

# IDS Bulletin

Transforming Development Knowledge

Volume 47 | Number 5 | November 2016

## POWER, POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Editors Marjoke Oosterom  
and Patta Scott-Villiers



<b>Notes on Contributors</b>	iii
<b>Introduction: Power, Poverty and Inequality</b> Patta Scott-Villiers and Marjoke Oosterom	1
<b>Inequality, Power and Participation – Revisiting the Links</b> John Gaventa and Bruno Martorano	11
<b>Why Invisible Power and Structural Violence Persist in the Water Domain</b> Lyla Mehta	31
<b>Inclusion as an Agenda for Transformative and Sustainable Change: Addressing Invisible Power through Reflective Practice</b> Jo Howard with Violeta Vajda	43
<b>Intersectionality: A Key for Men to Break Out of the Patriarchal Prison?</b> Jerker Edström with Satish Kumar Singh and Thea Shahrokh	57
<b>Towards a Pedagogy for the Powerful</b> Andrea Cornwall	75
<b>Why Citizens Don't Engage – Power, Poverty and <i>Civic Habitus</i></b> Jethro Pettit	89
<b><u>Power and Empowerment Meet Resistance: A Critical, Action-Oriented Review of the Literature</u></b> <u>Rosie McGee</u>	103
<b>Power in Practice: Bringing Understandings and Analysis of Power into Development Action in Oxfam</b> Jo Rowlands	119
<b>Glossary</b>	131

# Power and Empowerment Meet Resistance: A Critical, Action-Oriented Review of the Literature

Rosie McGee\*

**Abstract** This article reviews recent literature relating resistance studies to power studies, seeking insights that can be applied by change practitioners and social activists. Starting by critically revisiting the purpose and evolution of power analysis with the hindsight that comes from two decades of scholarship and practice, it shows how the transformative potential of power analysis is currently constrained in important respects. The coverage of power theory in the resistance literature is found to be promising but patchy. Agency-based, coercive and wilful versions of power as ‘power over’ tend – with noteworthy exceptions – to be more accessible and tractable to power and resistance scholars and strategists alike than the less accessible structuralist and post-structuralist versions of power as norms, culture and discourse, or processes of structuration. The article therefore proposes a broader framing of power analysis, and makes a start at extending its application beyond strategising for empowerment to strategising for resistance.

**Keywords:** power, power analysis, power theory.

## 1 Introduction

It is time to take a critical look at power analysis and see whether it is being used to its full potential. As a member of the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) Power and Popular Politics cluster, I have worked with colleagues over the last decade to apply understandings of power through teaching, training and use in the design and management of development and social change programmes. Common approaches to power analysis seem sometimes to fall short of the breadth of manifestations of power that we have encountered in practice, and of people’s responses to it. The last decade of social science research has produced several exploratory forays by resistance scholars into the field of power studies, raising the question of whether there is scope for power analysis to help in strategising not only for empowerment but also for resistance, and what that might look like.

© 2016 The Author. *IDS Bulletin* © Institute of Development Studies | DOI: 10.19088/1968-2016.170



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non Commercial 4.0 International licence, which permits downloading and sharing provided the original authors and source are credited – but the work is not used for commercial purposes. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

The *IDS Bulletin* is published by Institute of Development Studies, Library Road, Brighton BN1 9RE, UK  
This article is part of *IDS Bulletin* Vol. 47 No. 5 November 2016: ‘Power, Poverty and Inequality’; the Introduction is also recommended reading.

This article reviews recent literature relating resistance studies to power studies, assessing its coverage in terms of the range of ways power is understood and apprehended by contemporary social justice advocates and actors, and exploring how insights from these conversations might inform activism. It is more of a literature review than an empirical piece, but is action-oriented in two respects. First, it is informed by my recent empirical work on 'invisible power' – power which is structural or lies in the interplay between agency and structure, taking form in socially embedded norms, values and practices (McGee 2016) – and seeks to provide insights for those resisting and contesting this 'most insidious' (Lukes 1974: 27) form of power. Second, I take it that the point of conceptualising power and how it relates to different actors is so as to better understand the social processes surrounding these actors, and ultimately, to contribute to more effective engagement by activists in contemporary social justice struggles.<sup>1</sup>

In the next section I position power analysis as an approach in need of a critical revisit. I go on to review literature from resistance studies and power studies which relate one field to the other at conceptual and theoretical levels, and come to a view on its coverage and gaps, including its applicability to practice. I then compare the concepts of empowerment and resistance; and conclude by reflecting on some implications and questions arising for social activism and practice.

## **2 Power analysis: a refresher**

I frame the article by offering here a brief and partial revisit and reappraisal of power, focusing on two questions: (1) why do power analysis? and (2) what has happened to it over the last two decades?

The bundle of analytical approaches and tools popularised among activists as 'power analysis' since the early 2000s (VeneKlasen and Miller 2002; Gaventa 2006) has grown out of the North American political science tradition of 'power structure research' in the 1960s and 1970s (John Gaventa, pers. comm.), and also owes much to feminist studies and feminist advocacy (Rowlands 1997; VeneKlasen and Miller 2002). Essentially, power analysis is a way to understand the nature of power and power relations. It consists of applying a set of overlapping and interacting analytical lenses to help one to understand that power is at play and categorise it – in terms of expressions (over, to, with, within), realms (public, private, intimate), levels (household, local, national, transnational, global), forms or faces (visible, hidden, invisible), as well as dimensions such as agency and structure, intention and consciousness.

