
Copyright:
© the author, 2014

Date deposited: 19 November 2014

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported License

ePrints – Newcastle University ePrints
http://eprint.ncl.ac.uk
Resistance from within and without

Victoria Pagan

Newcastle University Business School

5 Barrack Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 4SE, UNITED KINGDOM

Email: v.k.pagan@newcastle.ac.uk

Acknowledgements

This PhD project is being funded through a studentship from Santander Universities.
Abstract

The relationship between organizations and actors with different ideologies working to address global issues is not well understood, despite the prevalence of forums, meetings and networks acting on a global scale to generate new ideas and new knowledge for intervention. Through this research, I theorize that strategies of resistance to perceived hegemony are subject to contestation and two particular examples of resistance strategies are explored here. The first example is characterised by representatives of civil society who act collaboratively with politicians and corporations in order to resist the existing order and promote transformation. The second example is characterised by similar actors who consider the first a perpetuation of the existing order and so resist by acting independently of politicians and corporations. It is argued that variable interpretations of appropriate resistance are present within the same ideological field and compete with one another in the context of power relations. This results in inconsistent actions towards a transformative goal.

Keywords: global issues, hegemony, civil society, resistance
Introduction

Whilst there is a significant body of work that examines forms of organizing which facilitate actors on a global scale to generate new ideas and new knowledge for intervention (e.g. Caruso, 2012; Fisher & Ponniah, 2003b; Graz, 2003; Santos, 2006, 2008; Scerri, 2012; Vinthagen, 2008; Yanshen, 2012; Ylä-Anttila, 2005) and that which examines the theoretical context in which such forms operate (e.g. Banerjee, Carter, & Clegg, 2009; Bieler, 2012; Conway, 2012; Evans, 2005; Nash, 2005; Rosenau, 2003; Smith, 2005; Steger & Wilson, 2012), there is limited work on the relationship between forms which seem to have conflicting purpose and the actors who operate therein. The relationship between organizational and individual actors with different ideologies working to address global issues is not well understood, despite the prevalence of forms of organizing including global fora, meeting and network spaces.

Through this research, I theorize that actors’ strategies of resistance to perceived hegemony (Spicer & Bohm, 2007), enacted through global fora, are subject to contestation by actors who share similar identity resonances (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Courpasson, Dany, & Clegg, 2012; Thomas & Davies, 2005). The aim of the research is to examine the complexity and contested nature of resistant strategies. Two particular examples of strategies of resistance for the promotion of transformation and the development of an alternative order are explored here. They are both performed by actors who represent civil society (Hutter & O’Mahony, 2004). The first example is a strategy of resistance through a global forum that facilitates collaborative action with politicians and corporations – a strategy from within. The second example is enacted by those who consider the first strategy a perpetuation of
the existing order and their strategy is to resist through a global forum that is independent of politicians and corporations – a strategy from without. Both strategies aim to reinterpret and reinscribe the dominant discourses (Thomas & Davies, 2005) in addressing global issues. Actors try to “commandeer the same discursive space” (Symon, 2005, p. 1658) but aim to achieve this either through multi-disciplinary dialogue with those perceived to have responsibility for perpetuating global inequalities (from within, example 1), or through a refusal to engage (from without, example 2).

This research explores the World Social Forum (WSF) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) as locations of resistance (Spicer & Bohm, 2007). As a forum without the perceived hegemony, WSF “is a space of dialogue: a space for the exchange of ideas and the establishment of connections between different groups and networks from around the world” (Böhm, 2005, p. 138). WEF as a forum within the perceived hegemony is perhaps best known for its annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, every January since 1971. It “built its reputation on being the foremost convenor of global leaders from business and its many stakeholders…then created a base of sustainability and loyalty by integrating those leaders first into business communities and later into non-business communities” (Zwick, Reyes, Schwab, & World Economic Forum., 2009, p. 257).

