

**Theorizing Resistance:
Mapping, Concretism and Universalism
The New Feminist Concepts of our Time?**

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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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