

EDITORIAL

What we (do not) want to publish in the Journal of Resistance Studies

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Journal of Resistance Studies

Entering the fifth year of publishing JRS we can look back at a number of articles on a wide variety of topics within resistance studies. The interest is growing and the field of resistance studies have expanded. From the editorial side we have encouraged authors to describe, analyze, and build theories of resistance in new areas of the complexity of human power relations. The history of resistance studies has moved from a focus on more or less organized social movements to new areas of resistance. We now see a considerable expansion of resistance studies in what James Scott labelled “everyday resistance”. New studies have taken the concept and theories of “everyday resistance” to workplaces in industrialized countries and in military organizations. More studies in a wide variety of fields are done and even more to come.

Let us give some examples. There is a new interest in developing the Gandhian ideas of Constructive Program into a field of different kinds of Constructive Resistance. We have recently published a special issue on *The Materiality of Resistance: Resistance of Cultural-Material Artefacts and Bodies*. The fall issue this year will focus on forms of Digital Resistance. These examples show that nowadays authors from a multitude of academic fields publish studies and develop theories that naturally falls under the heading of resistance studies. Naturally, for us this is like a dream come true. When we started the quarterly forerunner of JRS, the *Resistance Studies Magazine*, more than a decade ago, our hope was to participate in the growth of a new academic field and establish a ground for academic texts to be published. In 2015 we decided to go for a peer reviewed journal and hoped to gain more recognition within academia; and the *Journal of Resistance Studies* was born.

We have not been disappointed. The numbers and qualities of submissions to JRS have surpassed all expectations.

However, this brings us to a new challenge; what are the boundaries of what we want to include in the term “resistance studies” within a publishing policy of JRS? As mentioned in the first editorial (JRS 1-2015) our point of departure was a tentative definition of resistance as “a subaltern practice that might undermine power”. We wrote: “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.”

And these have been central questions during our discussions trying to determine if submissions fit our idea of what JRS should publish, or not. We have rejected many articles of high academic quality when they have failed to fit what we regard as a sufficient resistance focus. The majority of these texts have been assessed to fit better in journals focusing on social movements. Since social movement studies are a field that easily finds its own outlets, we think it only makes sense for us to publish texts on movements that do not fall into mainstream movement research, or that do not explicitly discuss how movements relate to the concept of resistance.

Our aim has been to instead broaden the scope of power relations and contexts, as well as the type of agents and practices that might be helpful to regard as “resistance”. We have, for example, broadened the types of agencies from the typical stakeholders within social movements to a much more diverse group of activists. In this issue we have a text analyzing resistance at the middle level within the Swedish Army. That would have been difficult to imagine five years ago. But we hope it is seen as an indication that it is possible to identify cases of resistance within almost all power relations and kinds of conflicts.

Several questions have popped up in our editorial discussions about the borders of what counts as resistance studies. In these discussions we have always arrived at the same conclusion: that we want to broaden our understanding of resistance and bring in new and surprising perspectives of what counts as resistance, but without diluting the meaning of resistance. Thus, although we encourage novel approaches to what counts

as “resistance”, we need such texts to explicitly discuss what makes their novel examples of practices into “resistance”, and that such discussions relate to other texts or definitions of resistance. So, for example, we would have no problem if someone wants to discuss how meditation and mindfulness might be a form of mental or personal resistance to the internalization of modern truth regimes of productivity, rationality and individualism, as long as it is shown in the text how a resistance framing is helpful to view meditation in a new and relevant perspective. At the core of the question of borders is clearly the question of what we label as “resistance” and why. And, every elaboration of “resistance” must always connect to a power analysis to become meaningful. Basically, something becomes “resistance” by being related to and having (at least potentially) an impact on specific power relations. Therefore, no article in the JRS can discuss resistance without outlining what power it affects, and how. Our policy is quite simple. In the JRS we do not want to publish articles that use the concept of “resistance” in a generous and unsystematic way to all kinds of practices and contexts without explaining why it makes sense, or that discuss conventional examples of social movement activism and use the label of “resistance” without discussing in what way something becomes “resistance” and how it contributes to view it as “resistance”.

On the other hand, we do want to encourage authors to submit articles that explore the borderland of “resistance”. And, here we can imagine several questions or categories of interest. Firstly, we might ask, if resistance has to necessarily be done with certain political intentions or is it the consequences that will decide if it is resistance or not?

Many studies of everyday resistance show that the consequences are often more recognizable than the intentions. Lack of organizational structures and outspoken goals blur most of the potential intentions. But the actual consequences are often clearer and more detectable.

