



## **Editorial Note: *Political Anthropology and the Fabrics of Resistance***

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Intricate social fabrics, processes and results, make the anthropological study of resistance both elusive and intriguing. Intriguing in the challenges it may or may not pose to power and/or domination; further intriguing because it demands close attention to what people do and say and say they do, and the necessary debates of interpretation and ideology it gives rise to. The word ‘resistance’ and entangled theoretical concepts have been eminent within social sciences at least since the time of Marx. Late Foucault urges us to use resistance “as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations” (1982: 780). Resistance appears in anthropological literature prominently when scholars begin to become aware of their own historical and political positionality vis-à-vis the people of their studies (Asad 1973). Theoretically, post-colonialism and the study of agency combined with ethnographies about subaltern cultures make anthropologists aware that people can, and often do, appropriate and reappropriate their domination structures, crystallize and challenge their discourses. James Scott in 1985 published what was to become a breakthrough in studies of resistance: *Weapons of the Weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*. An ethnographic catalyst in resistance studies, *Weapons of the Weak* shifts attention to everyday, ordinary, indirect strategies through which peasants play through symbolic sanctions with the limits of power imposed on them.

From Marx, Gramsci, Foucault and Scott, the processes and actualities of power/resistance are being debated.<sup>1</sup> Nonetheless, the study of resistance continues to constitute “a minefield of conceptual problems” (Keesing 1992, in Gledhill 2000), for a number of reasons. Some of these include a definitional problem bound up with the history of ideas pertaining to issues and uses of ‘resistance’, which makes the term controversial at best if not biased. A second problem is the foundations of such anthropological studies on the bases of thick ethnographic exploration, so we could agree with Ortner on the luring presence of an “ethnographic refusal” (1995).

It was with a certain curiosity for the different paths in which people challenge or accommodate power through, and with an increasing anxiety about the multiple dimensions of resistance (both as praxis and as concept) that I put forward the call for *submissions* to a *resistance* issue of Durham Anthropology Journal (DAJ). And with a pervasive sense of urgency and necessity. The responses

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<sup>1</sup> In accordance to the tradition in DAJ, I will try to keep this short and I will not go into the details of these debates (but see Comaroff & Comaroff 2002; Foucault 1982; Gledhill 2000; Gramsci 2006; Kurtz 1996; Lukes 2005; Mitchell 1990; Ortner 1995; Sahlins 1999; Scott 1985, 1990; Smith 2004).



received are as varied as the ethnographic instances which they come from. Yet, what the five articles that we present here share the most between them is their defiance of classification.

Diverse and intriguing, these articles emphasise different aspects of political anthropology and the history of resistance, while calling for a greater exploration and debate, either by their meticulous scholarship, their ethnographic findings, or through provocation. They deal with aspects of ‘subalternity’ in a variety of ways and periods, bringing to question overt and covert acts of resistance. The first three articles explore specific ethnographic cases and relate belief and ritual practices to wider historical, socio-economic and political contexts. The fourth article relates to a specific instance in the history of the theory and practice of resistance, while the fifth, an opinionated article, deals provocatively with a resisting ‘subalternity’.

Peter Collins, in his article “On Resistance: The Case of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Quakers”, challenges Scott’s reading of both 17<sup>th</sup> century peasant resistance and his portrayal of everyday forms of resistance as private and ‘hidden’. Through a scholarly, careful and well-supported tracing of historical material (including primary resources reproduced in the article), Collins deals with the difficult and challenging questions of what makes ‘real’ resistance; to what extent political, economic and cultural factors affect resistance movements and strategies; the relationship between resistance and institutional power; and the question of whether resistance needs be revolutionary.

The main argument Collins brings against Scott is that Quaker resistance in 17<sup>th</sup> century England, as a movement and as evolving practices, was not at all hidden: on the contrary, it was provocative and public, and comprised of a complex politico-economic, religious and regional matrix. Its acts of resistance were very public indeed (through the press) and organised (through public meetings), highly provocative against the institutional power of state and church, and received an “extremely repressive and violent response from secular and ecclesiastical authorities.” Yet, the Quaker movement actually thrived under the brutal force of opposition, while, interestingly, it started to shrink after its institutional tolerance, a century later.

Emanuel Valentin, in “Ritual as Cultural Reserve among Sicilian Migrants in Germany”, writes about the rituals of a saint cult, as revitalised by Sicilian immigrants from Mirabella Imbaccari in Sindelfingen, Germany. The article deals with the revitalisation of the Maccarísian saint cult: the “festa di San Giuseppe” (festival of St. Joseph). Valentin traces the historical changes in social and ritual practices, especially as they appear through the complex processes of migration, modernisation and globalisation.

