

Cultural Productions Through Resistance: An Introduction to Section I

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If we had not the power and right to oppose tyranny and obstinacy, caprice and tactlessness we could not endure relationships with people who betray such characteristics. We should be driven to deeds of desperation which would put the relationship to an end. (...) such disagreeable circumstances tend to become intensified if they are endured quietly and without protest ...

(Simmel, 1903, p. 493).

Abstract Building on cultural psychology and taking inspiration from the George Simmel's work, this introduction considers resistance as an act of human and societal creativity and thus as developmental at its core. Resistance can be local, such as fleeting moments in one person's life, or a collective and historical revolt. The chapters in this section introduce this variety.

Keywords Resistance • Cultural psychology • Cultural and personal creativity

Introduction

It is a privilege to introduce this first section, which is devoted to examining relations between resistance and cultural productions. I will do so within the framework of cultural psychology, already introduced in the foreword and the introduction to this volume (Valsiner, this volume).

Central to this developmental perspective is the conceptualization of interdependence in the relation of human beings and their sociocultural environment. From this interdependence human beings as well as cultural environments evolve (Valsiner, 2014). In this respect, the notion of *resistance* is refreshing and welcomed. Most conceptualizations of the dynamics between person and environment highlight how the subject embraces cultural meanings and is empowered by these cultural meanings, while making them into his or her own. This includes concepts such as internalization (Vygotsky, 1998), appropriation (for the varied use by

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earlier and contemporary researchers, see Valsiner, 1998) and notions that are part of developmental concepts such as making use of cultural resources in life (Zittoun, 2006). But contrary to this, we are here dealing with a concept that refers to processes by which human beings dismiss, refuse or oppose cultural meanings and practices from interfering in their lives—or looked upon from another angle—processes by which the environment resists or obstructs the intentionality of the person(s). Resistance is thus a specific developmental occasion that represents a sort of misfit and processually speaking it opens up to further and deeper tensions as well as new generative resolutions. The developmental potentials reside in resistance as germs or complex imaginary visions of other (and better) future states.

Resistance, Subjectivity and Cultural Creativity

As resistance fundamentally operates to reconfigure the relation between the person and her sociocultural living conditions, willpower (and emotions) comes to the fore of our attention. As such resistance is vivid, lively and personal; and this much more than many other phenomena, is given attention in psychological research. Whether loudly or discretely expressed, it contains self-affirmation and a self-experience,

(...) that we are not completely crushed in the relationship. It permits us to preserve a consciousness of energy, and thus lends a vitality and a reciprocity to relationships from which, without this corrective, we should have extricated ourselves at any price (Simmel, 1903, p. 493).

Such subjective messages to the environment might in some instances be tolerated without further notice, in one accepted as a standpoint from which to renegotiate the situation of the subject and yet in other situations retaliated with greater force, thus escalating the tension and maybe the resistance. A particular version of retaliation consists of attempts to de-subjectify the act and subscribe the behaviour to a particular mental disease or a natural period in life (e.g. “terrible twos”).

Resistance is a pathway to the *maintenance* of the dynamic and evolving relation between human beings and their environment; *an act of human and societal creativity, whether it be local and fleeting moments in one person’s life or a collective and historical revolt*. Traditional psychology might have missed this pathway all along its own attempt to understand the human psyche abstractly, and has thus contributed to the cleft between the individual and the collective.

Taking general cultural variability into account, resistance is absolutely necessary to human living. Ordinary, mundane everyday life would turn into an infinite pell-mell of environmental suggestions if persons didn’t resist at least some of them. Existentially speaking, the act of resisting guards and nurtures experiences of meaningfulness in living—irrespective of whether we have small temptations or everyday nuisances in mind or intolerable and life-threatening environmental conditions. Thus, the specific and concrete configuration of resistance, the processes

and outcomes of such developmental occasions are of immense variability and this section only represents glimpses into that variability. But for each and every occasion, “resistance” cannot be conceived other than as a relation.

The Chapters

The chapters are distinguished by very rich descriptions of the contexts and circumstances in which resistance takes place; the practices and the meaning-complexes which persons resist. This richness and historical depth is important to readers who are otherwise left to their own imagination and experience of resistance, which is—however “right” it is felt—always an experienced relationship with *particular* cultural circumstances. By explicating the qualities of the particular cultural circumstances in which resistance occurs, the chapters offer the readers insight into what, and how much is at stake to the persons involved.

To a female living in a Nordic context, the act of divorcing an oppressive and tyrant-husband is considered a completely legitimate and accepted form of resistance, whereas continuous marriage would be viewed with concern. Historically speaking, this societal suggestion is a result of generations of women fighting for equality, along with the general societal need for women in the labour market, trust in the competencies of women and lack of (or control of) fear, that could follow allowing particular groups of people more influential positions. Structural arrangements on state-level seek to compensate (to some degree) for the financial situation of single parents (be it mothers or fathers) although they as a group generally have less lucrative standards of living. Thus, a dense web of social representations and concrete support for those who choose to resist a life in marriage has developed through the history of societies. This affects the choice to divorce or not and the psychological experience of divorce. Divorce is thus not flavoured by feelings of shame today and not taken as a sign of failure as a woman (or man). None of this is the case for Indian females (or males) living in unbearable marriages; not discursively, financially or legally, and even a horrible husband can still be a considered “guard dog to keep other dogs away” (personal communication). The particular resistance, given by a subject or local collectives can thus only be understood—in its creativity or its hazardousness—as a meaningful form and direction, in relation to its specific context.

