

## EDITORIAL

# What is the core of resistance studies? To challenge conventional perspectives on resistance?

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Seven years into the successful establishment of the Journal of Resistance Studies (JRS), it seems appropriate to make some reflections on what makes ‘resistance studies’ its own field; an area of specialized teaching, research, debate and engagement, involving a body of texts, organized collectives and attached individuals, all focused on resistance. Or, put differently: what makes ‘resistance studies’ alive? Of course, this is also a theme that is clearly connected to the JRS, especially what type of texts we aim to publish. Many current submissions are of good quality but lack a sufficient resistance studies focus. Therefore, we want to take the opportunity to present our thoughts on what we see as the key priority for JRS to publish.

JRS matters for the creation of ‘resistance studies’. This emergence of a field of ‘resistance studies’ can be facilitated by JRS in different ways. Some of it is what all journals tend to do: the publication of overview texts that describe, categorize and analyze the field and, through that process, authoritatively declaring some authors/texts as ‘classics’/‘canonical’, thus creating the structure of the field (this is something several authors do already); making calls for papers on certain themes for the JRS that will build and expand the field and its thematic areas (something we do through thematic special issues); clarifying our editorial policies of what kind of texts we want and do not want (which we try to clarify in our communication with submitting authors, in this editorial space, and on our website); developing our base of specialized reviewers (a constant challenge since we are wildly interdisciplinary in reach, and not all of our specialized expert reviewers are equally well read within resistance studies).

What is common among all these attempts is that by undertaking this seemingly undramatic work of describing the field, that very same field is also simultaneously (re)created. The creation of a field is in a way an effect of several people engaging in and forming a specialized discourse.

When a set of people starts to point out what they see as the elements of a field, arguing about some of its elements and rules, they also create that field. If they continue doing this and more people join the discourse, with references to each other's work piling up and especially when controversies and debates evolve, many people may be drawn into intensive exchanges of opinions— perhaps even creating subgroups, competing initiatives, fractional politics, public statements for and against individuals, institutions, positions, theories and so forth. When all of this happens, the field exists and evolves. This is a fact. It is how thematic subfields within academia are continuously created and change.

However, resistance studies differs from many other fields, or rather it should differ in at least one important way. Resistance studies needs to maintain its resistance to domination also when that domination is occurring within its own field (for example, when one hegemonic definition of 'resistance' goes unchallenged), particularly when it is the academic character of that field that creates patterns of domination within it, when it should instead be accessible to a broad range of actors concerned with the problems of domination.

How then can we do this differently, seeking to avoid a normalization and institutionalization that make fields into new arenas of power struggles, creations of hierarchies, established "truths" and discourse rules, rigid positions to defend? Many of us have a background in Peace Studies and have seen how, at many institutions, that field has been 'streamlined' and taken over by more established fields, such as Political Science and Sociology. Thus, the problem is that some people have managed to establish themselves as a new power hub within the university system. To us this would mark a failure of resistance studies, regardless of whether there are clear advantages to becoming established as an academic field.

We at JRS are attempting to do this differently, by facilitating the emergence of resistance studies in a way that focuses on its core, not its institutionalization. We are not aiming to police the borders or gate-keep entry to the field. Quite the opposite. Instead, we are trying to suggest what makes up the necessary desires, engines and forces within the field that makes it able to move. By understanding more about what makes a field appear in the way it does—in this period of history, among certain people—we hope to nurture its constant emergence.

Rather than protecting, institutionalizing and policing what exists, we need to develop its core and let it evolve and branch out in different directions. Rather than declaring an Orthodoxy, we need to defend the practice of being Heterodox within contemporary academic, political discourses. Rather than patting each other's backs in self-congratulatory tributes to all that we have achieved, we need to get uncomfortable together and disturb the academia that serves the militarized 'peace' and the legalized exploitation of working people, that legitimizes the creation of injustice related to the 'nation state and the existing racist, heteronormative, patriarchal and imperialist world order. We do not need yet another discipline, with new departments, positions and budgets (and all the regulations, policies, criteria, hierarchies, and interests that come with that), if the price we pay is the loss of our critical emergence as a field and involvement in resistance movements. Instead, we want to understand what makes some academics, activists, authors or other (more or less organic) intellectuals move in the direction of critically studying resistance, inside and outside of academia.

Then, what makes a text into one that belongs within 'resistance studies'? Ideally, we think the will to understand resistance (and its relations to power and social change) can arise from lived painful self-experience of—or alternatively, an empathic understanding arising from observing others struggling with—the difficulties for oppressed groups to achieve liberation from domination, violence, exploitation and marginalization.

However, the reality is that such a will to understand can only be sustained if persons have the time, skills, resources and training that enable years of collecting and processing data, literature, available theories and debates. That might be possible for many people with their own experiences from struggles, afterwards, or in periods of reflection. Movements have always had their own 'organic intellectuals' or authors that reflect on the lessons learned, offering a debate and political education within their collectives. Even if individuals can have such experiences and contribute constructively to the development of resistance studies, we see the value of building networks of people who together can develop the field through discussions, disagreements, confrontations and cooperation and by supporting each other.

Thus, few of these written accounts will be viewed as going beyond the personal memories, perspectives or ideologies associated with the movement they came from. The status of presenting 'knowledge', 'social

science' or 'authoritative' accounts is often reserved for professionals, usually as investigative journalists or academics. For those that have the status, salary and training as an academic (or journalist), with the willingness to write on resistance, it might work out well. However, that is a hindrance for non-professional authors. Therefore, a problem might arise of 'professional' dominance over the field. Accordingly, the protection of the author's identity from the reviewer during the 'blind' peer review process is a very important principle—albeit only if the editors invite non-professionals to also have their texts reviewed, an invitation which we feel honored to extend.

The core of a 'resistance studies' text is not its specific style of academic discourse, references or structure. Rather it is a matter of showing an authentic engagement with the fundamental problem: How can we better understand 'resistance' and its relations to power and social change (in this case)? Moreover, such a text needs to relate to and engage with what others have said before on a similar theme/case. Thus, the core of a 'resistance studies' text is to both discuss 'resistance' in relation to power and social change, and discuss how it relates to what others have claimed already.

While this seems straightforward to suggest, what does that mean in terms of actual texts? How are such texts different from others? That is hard to say, although we are not thinking it needs to be formalized. Instead, we would suggest that the JRS needs to open up itself for such critical discussions. The JRS needs to be self-reflective in trying to understand what makes a text into a text within (or outside of) 'resistance studies'. If that is not critically discussed, we are in trouble.

Therefore, the JRS would love to receive texts expanding on a discussion related to this area: self-reflective texts that take a look at our/authors/JRS'/ etc. positionality within academia, society, and the world. We need critical mappings of the field, what it contains and particularly what kind of silences that exist, and why. We need innovative interpretations of what 'resistance' can be in different contexts, in addition to how such 'resistance' becomes different to other more conventional understandings. Furthermore, we need visionary pieces outlining how we can avoid becoming yet another institutionalized, tired and comfortable non-radical discipline, instead identifying how we can as a field become integrated within revolutionary movements, making the JRS and, more importantly, 'resistance studies' as a field, a part of real, radical change against all kinds of unjust relations of dominance, exploitation and violence.