Ethnographically ‘thick’, the article accounts for the ritual changes between the socio-historical contexts of Sicily and Germany, underlying the “importance of seemingly anachronistic traditional forms” as outgrowths of modernity and migration, a hybrid counter-reaction analysed here as “cultural reserve: the dialectical processes between resistance and overlay”. Far from immigrants playing a passive role in their host countries, Valentin shows how they actively create and re-create time, space and social hierarchies through ritual, whilst also ‘traditional’ ritual time and space are adapted to changing social hierarchies, like gender roles and conceptions of public-private space. As a complex process, *cultural reserve* is both an attempt to maintain reciprocal solidarity and resist subordination in shifting social landscapes, as well as a *de facto* effect of immigration.



The triangular relationship between belief - politics - economics, in the heart of political anthropology, is put under the ethnographic microscope in Mark Jamieson's article: "Contracts with Satan: Relations between 'spirit owners' and apprehensions of the economy among the coastal Miskitu of Nicaragua". Jamieson explores how perceptions of 'mythical' beings (such as 'spirit owners' — *dawanka*) offer a window for exploration of present-day forms of exchange which, like the relationship between the Miskitu and their *dawanka*, are often mutually exploitative and destructive. Jamieson not only challenges the literature that presents relations with the supernatural as benign, but shows, using both history and ethnography, that such relations and perceptions are interconnected with changing historical and economic realities.

The article firstly situates the *dawanka* within ethnographic, linguistic and cosmological contexts. Secondly, it describes the relations between *dawanka*, often referred to as 'satans', and human beings: relations of inequality, amorality and asymmetrical exchange, relations of luring but ultimately dangerous 'contracts'. Then, Jamieson ventures on the troubled history and political economy of the Miskitu, situating the narratives of *dawanka* within the broader historical contexts of the rise of asymmetrical relations. Jamieson shows that indeed Miskitu relations of production have been asymmetrical and exploitative, and argues that this exploitative interaction between humans and non-humans is a direct commentary/reflection of the historical socio-economic position of the Miskitu population. Since the traditional role of the *dawanka* in representing socially constitutive 'cycles of exchange' has been rendered redundant, Jamieson argues that these extraordinary beings have come to explain "the mysteries of wealth generation within an opaque cash economy".

Simone Panter-Brick's article "Gandhi's Dream of Hindu-Muslim Unity and its two Offshoots in the Middle East", is a historical exploration of some of the most controversial actions undertaken by one of the world's renowned exemplars of resistance. The article offers a captivating and compact historical analysis of Mahatma Gandhi's political experiments with non-violent resistance, providing a contextual historical account of his political campaigns beginning with Africa in 1906 and leading up to WWII. Panter-Brick brings to light new evidence of Gandhi's double involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, an involvement kept secret for decades; touching upon issues of resistance as perceived and embodied by Gandhi.

In this context, Panter-Brick queries about Gandhi's dream of Hindu-Muslim unity, as well as who were the beneficiaries of Gandhi's political campaigns. Through a well-rounded historical and biographical approach, she provides the contexts of Gandhi's actions as they relate to his theory of resistance — resistance as non-violence or 'adherence to the truth' *satyagraha*. Presenting aspects of Mahatma's thought and actions, the article discusses the realities, successes and failures of non-violence as a means of political resistance, simultaneously revealing the details of his secret and paradoxical involvement in the Middle East.

Panagiotis Papadimitropoulos' article, "Trance Dance: Ritual and Belief", focuses on the emergence of a modern subaltern culture, that of psychedelic trance music and dance. Papadimitropoulos provides a short history of how this subculture came to be and how it is built on the idea of resistance against 'modernisation' by its emphasis on an imagination of a 'pure' past, being 'in touch' with nature. This imagination, we are shown, combines, essentialises and exoticises diverse cultural formations such as perceptions of shamanism. As a 'reaction' to modernisation, in turn, this movement is based on recent historical and politically situated dichotomies between 'West' and 'rest', 'nature' and 'culture', as well as an evolutionary essentialisation of Otherness.



Papadimitropoulos' article presents an interesting array of material, ranging from ethnography, history, ritual studies to biology. His argument captures both the social contexts of the subculture's formation, as well as the possible cognitive reasons for the resilience of a specific music and dance style. This article, audacious in the range of material it presents, acts like a trigger, a direct provocation to the kinds of literature we would usually read in an anthropological publication, and as such we hope will give rise to further debate.

Many thanks to all contributors, not only for their submissions but also for their patience. A special thank to Dr. Claudia Merli and Dr. Stephen M. Lyon, present and former general editors of DAJ respectively, for their warm support and invaluable guidance. I am grateful to all the postgraduate peer-reviewers of Durham Anthropology Department for their help. To be the guest editor of an issue dedicated to political anthropology and the ethnographic fabrics of resistance has been both a pleasure and a struggle. The necessity of political analyses emerging from fine-grained ethnographic studies becomes all the more visible as I'm writing this from the 'field'. I hope the reader will enjoy this issue and find it inspiring.

As a traveller friend wrote to me: "now more than ever, to resist is important."

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