The empirical contribution of this paper is an understanding of how different actors embed different resistant strategies (Spicer & Bohm, 2007) to achieve a perceived common goal. It explores the ways in which individuals enact struggle without privileging one strategy of resistance over another (see Ashcraft, 2008; Dick,
2008) through the medium of large global expressions (e.g. Fleming & Sewell, 2002). Theoretically, the paper reveals the tensions and conflictual nature of strategies of resistance.

**Resistance and organization studies**

This research is situated within the broad literature of resistance that demonstrates its complex and socially constructed nature (e.g. Thomas & Davies, 2005; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011), as well as that which theorises forms of resistance beyond static organizational boundaries (e.g. Banerjee & Linstead, 2004; Kraemer, Whiteman, & Banerjee, 2013; Spicer & Bohm, 2007; Wittneben, Okereke, Banerjee, & Levy, 2012).

Courpasson, Dany & Clegg (2012) identify three main streams of research into the nature of resistance in the field of organization studies: firstly, that which focuses on workplace dynamics (e.g. Iedema, Rhodes, & Scheeres, 2006; Prasad & Prasad, 2000); secondly, that which draws on creativity (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1998); and thirdly, examinations of the positive dimensions of resistance to change (e.g. Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006). Symon (2005) further conceptualizes resistance according to its location, being: in the psyche, positioned in the individual and expressed through attitudes and behaviours; in the labour process, manifested in the relationships of organizational actors; in Foucauldian disciplinary practices and subject positioning; and in counter-argument and rhetoric. The resistance literature encompasses theories of opposition to repressive and controlling practices, through “to a multidimensional, fluid and generative understanding of power and agency” (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 700).
Whilst studies have examined resistance as micro-political (Thomas & Davies, 2005) which, following Foucault (Spicer & Bohm, 2007), is the “constant process of adaptation, subversion and reinscription of dominant discourses” (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 685), and as macro-struggle “articulated as part of wider hegemonic discourses” (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1671), there has been little discussion of the nested relationship between these forms of resistance in order to explore contestation, competition and construction of new ways of being and doing resulting from strategies of resistance. Spicer and Bohm (2007, p. 1673) acknowledge the potential in examining “sustained interaction with dominant groups such as managerial elites” (resistance from within) as separate from “relatively short bursts of micro-political struggle” (resistance from without), however, this paper seeks to examine these in tandem, both in terms of their outcomes and in terms of the contestation between these as strategies for resisting actors. It is suggested that multiple strategies may provoke ambiguity such that transformation is enabled (Carter, Clegg, & Wahlin, 2011), the goal of those who resist.

This paper recognises a constructionist understanding of resistance (e.g. Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002; Thomas et al., 2011) with the ways in which resistance is identified and characterized being subject to its context (Symon, 2005) and meanings therein (Courpasson & Golsorkhi, 2011). Actors with the goal of achieving transformation in world issues utilize different global forms of organizing and associated relationships in order to resist the current dominant order (Dick, 2008), and these actors assign different meanings to their strategies of resistance which are “characterized by overlapping and mutually embedded practices of

The analysis presented here continues the move away from conceptualizing resistance in a deficit model (e.g. Barbalet, 1985), instead agreeing that resistance is both normal (Clegg et al., 2006) and productive (Courpasson et al., 2012). It seeks to build on the existing definition of productive resistance as being “concerned with concrete activities that aim to voice claims and interests that are usually not taken into account by management decisions…to foster the development of alternative managerial practices that are likely to benefit the organization as a whole” (Carter et al., 2011; Courpasson et al., 2012, p. 801) by replacing ‘the organization’ with ‘the world’. Such a grand substitution, one might argue, however, the actors are resisting discursive practices (Symon, 2005) which have global implications; through their resistance, within or without, they aim for new worlds to emerge. In this respect, as Courpasson et al. (2012, p. 804) continue, “productive resistance requires that resisters create temporary realignments of normal power relations in which the commanded achieve control of an agenda that is presumed to govern them.”