Power analysis might be done as an intellectual or a practical pursuit, or a mixture of the two. On the practical side, power scholars and social justice advocates within the social change and international development fields find that analysing existing configurations of power helps in devising ways to neutralise, counteract or transform them. They have used power analysis to conceive, plan or evaluate efforts to shift power relations between concrete actors in specific contexts.

By 2002, according to Just Associates (JASS), ‘experts and practitioners in the fields of conflict resolution and democracy-building increasingly stress[ed] the importance of incorporating power into their analysis and actions’ (Veneklasen and Miller 2002: 39). In 2006 the Participation, Power and Social Change team at IDS published a range of current work on analyses and practices of power in international development and the entry points for change (Eyben, Harris and Pettit 2006). A few years later, a workshop on ‘power analysis in practice’ at IDS in June 2009 gave rise to the Powercube website,<sup>2</sup> a rich resource for understanding power relations in efforts to bring about social change, and a curated repository of reflective practitioners’ experiences. Work by JASS and IDS along with a range of non-governmental development, advocacy and change organisations<sup>3</sup> to develop and apply power analysis in the development field have in common an explicit and practical commitment to socially progressive change as an end, and to power analysis as a means to that end.

At the opposite end of the continuum, among other political science and political sociology treatises on power are several analyses of different forms of power undertaken by resistance scholars of various social science disciplines. Some of these use power analysis as an instrument to help them develop conceptually and theoretically the newer field of resistance studies (Vinhagen 2007; Vinhagen and Johansson 2013; Johansson and Vinhagen 2014; Lilja, Baaz and Vinhagen 2013; Lilja and Vinhagen 2014). Others (Lilja *et al.* 2013; Hoffman 1999) start from the premise that the point of resistance studies is to better understand power and challenge existing power relations, following Foucault’s dictum that resistance can be used ‘as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used’ (Foucault 1982: 208, 211).

But although power analysis has been used and developed by social justice activists and advocates to strategise for empowerment (Pantazidou 2012), its transformative potential has been constrained in at least two important respects. The social sciences have been dominated for decades by rational choice theory and analytical approaches derived from it. This has cast a long shadow over understandings of social, political and institutional realities. In the view of many non-economist social scientists and even some economists, rational choice theory and its derivative political economy analysis (PEA) offer an ethnocentric, partial or incomplete account of what motivates individual and collective attitudes and behaviours. In relation to power, Pettit (2013: 15) shows how PEA is ill suited to understanding what goes on ‘below the waterline’ – at the less visible level of informal norms, beliefs and practices and the interplay between structure and agency. Some resistance scholars have highlighted how rational choice theory fails to capture the wide range of strategies and reasons behind performances of power and resistance, pointing to the limitations of universal notions of the ‘rational’ for understanding episodes of resistance and using Foucaultian power theory instead (Lilja *et al.* 2013: 204–5). In some quarters of the international

development and aid field too, rational choice-based approaches have come under question, including in recent critiques of the dominant formulae for securing accountable governance through stimulating citizen engagement and bottom-up social change (Pettit *et al.* 2015; Pettit, this *IDS Bulletin*; Fox 2014). For understanding power, power analysis and PEA each have merits and limitations, and the two are best seen not as interchangeable but as alternatives for different, specific, purposes, or as potentially complementary (Mejía Acosta and Pettit 2013; Pettit and Mejía Acosta 2014). Yet overall, in the social sciences, public administration and development studies fields, if not in the realm of social activism, PEA remains much better known and more widely applied than power analysis.

Simultaneously, although reflective practitioners have been careful to contextualise the visually appealing, conceptually simplifying 'power tools' they use within sound social and political theory, and to caution against simplistic, reflex application of devices such as the 'power cube' (Gaventa 2006),<sup>4</sup> 'power analysis' has become all too readily understood as widgets – faces, levels, tools, cube – for unpacking agency-based varieties of coercion. By this, I mean that they treat power as intentional agency and as coercion, focusing on how power is exercised by one actor to constrain or direct the agency of another. To be sure, these artefacts provide excellent entry points for conversation and critique of power in social realities and an introduction to political and sociological theory on power. But the 'essentially contested' (Lukes 1974: 137) phenomenon of power soon escapes the confines of simplified binary and trinary metaphors. A set of richly textured yet less accessible structuralist and post-structuralist accounts of power as norms, culture and discourse, associated with Foucault, Bourdieu and Hayward (Navarro 2006; Hayward 1998, 2000), although addressed in theoretical work (e.g. Lilja *et al.* 2013; Johansson and Vinthagen 2014; Mitchell 1990; Navarro 2006), tend to get marginalised from applied research on power, in favour of those more accessible agency-based, coercive and wilful versions of power as 'power over'. Left out of the picture, too, is structuration. Giddens's way of understanding how society works as a continuous interplay of agency and structure is to posit that society is in a continuous process of 'structuration', with human actions simultaneously structuring society and being structured by it (Giddens 1984). It has been built on by Haugaard (2003) to construct a theory of social order based on structuration and 'confirming-structuration' practices in the exercise and contestation of power: this too lies beyond the scope of common usage of power analysis.

