

Review of “Conceptualizing Resistance”⁹⁹, by Jocelyn A. Hollander and Rachel L. Einwohner

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Resistance has become a fashionable topic within a diversity of disciplines. The rapid increase of scholarship on resistance is both exciting and productive, but according to Hollander and Einwohner also problematic in the sense that different authors understand and make use of resistance differently, often with a clear lack of attention to definitions (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:533-534). Their work shows that resistance has been used to explain a diversity of behaviors and settings that are very different in terms of the Mode and scale of resistance, as well as the targets and direction or goal of the resistance (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:535-537). Perplexed, the authors ask; “how can all of these phenomena be described with the same term?” (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:537). In their paper, Hollander and Einwohner aim to clarify the conceptual confusion by presenting a typology of resistance that seeks to move beyond definitional debates and focus instead on the analytical qualities of resistance (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:534). How to proceed on such an

99 Hollander, Jocelyn A. and Einwohner, Rachel L. 2004. “Conceptualizing Resistance”, in Sociological forum, Vol. 19, No. 4, pp. 533-554.

ambitious enterprise? The authors choose to focus on social scientists' published work on resistance where hundreds of books and articles dealing with resistance in one way or another serve as the theoretical and empirical material. Their examination of this literature leads them to conclude that action and opposition (in different forms) are core elements that basically all literature on resistance engages with (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:538-539). However, whereas the basic idea that resistance naturally and/or always deals with some kind of activity that occurs in opposition to someone or something is seen as unproblematic the authors suggest that recognition and intent lies at the heart of disagreements in scholarly debates about resistance (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:539). The questions of whether resistance must be recognized by others ("Must oppositional action be readily apparent to others, and must it in fact be recognized as resistance?") and whether it must be intentional ("Must the actor be aware that she or he is resisting some exercise of power—and intending to do so—for an action to qualify as resistance?") are clearly important questions that scholars researching on resistance, in whatever form and discipline, need to consider and be aware of (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:539, 542). By organizing literature on resistance according to how it deals with recognition and intent, the authors inductively develop a typology of resistance, identifying seven distinct types, each defined by a different combination of actors' intent, target's recognition, and observer's recognition. By characterizing resistance according to these parameters, they distinguish between 'over resistance', 'covert resistance', 'unwitting resistance', 'target-defined resistance', 'externally-defined resistance', 'mixed resistance', and 'attempted resistance' (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:544).

Although the authors briefly discuss the empirical and theoretical material behind the typology, it would have been interesting to have more insight into their sampling procedures, e.g. what does it mean that the bulk of literature comes from sociological papers and how did they decide on the 'influential works' published prior to 1995, and since not all of their references, due to lack of space, are not published it becomes very hard to know if they have missed out on certain important works, e.g. there is no reference to the influential work by Guha on subaltern resistance.

The authors suggest that the typology is a means to sharpen the analytical practicality of resistance and help the researcher to move beyond definitional debates that obscure the sociological aspects of the concept. In

that sense, the typology helps to control for the diversity of resistance and effectively guide the researcher through the chaos of meanings and uses. Problematizing recognition and intent in the light of resistance is an original but yet interesting approach that emphasizes the diversity of understandings and uses of resistance in academia. The authors rightly claim that here is a big gap between everyday forms of resistance such as satire and style of dress and more conventional forms of resistance (political mobilization) such as demonstrations and revolutions, as well as, between understanding resistance as something that needs to be intended by the actor and resistance as something where the actors' intentions are not at all important. Whereas the first part of the article seeks to conceptualize resistance by laying out some parameters for the concept, the second part seeks to problematize the concept from the position of the typology and draw attention to innate complexities of resistance. The idea is that before engaging with the complexities of resistance, it is necessary to first sort out the concept. Here, the article gives special attention, though very brief, to the complex nature of resistance. By examining its interactional nature, the notion that resistance is not defined by the resisters, but also by targets and/or others' recognition of the resistance, the authors seek to draw attention to the role of power (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:547- 551). However, the analysis remains superficial, and the connection between resistance and power is not developed beyond the notion that resistance and domination have a cyclical relationship. Slightly more nuanced is the discussion about accommodation, the notion that agency may constitute both resistance and accommodation to different aspects of power and authority. However, although it is noted that resistance is complex in the sense of being impure, interactional, socially constructed and complex, the authors never engage in any fruitful discussion what this means for the understanding of resistance. Considering the aim of the article—to boost the analytical practicality of resistance—the second part feels somewhat awkward and only remotely connected to the first part. Although the second part brings up very interesting issues, it is never made explicit how these relate to the typology of resistance, and with the brief treatment of these issues they are mainly confusing. Nevertheless, the article is a justified reminder how crucial it is to elaborate on and be aware of strengths, weaknesses, limitations etc. of how one uses resistance as an analytical concept. Considering that resistance constitutes complex social phenomena, it becomes especially important to be clear on how one approach the concept and what consequences that approach has for inquiries into social change. However, it is important to notice that a