What is under examination is the ways in which the resisters act to create such realignments, the locations of these acts, and the contested nature of the strategies pursued and locations selected. In this research, those who resist are representative of civil society as individuals and/or as organizational actors, defined as “non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charities, trusts, foundations, advocacy groups, and national and international non-state associations” (Hutter & O’Mahony, 2004, p. 1). The research looks at “what resisters do to get their ‘resisting work’
done” (Courpasson et al., 2012, p. 816) and where they do it, rather than positioning actors in fixed and direct opposition to one another. This corresponds with Mumby’s (2005) dialectical analysis of resistance which enables focus on the co-productive nature of actions and consideration of the relationships that maintain one another (Courpasson et al., 2012), marginalizing any requirement to conclude consensus.

**Strategies of resistance in global fora**

Studies of resistance in the organization studies literature have tended to focus on the workplace as the location of resistant acts (Spicer & Bohm, 2007) within uneven power relations as expressed therein (Dick, 2008). However, it is possible to broaden our examination to other forms of organizing and associated relations of power, particularly at a global scale, in order to develop our understanding of strategies and locations of resistance, specifically, “resistance as taking place within a field of power and meanings” (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p. 700). In this paper, I examine strategies of resistance through global fora which are subject to struggle over both issues of global significance and “the conditions of participation in the debate” (Ylä-Anttila, 2005, p. 428).

There are a number of global meeting and discussion fora, as one such form of organizing operating to address global issues. These have varying structures, memberships, participation and purpose (e.g. Bieler, 2012; Fotaki, Bohm, & Hassard, 2010; Maguire & Hardy, 2006) and examples include United Nations committees, G7/G8/G20 meetings of world leaders, Bilderberg conferences, Trilateral Commission (Hilary, 2013) Occupy, Anonymous, World Economic Forum, World Social Forum and many others. These examples are characterised by their
meeting-events and between-meeting interactions and a common connection is established between actors by virtue of their participation.

Participation in all of these forms of organizing is regulated, albeit to different degrees and in different ways, creating power relations of inclusion and exclusion and leading to characterisations of being either of the current world system (within it) or against it (without it). Ylä-Anttila (2005) theorizes three forms of exclusion in such fora: 1) formal, for example, the rules of participation, who is in and who is out; 2) structural, for example, the resources and networks to be able to participate; and 3) cultural, the portrayal as being unqualified to participate in some way. Participation may be structured according to, for example, resonant ‘day job’ roles and responsibilities, invitation, paid membership, and/or registration. Even those that have a relatively open participation policy may still generate exclusions on the grounds of political affiliation (for example, holding political office), choice of political action (for example, violent direct action), resources (for example, inability to pay for travel to a meeting/event), and/or organisational focus (for example, religious representation or business focus).

Actors from civil society may or may not be able to participate in these global fora according to their regulation. Those that are able and do participate can use their participation to resist and reshape discursive regimes (e.g. Jorgensen, 2007; Thomas & Davies, 2005) of global significance. Whilst each global forum has varying degrees of exclusion across these forms exerted as a condition of their central principles, it can be argued that there is a fourth form of exclusion that can be exerted between resisters. There is an extent to which an actor's ideological
resonance (i.e. challenging the dominant discourse) privileges the ‘right’ type of alter-resistant resistance through such global fora (e.g. Dick, 2008) to the exclusion of particular types of collaborative or cooperative strategies (Valley & Thompson, 1998). For some, resistance should only be enacted in and through global fora which exist in direct opposition to the current order (from without). For others, resistance can and should (also) be enacted in and through global fora with participants who generate, perpetuate and protect the current order (from within).