Power analysis is more than promoting widgets that distinguish between varieties of wilful power. The shades of meaning and subtle differences between all the theoretical takes on the various apprehensions of structural and invisible power equally merit analysis. Overall, power analysis offers not a more simplified, reduced account of a given reality than the naked eye or PEA, but a deeper, more complicated one that is more complex to resolve. This promise to complexify rather than

simplify, inherent in the paradigmatic origins of power analysis in the realms of critical realism and social constructivism<sup>5</sup> – contrasting with those of PEA and rational choice theory, which lie in positivism – has probably limited its appeal and uptake.

With these reflections on the current state of power analysis in mind, and a commitment to exploring less common or untried applications, in Section 3 I review literature which relates resistance studies to power studies.

### 3 Resistance meets power

Whether one agrees with Foucault that ‘where there is power, there is resistance’ (Foucault 1978: 95–6) or accepts only Hoffman’s more qualified reformulation that ‘where there is resistance, there is power’ (1999: 674), the exploratory conversations now taking place between resistance studies and power theory or power studies are to be expected and encouraged. They afford deeper understanding of these two sets of concepts and approaches, while also begging the more specific question of how ‘resistance’ relates to ‘empowerment’, a concept that power practitioners and to some extent power scholars use (diversely) to denote challenges to existing power relations.

James C. Scott’s major works expounding his theory of ‘everyday resistance’ predate the naming of today’s field of ‘resistance studies’, but are clearly the first major works to relate different forms of resistance to different forms of power and attempt to systematise these relationships (Johansson and Vinthagen 2014). In referring to the variety of forms of resistance as a ‘mirror image of the variety of forms of *appropriation*’ (Scott 1989: 37, my emphasis), Scott locates his power interest as ‘power over’, power as domination. In sketching how three ‘forms of domination’ correspond to ‘forms of disguised resistance’, he offers ‘Material domination – Everyday resistance’, ‘Denial of status – Hidden transcript of anger, aggression and a discourse of dignity’, and ‘Ideological domination – Development of dissident subculture’ (*ibid.*: 55–6). Thus, Scott does recognise non-material forms of power, and ‘hidden’ and ‘invisible’ power as well as visible. He acknowledges ‘ideological domination’, a form often manifest structurally through the shaping of values, beliefs and norms. Even while focusing on ‘power over’, power as coercive agency – one actor exercising power to coerce or manipulate another – he recognises that the way this happens is sometimes via hegemonic control over the other’s ideas and norms (a Gramscian view, taken forward by Lukes). He also critiques Gaventa’s work on ‘powerlessness’, arguing that power is never completely dominating and resistance is never completely absent, however much it eludes observation (Gaventa 1980; Scott 1990).

‘Everyday resistance’ as conceived by Scott is all about forms of agency that offer ‘disguised’ resistance to both visible and less visible forms of domination; other terms Scott uses are ‘masked’, ‘invisible’ and ‘tacit’. Because it happens unnoticed under a veneer of compliance with the dominant coercive order, each act of everyday resistance ‘discursively

affirms that order' and 'leaves dominant symbolic structures intact' (Scott 1989: 57). However, over time everyday resistance '[exerts] a constant pressure' (*ibid.*: 59), and eventually norms get changed through the defiance and delegitimation it entails.

In later work, Scott (1990) continues to treat power as essentially agential and coercive, while allowing that in 'public transcripts' it is manifest in structural forms. Scott's concepts of 'hidden transcripts' and 'infrapolitics' or low-profile undisclosed resistance to ideological domination (*ibid.*: 198) are all about what power analysts would call the 'power to' reject domination and the 'power with' of sharing grievances and cooperating with fellow subordinates. In the power literature, today's concept of 'invisible power' has emerged gradually from Lukes's (1974) identification of thought-control and compliance with domination as the 'third dimension' of power and Gaventa's further theorisation of this as the internalisation of powerlessness 'instilled historically through repeated experiences of failure' (1980: 254). Later, in VeneKlasen and Miller's work (2002), that invisible power was framed as something tractable, to be confronted using specific consciousness-raising, advocacy and change strategies of the 'power within' and 'power with' varieties (Miller *et al.* 2006). These formulations advocate '[c]hange strategies to counter invisible power [by targeting] social and political culture [and making] alternative values and worldviews alive and visible' (*ibid.*: 10) – essentially, and not in so many words, they advocate the strategic use of 'invisible power' as a weapon or resource the weak can use against the relatively more powerful in a consciously counter-hegemonic way.