All the more astonishing is in the chapter by Savita Sagar and Vinita Bhargava: [Dalit women in India: Crafting narratives of success](#). This paper presents the history and present conditions of “untouchable” women; an almost infinite humiliation, exploitation and redundant de-subjection. The deep cultural representations and the severe injunctions applied to their living seem insurmountable for any living creature. Yet, we are presented to the efforts by (some) of these women, craving for dignity and recognition, raising their voices to the world and to Indian society through poetry. As an example, the poem below is excerpted from *Ms Militancy* (2011) by Meena Kandasamy (Navayana Books).

One eyed

the pot sees just another noisy child
 the glass sees an eager and clumsy hand
 the water sees a parched throat slaking thirst
 but the teacher sees a girl breaking the rule
 the doctor sees a medical emergency
 the school sees a potential embarrassment
 the press sees a headline and a photo feature
 Dhanam sees a world torn in half.
 her left eye, lid open but light slapped away,
 the price for a taste of that touchable water.

Chapter “[The Third Gender and Their Identity in Indian Society](#)”, by Nandita Chaudhary and Shashi Shukla, presents a very similar process of exclusion, suppression and exploitation of transgendered Indian persons. But the historic evolution of this situation is very different. *Hijras* represent the oldest transgendered community in the world. It has historically been surrounded by respect and awe, and third-gendered persons have been given special favourable conditions of living. But globalization, the authors reason, has changed the societal representation of the third gender and this strongly affects their living conditions and sense of dignity. “Within this frame, only binary gender division exists, which does not provide recognition to the entire community of people of the third gender”, the authors write. Rather than a very uniform discourse, as we saw in the Dalit case, we are presented to a blend of understandings, including more mythical interpretations of their power and abilities to bless as well as to blight. They are marginalized, unwelcome but also feared, and it is likely that this fear is their key to survival, in an ever more marginalized way.

In Chapter “[Trajectories of Resistance and Historical Reflections](#)”, we are taken to the context of Europe, by Constance de Saint-Laurent. The chapter is noteworthy in several aspects. Here, the resistance concerns the collective past, as it is lived with, and resisted and transformed as the analysis demonstrates. The empirical data stems from interviews with artists who grew up in politically very active communist families whose interpretations of the political history and situation consisted of hegemonic collective myths. Through the analysis, we follow two women’s work and struggle to disentangle the narratives, their omissions and lies by the aid of cultural resources such as schooling and textbooks and personal encounters. de Saint-Laurent offers an analysis of such creative reconstructive processes—which goes far beyond the traditional notion of “remembrance”: From discovery of nagging contradictory information, to resistance to smooth those crackles, their frustration, withdrawal and their creative work towards a more encompassing historical-political narrative along with their own personal and quite painful trajectory in this process.

I assume that people, in most cases, would prefer to change burdening cultural conditions once and for all, rather than circumvent these in a private, discrete and unimpeachable fashion. However, such radical showdown can be extremely costly, in both sociocultural and psychological terms as the first three papers already demonstrate. In Shipra Suneja's and Bhanumathi Sharma's Chapter "[Children Finding Their Ways Through Life Spaces: Glimpses from the Indian Ecology](#)", and in Neerja Sharma's Chapter "[Adolescent Dissent and Conflict Resolution in the Indian Context](#)", we are presented with cases and circumstances in which children and young persons resist collective systems of meaning and practise in their everyday lives, without collectively trying to reinstate another cultural-collective order, by making their perspectives explicit. In Chapter "[Children Finding Their Ways Through Life Spaces](#)" we are offered a very promising start of an analysis of childhood in India; based on descriptions of how children—in a small scale—creatively work with setting their own standards to a satisfying life without risking abandonment or the threat of retaliation—should they go public. The same is the case in Chapter "[Adolescent Dissent and Conflict Resolution in the Indian Context](#)", with a special focus on ambivalent processes living and cherishing family life as well as peer relationships and romantic involvements.

In the final chapter of this section, (Chapter "[Cultural Scripts, Dialogue and Performance: Creating Processes for Resistance and Resolve](#)"), Asha Singh takes us to school. Through a personal account of her own work as researcher and educator, readers are presented with her responsivity to children's resistance, not only at an everyday-based interaction with children, but also proactively through initiating drama classes, where such tensions are safely examined and voiced. It is an interesting pedagogical case that somehow parallels other emancipatory pedagogical initiatives, such as the ones taken in the province of Emilia Romagna (Italy) in the wake of Mussolini's fascism. (Please read this without further comparison between Mussolini's Italy and present-day India.) Here, puppeteers were employed in the whole region and children were encouraged to do as if (imaginary) play. Artefacts were purposely "mis" placed (e.g. a plastic elephant walking on the ceiling or in an aquarium); all this in order to promote children's development of multiperspectivism, and to diminish a one-sided taken-for-granted perspective that once allowed fascism to grow strong. In Singh's case, the children perform, and play out critique and resistance, voicing their standpoints without risking persecution. It's an interesting case of school as mediating a conflictual relationship between person and society from the standpoint of the oppressed.

Taken together, the chapters of this section offer glimpses of insight into the developing dynamics of the individual and the collective through resistance, and to our understanding of how resistance contributes in drawing contours of futures for singular life courses as well as for communities (Fuhrer, 2004; Hviid & Villadsen, in press; Hviid & Villadsen, 2017).

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