diversity of understandings and employments of resistance is not problematic per se. Resistance as a discipline is an underdeveloped area within social science that is lacking in both theoretical and practical experience (Vinthagen and Lilja, 2007). A diversity of meanings and methods should be welcomed and recognized important to extend the practical utility of the concept and understanding of the world. Following this line of reasoning, the author's skepticism, referred to in the beginning, that so many diverse phenomena are called resistance, seems unjustified. Rather, for the concept of resistance to have an analytical potential to understand social change, it seems particularly important to link resistance with an extensive analysis of power relations that emphasize complex social relationships such as structure, agency, choice, identity and knowledge. In their analysis and categorization of resistance, Hollander and Einwohner fail to develop this link at any lengths. Although categorizing/theorizing resistance by the means of a typology can be a good method to draw attention to conceptual confusion, a typology gives an unnecessarily restricted notion of resistance that makes it difficult to think of resistance outside the parameters of recognition and intent. The scientific aspiration to order and classify social phenomena runs the risk of expelling uncertainties and irregularities into a group of others; "...the very act of classifying creates even more ambivalence by relegating everything that does not fit into a sphere of otherness" (Bleiker, 2000:105-106). The author's ambition to find a solid foundation for drawing generalizations rests on the notion that the purpose of social science is to observe empirical regularities. This view is problematic because it gives a restricted understanding of resistance and social change that is poorly equipped to deal with the complexities of the social world. With its diverse and complex nature it becomes particularly important to analyze resistance in specific and context-bound situations rather than by grand theoretical models. Arguing, like the authors of the article, that it is problematic that "different parties (actors themselves, targets, in situ observers, and scholars) interpret the intent behind a particular behavior in different ways" (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004:543) alludes to a positivistic epistemological position where the researcher's experience is supposed to be invisible. The idea that it is possible to produce a 'neutral assessment' of the concept of resistance is problematic in the sense that it conceives of a world that is stable and fixed (Bleiker, 2000). Although it is an ambitious enterprise to clean up the theoretical foundation by constructing ideal types of resistance, this aim fundamentally misconceives of the relationship between theory and practice. In contrast to

positivist understanding, theories cannot be separated from the empirical world that they seek to explain since it is theories that constitute the world (Smith, Booth and Zalewski). In other words, how we perceive the world, and what we think we can do about it, fundamentally depends on how we think about it (Smith, Booth, and Zalewski, 1996). Following this line of reasoning, definitional and theoretical disputes over the meanings of resistance are important in themselves and cannot be reduced, packaged and labeled according to a few criteria in a typology, ready to be unpacked and employed when the researcher sees fit. From this perspective, fussy theory and diverse meanings of concepts are not only signs that there is a lack of attention to concepts and definitions, but also that there is an inherent and ongoing power struggle over these concepts. Rather than finding the ‘truth’ about social change, it is the researchers responsibility to reflect on where this truth comes from “What are the legacies of past theories? Whose facts have been most important in shaping our ideas? Whose voices are overlooked?” (Smith, Booth, and Zalewski, 1996).

Accepting the diversity of resistance requires the researcher to come to terms with the death of God, the Nietzschean notion for the loss of certainty (Bleiker, 2000). A post-positivist approach is equipped to do this, and meanwhile, to provide the tools necessary for enquires into the social world that can embrace complexity, rather than rejecting it.

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