Mitchell (1990) critiques most past work on power and resistance, including Scott's, because of its basis in a dualist ontological conception which assumes an opposition between a material or physical realm (the objective dimension of coercion and the physical self), and a realm of consciousness or mental realm (the subjective dimensions of ideas, consciousness and beliefs). Scott's *Weapons of the Weak*, Mitchell argues, 'aims to discover whether power works by persuading peasants' minds of its legitimacy, or by coercing their actions' (1985: 548) – that is, whether it is only the *behaviour* of non-elites that is subjected to power or also their *consciousness*, through hegemony. He argues that this overly dualist starting point – which is evident also in Lukes's (1974) mainly agential construal of the third of his three dimensions of power – invalidates many of Scott's propositions and conclusions: '[T]he complexities of domination never quite fit the terms of the opposition between a physical and mental form of power' (*ibid.*: 573).

As a corrective to this dualism, Mitchell points to Bourdieu's approach to power. Instead of assuming opposition between physical (potentially violent) coercion and voluntary acceptance of an ideology, Bourdieu understands power as 'symbolic violence', 'exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Wacquant and Bourdieu 1992: 167). Symbolic violence is 'intrinsically equivocal', and arises from the



inseparability of practice and ideology. It captures Bourdieu's notion that sustained coercion can actually only take place disguised as voluntary acceptance, as a 'gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognised as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen' (Mitchell 1990: 551, citing Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice*). In this interpretation, far from being a distinct mode of operation of power, coercive power is enmeshed with persuasion or voluntary acceptance, and the dualisms of behaviour/consciousness, material/ideological, lose their validity. Mitchell gives equally short shrift to resistance theorists' debates about the rationality or otherwise of instances of resistance (and by implication, to rational choice theorists). 'Rationality', he points out, is highly situated and experientially defined.

Mitchell's contribution to theorising the relationship between resistance and power is to debunk ontological dualism and the dualist conceptions of power and resistance that go with it, clearing the way for more holistic versions. His arguments have important implications for power analysis: the clumsy dualisms of structure/agency, intentional/unintentional, recognised/unrecognised should be left behind and the differentiation of invisible power from visible and hidden power should be de-emphasised, giving way to contextualised, detailed, perceptive apprehensions of instantiations of power and resistance as people encounter and observe them, rather than as social theory theorises them.

Hollander and Einwohner (2004) set out to 'conceptualise resistance', starting from an understanding that this is a social action involving agency and performed in an oppositional relationship to power. They identify two key defining features: recognition and intentionality. The importance attached to intentionality arises from Scott's observation that outcomes are a poor way to understand acts of resistance because in practice acts intended to constitute resistance often fail. Recognition is a central issue because some resistant acts are designed to be recognisable and others are designed not to be. Hollander and Einwohner unpack these issues through setting out the diversity of 'resistance' – in their treatment, always an action – in terms of its targets, its direction or goals, and whether it is a political or an identity-based action. They identify seven distinct 'types of resistance' (*ibid.*: 547). Key to the concept of resistance, in their view, are its complex and socially constructed nature and its interactional relationship with power. Although they do not explicitly define it, they take power to be domination, and about agency – one actor exercising it over another.

One implication of their argument and their exclusive focus on actions and agents is to eclipse cases where the target of resistance is a faceless, de-personal non-agent. In instances of power as 'everywhere' (Foucault), 'a network of social boundaries' (Hayward) or habituation of social dispositions (Bourdieu), responses to it are less likely to be intended as resistance, or even if intended, might be unrecognisable as such, so according to the narrowest definitions would not count as resistance.

Aspects of Hollander and Einwohner's framework are critiqued in turn by Johansson and Vinthagen (2014). They take the broader perspective that 'everyday resistance is a *practice* [...] historically *entangled* with (everyday) power [...], needs to be understood as *intersectional* with the powers it engages with (not one single power relation); and [is] *heterogeneous and contingent* due to changing contexts and situations' (*ibid.*: 2). Taking resistance to be agency, they explore questions of where, when, by whom and how it occurs. Their perspective emphasises a more fluid, ongoing and open process in contrast with Scott's or Hollander and Einwohner's visions in which certain acts of resistance are treated rather mechanically or compartmentally as responses to certain types of domination. Building on Chin and Mittelman's earlier conceptualisation of resistance to globalisation – a process which represents new forms of power and calls up new forms of resistance – they propose a framework for analysing the interplay of power/resistance, with four dimensions: repertoires of everyday resistance; relationships of agents; spatialisation; and temporalisation (1997: 3). In treating power in the Foucaultian sense as 'ubiquitous rather than located in certain groups; productive rather than merely repressive, and relationship rather than reified' (Johansson and Vinthagen 2014: 4), they depart from the more rigid structuralist and Marxist categories that inform Scott's analysis of power/resistance. Even so, Johansson and Vinthagen's perspective does not explicitly extend to the least visible, least agential interpretations of 'invisible power'.

What we have in Scott (1985, 1989, 1990), Mitchell (1990), Hollander and Einwohner (2004), Lilja *et al.* (2013), and Johansson and Vinthagen (2014) is a series of evolving and increasingly refined frames for resistance analysis derived from various political and sociological traditions and epistemological and empirical standpoints. From Scott onwards, resistance has been understood as a range of agency-based responses to power (or domination), but over time, the understandings of power informing these evolving perspectives on resistance have become less structural, more post-structural, and implicitly or potentially, open to notions of structuration. The resistance scholars have generally favoured continuum- or spectrum-based, relativist typologies, rather than the binary, trinary and dyadic frames of the 'power structure researchers'.

