social order’” (p. 678). Haenfler’s (2004) research goes on to search for a balance among the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of resistance. Among the straightedge youths he studied, abstaining from mass cultural products such as alcohol or sex was not only an individual(istic) choice, but also part of an outward-facing political orientation toward societal-level change. Some participants in punk and its derivatives also self-identify as members of environmental, social justice, and animal-rights movements and are actively engaged in public protests and other types of “formal” collective action that are macro-oriented (see e.g., Cherry 2006). Yet in general subculture studies has tended to *not* frame youth subcultures as movers of macro-social change, leaving that task to new social movement scholars. One reason for this may be that social movement scholars have done such a good job theorizing macro-oriented resistance over the past forty years that subculture scholars have not felt the need to theorize it themselves (see Martin 2002). My own sense of why macro-oriented resistance is rarely considered is the move toward a post-subcultural sensibility that highlights play and hedonism over more political concerns such as the economy, discrimination, and public welfare.

Overt – Covert

Among the many types of resistance that Hollander and Einwohner’s (2004) conceive are overt and covert, which they describe in the following way.

...overt resistance is behavior that is visible and readily recognized by both targets and observers as resistance and, further, is intended to be recognized as such. This category includes collective acts such as social movements...as well as individual acts of refusal... We use the term covert resistance to refer to acts that are intentional yet go unnoticed (and, therefore, unpunished) by their targets, although they are recognized as resistance by other, culturally aware observers. [Hollander and Einwohner 2004:545, emphasis in original]

Hollander and Einwohner's claim that overt resistance may be either macro-oriented ("acts such as social movements") or micro-oriented ("individual acts of refusal") appears to recognize what I have been arguing so far, that resistance may simultaneously exist across multiple dimensions. They also rightly note the significance of intent in both overt and covert acts of resistance, which has a lot to do with how active resistance is. Even if resistance is intentional at the level of individual thought, the desire for recognition might not be. In other words, we can identify resistance as relatively overt when all parties involved agree on the meaning of things, while the idea of covert resistance may be more appropriate for framing situations where subculturalists feel that they are acting in a resistant way but do not want certain outsiders to recognize it as such.

By definition overt resistance is hard to miss, but it may still take many forms. The "J18" Carnival Against Capitalism and "N30" Anti-WTO protests in Cologne, Germany and Seattle, Washington in 1999 are examples of overt, active, macro-oriented resistance, where activities were coordinated to draw attention to global processes of inequality. Such events can live on forever in subcultural and mainstream mythology alike (consider the continued circulation of discourse surrounding the original Woodstock festival in 1969) but are rare compared to more mundane, micro-oriented forms of overt resistance. Consider how dreadlocks and reggae music, once religious icons among followers of Ras Tafari, took on new significance among participants of the rude boy subculture in the UK in the 1960s and 1970s (Osgerby 1998). Since then, other styles of hair and music have similarly functioned as "in your face" forms of overt resistance. Increasingly common today among youth, tattooing has traditionally "marks a lifestyle declaration on the body...and publicly announces one's identity as resistant to the cultural mainstream" (Atkinson 2003: 210-211).

Toward the covert pole are those actions engaged in within the relative privacy of subcultural space. Music gigs in the hardcore subculture, for example, occur in relatively private spaces such as clubs or the basements of homes. There, the performances of bands and dancers alike redress communal discontent and dissatisfaction with aspects of the larger society while simultaneously allowing participants to momentarily set aside mainstream social norms of etiquette. Hardcore dancing is enjoyable to participants, yet on those rare occasions when members of the mainstream witness it, it is labeled as violent, dangerous, its performers in need of social control (see Simon 1997; Tsitsos 1999). Dancing and sing-alongs may thus be seen as covert even though they are intentionally resistant.