Will the same be true for other kinds of resistance; are the consequences what should decide our categorization of acts of resistance? This seems as an even more relevant question when we study acts of constructive resistance. Campaigns within the wider environmental movement to build ecological systems for electricity production based on water waves, sun, and wind can be viewed as part of the tradition of Gandhi and his Constructive Program. Today more people are engaged

in building alternative energy systems than in protesting climate change or nuclear power stations. Some of the campaigns for constructing sustainable energy production are clearly a conscious act of constructive resistance, trying to undermine the dominance of the fossil industry and nuclear system. If an ecovillage during its struggle against a nuclear waste site decides to build their own solar panels, it will be seen as an obvious case of constructive resistance. But should all installations of solar panels be seen as acts of resistance? Probably not. So, what are the relevant and correct criteria for labelling “resistance”? While of course not aiming to publish articles that discuss alternative energy systems, we would be happy to publish articles discussing and analyzing such questions in JRS; both articles coming from a theoretical perspective and those with illustrative case studies and discussions of theoretical implications.

Secondly, although resistance of course might be violent in different ways, conventional armed struggle by guerrilla movements or paramilitaries falls outside what JRS want to publish. We do not see these means as part of what we understand with resistance studies although they might aim to resist state armies or other dominant military organizations. The reason is that we have chosen to focus on unarmed resistance in all its forms, assuming there are other journals where such war research topics are most welcome.

On the other hand, we think it is an often-overlooked fact that no armed movements use only military weapons and violence. There are always elements of non-armed resistance in their campaigns and wars, and collaborations with non-armed actors. Propaganda, diplomacy, protests, and construction of alternatives (as for example establishing a rebel governance system in “liberated” territories) have always been integrated part of the overall strategies. These parts of resistance and armed struggle are under-researched and there is a need to understand better their role, function, and how they interact with the use of violent means. JRS would like to see more case studies and analytical articles on the role and function of the non-armed elements and actors in guerrilla wars; may that be FARC, ISIS, the Naxalite movement, IRA, or any other armed movement. We see a need to present more nuanced views on their arsenal of tools for resistance.

Thirdly, “sabotage” is an interesting example of a means often related to armed struggles and war, which we think is often too quickly categorized and deserves to be explored more, particularly when it is used within unarmed struggles. We are critical to how some articles in other journals have sometimes framed unarmed sabotage as “terrorism” also when there has been no risk of harming humans, and think the framing of sabotage as “resistance” might be more relevant and fruitful. Depending on the definition of it we have seen movements normally regarded as nonviolent take up different forms of destruction of objects and processes. So far, it has been in the periphery of resistance studies and deserves more exploration. Most examples are probably from times of war, but we have seen more of it also in peace- and environmental movements as well as privacy groups and animal rights networks. When the anti-colonial Gandhian movement encouraged Indians to burn foreign textiles (as part of promoting Indian textile production) it could be defined as an act of sabotage. In order to stop commercial whaling, the animal rights organization Sea Shepherd sank whaling ships, for example in Iceland. We have also seen how the state uses sabotage to undermine activists, as for example when the “action” branch of the French foreign intelligence services (DGSE) sank the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* to prevent them from protesting French nuclear weapon tests in the Pacific Ocean. Hackers or “crackers” have sabotaged computer systems and activists from the Plowshares movement have “disarmed” military equipment and arms by hammering on them in factories and at military bases. Environmental movement groups like Earth First! have destroyed bulldozers, trucks, and other machinery by putting sugar in the gas tank or iron filings in the oil. The examples are numerous and JRS would welcome articles mapping, analyzing, defining, and studying the impact of such acts of sabotage in the context of resistance.

Fourthly, a last point on our “wish list” for future contributions to JRS is articles that focus on less successful examples of resistance. The majority of case studies on resistance are on those who has to some degree been successful. This is understandable, but it might be that cases whiteout the same success rate could be just as interesting and important for the understanding of resistance. We welcome articles analyzing why some actions, campaigns, and movements did not achieve all their goals.

The “What went wrong?” question is under-researched and deserves more attention. Scientists are often quoted saying they learn more from mistakes than successes; and the same is probably the case for resistance actions and movements. But while scientists are very good at documenting mistakes, failures, and unsuccessful experiments, resistance movements tend to focus on their successes and forget what went wrong. In order the “learn from history” such movements need to painfully document and evaluate also their most embarrassing and fatal cases. Therefore, JRS would welcome articles analyzing acts of resistance that did not reach the expected outcome.

The four categories of possible topics for articles for JRS mentioned above should be regarded as a start of a brainstorming session and not seen as limitations for what we want to publish. Other topics could deal with “untasteful” resistance (from fascists, religious fundamentalists, etc.), the role of ethical political considerations for what counts as “resistance”, or the limits of who can do resistance. Could for example powerful leaders, as governments, do resistance (clearly against larger imperialist states, but could they also “resist” its own people)? The only real limit, in a nutshell, is the labeling of “resistance” without discussing that label.