What is left out of the current scholarship on the relationships between resistance studies and power studies? Oriented towards conceptualisation and theory-building for resistance studies as a relatively new field, it is nonetheless far from exhaustive in its engagement with power theory. Gramsci's, Foucault's and Bourdieu's interpretations of power have been explicitly addressed in the later analyses of power/resistance, but nowhere have I found reference to the perspectives on power on which contemporary power analysis is founded: Lukes's (1974), Gaventa's (1980, 2006), VeneKlasen and Miller's (2002). Hayward's contestation of 'invisible power' as wilful domination, and reframing of it as 'a network of boundaries that delimit [...] what is socially possible' (2000: 3) is not addressed. Neither are the constitutive aspects of power as theorised by

Haugaard (2003). Existing resistance scholarship does not explicitly engage with structuration theory, but to some extent differentiates structural from agency-based understandings of power and makes some statements that imply structuration relationships and dynamics between initial power, resistance to it, power adapting in response, and resistance to that.

The work reviewed, being primarily theoretical-conceptual, has focused heavily on building frameworks for understanding, based on the deconstruction of key sociological debates about power (coercion vs persuasion; material vs ideological; intention and recognition). There is room to extrapolate from its theoretical and conceptual offerings to explore their potential or actual applications to practice, including questions of how social actors can respond strategically and effectively to problematic power relations and manage to shift power relations.

#### **4 Empowerment meets resistance**

Power/resistance debates have been more descriptive and conceptual than prescriptive and action-oriented. They have offered a range of understandings of the relationships between power/resistance, shifting over time from discussing power as ‘power over’ (Scott’s domination and coercion), to Gramscian and Foucaultian understandings of power as hegemony (power over and power to, persuasion rather than physical coercion; diffuse and ubiquitous conditioning) and in just one case moving on to engage with the more structuration-oriented perspective of Bourdieu (Mitchell 1990). Therefore, while they tell us something about the nature of resistance to ‘power as a contest of human agency’,<sup>6</sup> they have less to say on power understood as ‘underlying social structures or broader historical, social and cultural forces that shape [...] actors and their ways of relating or acting’.<sup>7</sup> Also, from the perspective of what resistance scholars call subalterns and power analysts call powerless or marginalised people, these debates have shed little light on what to do about the power relations that constrain these actors’ sense and practice of agency and structuration.

The literature on empowerment, conversely, is born of a preoccupation with what the relatively powerless and marginalised can *do* – or sometimes, more controversially, with what others can do on their behalf. Much empowerment analysis as presently practised comes from the women’s empowerment movement. By helping to label visible, hidden and invisible faces or expressions of power, distinguish power over from power to, with and within, and pinpoint the loci and interrelationships of power between the public, private and intimate domains, this body of work helps establish appropriate strategies for reconfiguring interests and positions so as to shift power in a given instance and context.

What about the phenomena of resistance and empowerment themselves? What are the differences, similarities and the overlaps between them? To what extent is strategising for resistance the same as strategising for empowerment? And if power analysis is currently used to some extent in strategising for empowerment and hardly at all in

strategising for resistance (as distinct from conceptualising resistance), is it being used to its full potential?

In views of power limited to 'power as agency' and 'power over', empowerment is about altering relative positions in power relationships in favour of the relatively powerless, or – very rarely – as weakening the dominant (Fox 2005, 2007), so that the relatively powerless can prevail, winning over the once powerful or dominant. However, for many scholars, power is better understood as also 'power to', 'with' and 'within'; as structural as well as agency-based (Hayward and Lukes 2008) and, by some, as involving structuration (Giddens 1984) and 'confirming-structuration' (Haugaard 2003). 'Subaltern' and feminist agency have been acknowledged and well explored, and power is seen as intersectional in nature.

As lenses on power broaden to include 'power as structure', and power to, power with and power within, understandings of empowerment also broaden. A crucial distinction is between 'liberal' and 'liberating empowerment' (Sardenberg 2009). While liberal views adhere to an individualist, materialist form of (usually economic) empowerment, within the 'liberating' camp emerging from feminist thought and Freirean conscientisation, empowerment is understood as involving first a stage of recognising existing power relations and oneself within them, and then a stage of conceiving and undertaking action to change them. In Sardenberg's words, the process 'involves the development of "power with", a notion implicit in "consciousness-raising" as a means of "empowerment", and thus as a political strategy for change' (*ibid.*: 11). Freed from the notion of power as a zero-sum game or as associated with liberal individualism, empowerment can happen or be pursued whatever the 'power' and whoever the 'powerful' in question, and can happen in forms and spaces relatively disconnected from these. An actor can become empowered in relation to a (structural) set of social norms through processes that do not engage the powerful actor in question, nor invoke the structural power in question. Empowerment is a process of agency and structuration. While it is relative to a former situation, it is not necessarily relational, in the sense that it does not need to be done 'against' anything or anyone – a quality summed up by Hayward and Lukes as 'Nobody to shoot'.<sup>8</sup> In a recent influential definition, 'Empowerment happens when individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently and to realise that vision by changing the relations of power that have been keeping them in poverty' (Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall 2008: 6).