Looking back at the quote from Hollander and Einwohner, we see that they name each form of resistance a “category,” thereby suggesting that any particular act of resistance is *either* covert or overt, but not both. In his study of a confederation of subcultural youths in a local alternative music scene, Tsitsos (1999) found that participants alternately oriented their beliefs and values toward both micro- and macro- forms of resistance. Similarly, Schilt’s (2003) study riot grrrl zines suggests something similar in terms of overt and covert resistance. Riot grrrl culture is predicated on the social problems that are intimately experienced by teenage girls: loss of voice, loss of self-efficacy, or unwanted sexual attention, for example—topics that are not easily dealt with openly/publicly during adolescence. Even if we frame youth subcultures as collective efforts to solve the problems associated with adolescence, girls who subscribe to them often find the same gendered structures enacted therein (Leblanc 2001). Schilt focused on the zines—home-made magazines featuring pictures, poetry, rants and raves, diaries, song lyrics, and other items defined as personally meaningful to the author—that riot grrrl participants created and shared with others in the subculture. Like dancing, zine writing may at first glance appear to be a covert strategy of resistance, since zines are typically produced and consumed in the privacy of girls’ bedrooms and distributed anonymously to small mailing lists. Yet, “zine writing has the ability to be simultaneously public and private. [...] For girls, the experience of having a space to talk about their lives can be very important, as there are few chances for girls to express their thoughts and feelings without fear of ridicule or censure” (Schilt 2003:79). Zines are not only traded through the mail with other girls who request them. Some may be placed in bookstores or coffeehouses anonymously by girls who want to reach a larger audience but wish to avoid the negative repercussions associated with “complaining” about their problems in a more direct way. Nowadays, the ideas of zines is migrating online in the form of blogs, online forums and YouTube videos, through which girls may share as much or as little of their “real life” identities as they choose. Zines, blogs, forums and videos articulate “a sort of c/overt resistance”, allowing girls “to overtly express their anger, confusion, and frustration publicly to like-minded peers but still remain covert and anonymous to authority figures” (p. 81).

This type of resistance may appear relatively impotent, offering an empowering identity or community of friends without affecting the culture of everyday life, yet creating and consuming these cultural objects can affect subsequent micro-oriented (for example, standing up for yourself after

reading a story of another girl who did so successfully or watching a home-made video celebrating “girl power”) and thus diffuse across multiple cultural groups over time, potentially leading to increased social awareness that can be meso- or macro-oriented. Here the concept of anonymity becomes very useful, for it highlights that resistance can be overt and covert at the same moment.

Conclusion

Through a necessarily short, focused review of the subcultures literature, I have identified three dimensions across which resistance functions. Resistance is *multidimensional* in the sense that any particular action or event identified as resistant may be simultaneously analyzed across one or more dimensions. Neither subcultures nor their participants are fixed at certain points on these dimensions, nor should other resistant phenomena be. A young person who defines herself as punk may engage in relatively passive acts of resistance such as buying punk music, yet reading the CD-insert or song lyrics may lead her to engage in more active forms of resistance. She might hide her CD collection and subcultural affiliation from her parents (covert), but proudly express them in front of peers or other adults (overt). The resistant actions in which she engages may involve criticizing her peers in a diary or one-on-one after school (micro), or participating in a social justice demonstration with thousands of other people (macro). In other words, one member of a single subculture may engage in many different types of resistance in their everyday lives, each with its own (set of) consequences.

Qualitative researchers in the social sciences have for some time now critiqued traditional models of research that require putting theory and hypotheses ahead of empirical research. Viewing resistance in terms of continua instead of typologies allows for a more valid approach to studying lived human experience (where validity refers to the “credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account [Maxwell 2005:106]). When researchers rely on typologies, they are straitjacketed, directed to force their data into a pre-existing theoretical category (or to create yet another category or theory). The continua I have suggested in this article are not intended to be used in that way. Rather they are intended to serve as “sensitizing concepts, [which] give the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances” (Blumer 1969:147, 148). And to be sure, these are not the only dimensions on which resistance operates, though they appeared as the most

salient to me in my review of the youth subcultures literature. I invite other resistance scholars to use, modify or reject these three dimensions, and to identify others, as we collectively build a pragmatic theory of resistance's usefulness and consequences for social life.

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