Resistance, like these contemporary understandings of empowerment, is also a process of agency and structuration. However, rather than shifting power, creating power or wresting 'power over' from another actor, resistance holds out against power, withstanding and countering its effects, which may entail overcoming it but not necessarily, and may entail just sitting it out. Like empowerment, it may be a response to any form of power. Unlike empowerment, it is an essentially relational concept: with resistance, there is always something or someone to resist.

### 5 Conclusion

Clearly, in any given instance resistance is shaped by power. But, in order to get more practical use from understandings of resistance and the practice of power analysis, an answer is needed to the question posed by Lilja *et al.*: ‘[H]ow does [resistance] undermine power?’ (2013: 209). Resisting someone or their intentions may seem relatively clear-cut; but what about resisting power in the form of ideological domination or hegemony, persuasion, manipulation of viewpoints, or

Table 1 Invisible power and resistance matrix

Mechanisms	Examples	Responses and strategies	
<i>Through which dimensions of power over operate to exclude and privilege</i>	<i>Power over</i>	<i>Power with, within, to</i>	<i>Resistance</i>
<p><b>Invisible: shaping meaning, values and what’s ‘normal’</b></p> <p>Socialisation and control of information: Cultural norms, values, practices, ideologies and customs shape people’s understanding of their needs, rights, roles, possibilities and actions in ways that prevent effective action for change, reinforce privilege-inferiority, blame the victim and ‘manufactures consent’. Dominant ideologies include neoliberalism, consumerism and corporate capitalism, patriarchy-sexism, racism, etc. Key information is kept secret to prevent action and safeguard those in power and their interests.</p>	<p><b>Socialisation/oppression</b></p> <p>1. Belief systems such as patriarchy and racism cause people to internalise feelings of powerlessness, shame, anger, hostility, apathy, distrust, lack of worthiness, etc. especially for women, racial-ethnic minorities, immigrants, working class, poor, youth, gay/lesbian groups, etc.</p> <p>2. Dominant ideologies, stereotypes in ‘popular’ culture, education and media reinforce bias combined with lack of information/knowledge that inhibits the ability to question, resist and participate in change. Examples: Women blame themselves for domestic abuse; poor farmers blame themselves for their poverty despite unequal access to global markets or decent prices or wages; crucial information is misrepresented, concealed or inaccessible (e.g. WMDs and Iraq).</p>	<p><b>Building individual and collective power</b></p> <p>Popular education, empowerment, new knowledge, values and critical thinking tied to organising, leadership and consciousness for building confidence, collaboration, political awareness and a sense of rights/responsibilities/citizenship which includes such strategies as: sharing stories, speaking out and connecting with others, affirming resistance, analysing power and values, linking concrete problems to rights, etc.</p> <p>Doing action research, investigations and dissemination of concealed information and also using alternative media, etc.</p>	<p><b>Contesting meanings and models of behaviour to reshape the boundaries of what is socially possible</b></p> <p>Collective creation of spaces for social interaction with consciously different (non-hierarchical, non-patriarchal, horizontal, democratic, peaceful, humanising) cultures and rules of access and conduct, defined collectively on the basis of critical analysis of dominant culture in ‘normal’ spaces.</p> <p>Instead of adopting dominant language that expresses and normalises the dominant <i>status quo</i> through desensitising euphemisms and metaphors, use of alternative lexicon that avoids or unmask euphemism and names frankly the boundaries experienced.</p> <p>Seeking opportunities to delegitimise the social boundaries in place, by withholding confirmation or affirmation of them, ignoring or circumventing rather than observing them, etc.</p>

Source Author’s adaptation from Miller *et al.* (2006: 11).<sup>12</sup>

the imposition of norms and behaviours? How does one resist a network of boundaries that limits what is socially possible?

Scott asserts: 'Inasmuch as every act of compliance with a normative order discursively affirms that order, while every public act of repudiation [...] represents a threat to that norm, everyday resistance leaves dominant symbolic structures intact' (1989: 57). Yet, he goes on, 'everyday resistance may be thought of as exerting a constant pressure, probing for weak points in the defences of antagonists, and testing the limits of resistance' (*ibid.*: 58–9). Resistance gains ground inch by defiant inch: norms get changed through defiance and legitimation. 'If [a particularly intrepid remark by a subordinate] is not rebuked or punished, others, profiting from the example, will venture across the line as well, and a new *de facto* line is created, governing what may be said and gestured' (*ibid.*: 59).

Power analysis, even in its constrained forms, has helped social activists and change agents to lay bare visible, hidden and invisible faces or expressions of power, distinguish power over from power to, with and within, locate power in intimate, private or public realms and in the connections and disjunctures between these.<sup>9</sup> A number of tools and frames have helped activists to lay the foundations of appropriate empowerment strategies in given contexts. This strategic and practical value is usefully demonstrated by Miller *et al.* (2006: 11) in their 'Power Matrix', where invisible power as a form of 'power over' is exemplified in various forms of socialisation and oppression and a range of ways to construct power with, power within and power to are offered as 'Responses and Strategies' to these.<sup>10</sup> More could still be done, though, to derive practical tactics and strategies from the broader range of power and resistance scholarship discussed above.

Following Hayward and 'de-facing' invisible power to reframe it as 'a network of boundaries that delimit [...] what is socially possible', the 'invisible power' row of their matrix can be expanded with a fourth column focusing on resistance, as shown in Table 1.<sup>11</sup>

Resistant behaviour can delegitimise the dominant or powerful and their norms and behaviours, and can construct legitimacy for alternative norms and behaviours. In a setting where dominant behaviours, attitudes and norms have become normalised over decades through material and fear-based coercion and later through intergenerational transmission mechanisms, in refusing to be complicit with these, people may ostensibly be leaving those structures intact, but they are refusing to affirm or adopt them.<sup>13</sup> However low key and small scale, these acts are contestational in meaning; by contesting them morally and ideologically, if not materially, they contribute to undermining them. Empowerment might be an ill-fitting term for these agential responses to unfair power in settings where the actors in question live in fear, but they certainly constitute resistance.

If empowerment begins ‘when individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently’ (Eyben *et al.* 2008: 6), and if no system of power has been constructed capable of fully extinguishing such imagination (Scott 1990, critiquing Gaventa 1980), resistance and empowerment overlap considerably. Acts, processes and attitudes of resistance to domination and unfair power represent an imaginary of a different world. By enhancing people’s appreciation of their agency and diminishing their fears of the negative consequences of taking action, acts of resistance prepare the terrain for shifting the boundaries of what is possible.

### Notes

- \* I warmly acknowledge feedback from Jethro Pettit on a draft of this article, as well as the extensive conversations about power with him over recent years which have fed into it.
- 1 This challenge was well articulated by the editor of the *Journal of Political Power* when he asked whether conceptualising the power of one philanthropist billionaire or another, or one tribe or another, enables a better understanding of the social processes surrounding these actors (Haugaard 2012: 357), although he did not go on to ask whether this improved understanding would lead to more effective engagement by activists in contemporary social justice struggles.
- 2 See [www.powercube.net/](http://www.powercube.net/)
- 3 For example: Oxfam GB, ActionAid, Christian Aid, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Carnegie UK Trust – see Hunjan and Pettit (2011) and Pantazidou (2012).
- 4 See also [www.powercube.net/analyse-power/what-is-the-powercube/](http://www.powercube.net/analyse-power/what-is-the-powercube/)
- 5 In contrast to political economy analysis, the epistemological origins of which lie in positivism and methodological individualism (Pettit and Mejía Acosta 2014).
- 6 [www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/agency-or-structure-or-beyond/](http://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/agency-or-structure-or-beyond/)
- 7 [www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/agency-or-structure-or-beyond/](http://www.powercube.net/other-forms-of-power/agency-or-structure-or-beyond/)
- 8 In the title of their 2008 article ‘Nobody to Shoot? Power, Structure, and Agency: A Dialogue’.
- 9 Examples of how can be seen at [www.powercube.net/resources/case-studies/](http://www.powercube.net/resources/case-studies/) and [www.powercube.net/resources/papers/](http://www.powercube.net/resources/papers/) and in Pantazidou (2012).
- 10 The Power Matrix can be seen at [www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/mch3\\_2011\\_final\\_0.pdf](http://www.justassociates.org/sites/justassociates.org/files/mch3_2011_final_0.pdf)
- 11 The added fourth column draws on action research in Buenaventura, Colombia (McGee 2016).
- 12 With grateful acknowledgement of co-researchers and action research participants in Commune 3, Buenaventura, Colombia (see McGee 2016).
- 13 See McGee (2016) for a case study of this sort of resistance to violence in Buenaventura, Colombia.



## References

- Bourdieu, P. (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Chin, C.B.N. and Mittelman, J.H. (1997) 'Conceptualising Resistance to Globalisation', *New Political Economy* 2.1: 25–37
- Eyben R.; Harris, C. and Pettit, J. (eds) (2006) 'Exploring Power for Change', *IDS Bulletin* 37.6: 1–10, <http://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/article/view/896> (accessed 26 September 2016)
- Eyben, R.; Kabeer, N. and Cornwall, A. (2008) *Conceptualising Empowerment and the Implications for Pro Poor Growth: A Paper for the DAC Poverty Network*, Brighton: IDS, [www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/conceptualisingempowermentpaperforPOVNET.pdf](http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/conceptualisingempowermentpaperforPOVNET.pdf) (accessed 1 November 2016)
- Foucault, M. (1982) 'Afterword: The Subject and Power', in H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow (eds), *Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press: 208–26
- Foucault, M. (1978) *The History of Sexuality: Vol. 1. An Introduction*, New York NY: Random House
- Fox, J. (2014) *Social Accountability: What does the Evidence Really Say?*, GPSA Working Paper 1, Washington DC: World Bank, <http://gpsaknowledge.org/knowledge-repository/social-accountability-what-does-the-evidence-really-say-2/#.V5zUT> (accessed 18 August 2016)
- Fox, J. (2007) *Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Fox, J. (2005) 'Empowerment and Institutional Change: Mapping Virtuous Circles of State–Society Interaction', in R. Alsop (ed.), *Power, Rights and Poverty: Concepts and Connections*, Washington DC: World Bank
- Gaventa, J. (2006) 'Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis', *IDS Bulletin* 37.6: 23–33, <http://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/article/view/898> (accessed 26 September 2016)
- Gaventa, J. (1980) *Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, Urbana and Chicago IL: University of Illinois Press
- Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press
- Haugaard, M. (2012) 'Editorial: Reflections Upon Power Over, Power To, Power With, and the Four Dimensions of Power', *Journal of Political Power* 5.3: 353–8
- Haugaard, M. (2003) 'Reflections on Seven Ways of Creating Power', *European Journal of Social Theory* 6.1: 87–113
- Hayward, C. (2000) *De-Facing Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Hayward, C. (1998) 'De-Facing Power', *Polity* 31.1: 1–22
- Hayward, C. and Lukes, S. (2008) 'Nobody to Shoot? Power, Structure, and Agency: A Dialogue', *Journal of Political Power* 1.1: 5–20
- Hoffman, D. (1999) 'Turning Power Inside Out: Reflections on Resistance from the (Anthropological) Field', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 12.6: 671–87
- Hollander, J.A. and Einwohner, R.L. (2004) 'Conceptualising Resistance', *Sociological Forum* 19.4: 533–54



- Hunjan, R. and Pettit, J. (2011) *Power: A Practical Guide for Facilitating Social Change*, Dunfermline: Carnegie United Kingdom Trust
- Johansson, A. and Vinthagen, S. (2014) 'Dimensions of Everyday Resistance: An Analytical Framework', *Critical Sociology*: 1–19
- Lilja, M. and Vinthagen, S. (2014) 'Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power and Biopower: Resisting What Power with What Resistance?', *Journal of Political Power* 7.1: 107–26
- Lilja, M.; Baaz, M. and Vinthagen, S. (2013) 'Exploring "Irrational Resistance"', *Journal of Political Power* 6.2: 201–17
- Lukes, S. (1974) *Power: A Radical View*, 2nd ed., Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
- McGee, R. (2016) *Power, Violence, Citizenship and Agency: A Colombian Case Study*, IDS Working Paper 474, Brighton: IDS
- Mejía Acosta, A. and Pettit, J. (2013) *Practice Guide: A Combined Approach to Political Economy and Power Analysis*, Work in Progress Paper, SDC-DLGN, Brighton: IDS
- Miller, V.; VeneKlasen, L.; Reilly, M. and Clark, C. (2006) *Making Change Happen 3: Power. Concepts for Revisioning Power for Justice, Equality and Peace*, Washington DC: Just Associates
- Mitchell, T. (1990) 'Everyday Metaphors of Power', *Theory and Society* 19.5: 545–77
- Navarro, Z. (2006) 'In Search of a Cultural Interpretation of Power: The Contribution of Pierre Bourdieu', *IDS Bulletin* 37.6: 11–22
- Pantazidou M. (2012) *What Next for Power Analysis? A Review of Recent Experience with the Powercube and Related Frameworks*, IDS Working Paper 400, Brighton: IDS, [www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp400.pdf](http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp400.pdf) (accessed 18 August 2016)
- Pettit, J. (2013) *Power Analysis: A Practical Guide*, Stockholm: Sida
- Pettit, J. and Mejía Acosta, A. (2014) 'Power Above and Below the Waterline: Bridging Political Economy and Power Analysis', *IDS Bulletin* 45.5: 9–22, <http://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/article/view/147> (accessed 26 September 2016)
- Pettit, J.; McGee, R.; Dixon, H.; Scott-Villiers, P. and Goyder, H. (2015) *Evaluation of the Strategy for Support via Swedish Civil Society Organizations 2010–2014 – Final Synthesis Report*, Stockholm: Sida, [www.sida.se/contentassets/a0054176407d455ea5e78db3662eb153/08516bfc-6b29-4248-97ae-9cb43ebe8c69.pdf](http://www.sida.se/contentassets/a0054176407d455ea5e78db3662eb153/08516bfc-6b29-4248-97ae-9cb43ebe8c69.pdf) (accessed 18 August 2016)
- Rowlands, J. (1997) *Questioning Empowerment: Working with Women in Honduras*, Oxford: Oxfam Publications
- Sardenberg, C. (2009) *Liberal vs Liberating Empowerment: Conceptualising Women's Empowerment from a Latin American Feminist Perspective*, Pathways to Women's Empowerment Working Paper 7, Brighton: IDS
- Scott, J.C. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press
- Scott, J.C. (1989) 'Everyday Forms of Resistance', *Copenhagen Papers* 4: 33–62
- Scott, J.C. (1985) *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press

- VeneKlasen, L. and Miller, V. (2002) *A New Weave of Power, People and Politics: The Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, Oklahoma City OK: World Neighbors
- Vinshagen, S. (2007) *Understanding 'Resistance': Exploring Definitions, Perspectives, Forms and Implications*, Gothenburg: Resistance Studies Network, Gothenburg University
- Vinshagen, S. and Johansson, A. (2013) "'Everyday Resistance': Exploration of a Concept and its Theories", *Resistance Studies Magazine* 1: 1–46
- Wacquant, Loïc and Bourdieu, Pierre (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, Chicago IL: Chicago University Press