These two strategies of resistance, one through an oppositional global forum and one through a collaborative global forum, echo the characteristics of two of the strategies as defined by Spicer and Bohm (2007). One characterised as infra-political strategy (without), that is, “direct action that is not co-ordinated through formal organizations and actively avoids engagement with official centres of power such as corporate hierarchies or the state” (p. 1675) and one characterised as political strategy (within), that is, “relatively open debate and conflict” (p. 1673). As Haunss and Leach (2007, p. 71) describe, “in their efforts to create change in the larger society, social movements enter into relationships of coalition, competition or conflict with other political actors, becoming embedded in a wider set of social and political networks that structures activists’ opportunities and choices.”

It is therefore possible to see these strategies both enacted towards the same ends, whilst being subject to critique by those pursuing one, usually infra-political, approach. But by pursuing such relationships, these actors may be perceived as colluding with and perpetuating the very thing that they aim to resist (Sewell, 2008). There is conflict between resisters as to the appropriate strategy or strategies, where
civil society acts as a partner to state institutions and/or with civil society as equal to them, and/or civil society acts as an agent to monitor state institutions, and/or civil society is prime, perceived as separate from state with resistance to homogenization (Fisher & Ponniah, 2003a). Decisions are made by resisting actors based on an analysis of how best to achieve one’s ends through dialogue and engagement (Courpasson et al., 2012) which may “simultaneously attract[ ] and repuls[e]” (Ashforth & Mael, 1998, p. 95). All approaches aim to exert influence over those who are perceived to be in positions of dominance (Courpasson, 2011) but whilst the “appearance of consensuality and cooperation can often conceal resistance” (Prasad & Prasad, 2000, p. 389), this strategy of resistance is perceived to be illegitimate by some.

Reluctance to engage in more collaborative strategies is not solely evident from the side of the resisters, but also from the incumbents. It would be misleading to expect that all would welcome those with obviously differing ideological positions to the debate without expecting resistance to be manifest (Courpasson, 2011). In the extreme, Hensmans (2003, p. 359) found “incumbent spokesmen now reframed their strategic discourses by repeatedly marginalizing anti-globalization demonstrators as ‘anarchists’ and ‘criminals’ who were not contributing anything to a constructive globalization debate.”

This paper has been motivated by the limited consideration in the extant literature of how those who resist can influence the decisions of others to produce change (Courpasson et al., 2012) in global issues. It aims to continue the move away from resistance as being in binary opposition to something, and of being only
one type of action or position in the field (Thomas & Davies, 2005). In this respect, the research reveals examples of the “tensions and contradictions that underlie apparent cohesion and that point to potential social change and transformation” (Mumby, 2005, p. 22).

**Research Context and Methods**

Two empirical fora are being considered in this research, selected on the basis of their comparable goals yet competing ideologies, and their similarity in terms of the manifestation of the forum as a form of organizing. They have been selected purposively based on their political importance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and relationship to one another on this basis. One of the fora shares the characteristics of a social movement or “movement of movements” (Santos, 2008, p. 249) and the other represents a more traditionally structured organizational form. These sites are selected as cases studied in order to explore debates and discussions of sustainability rather than to study the sites as ends in themselves (e.g. Stake, 2005).

The first site is the World Social Forum (WSF), which is purposely noted in Banerjee’s (2008) work as a mechanism through which normative practices are challenged and resisted. From its first assembly in 2001, the World Social Forum has defined itself as “an open meeting place where social movements, networks, NGOs and other civil society organizations opposed to neo-liberalism and a world dominated by capital or by any form of imperialism come together” (World Social Forum, 2002a), a forum that aims to support the creation of “another world” (World Social Forum, 2002b). WSF is a forum for strategies of resistance without perceived dominant hegemony.
Albeit that the World Social Forum (WSF) is not in itself a social movement (or a group or an organization), Clemens 2005, p. 355) notes, “many newer movements explicitly foreground non-hierarchical models of organization, ... alliance structures and consensus-based decision making”, enabling it to be identified as a ‘site’ to be studied. Some unease has often been exhibited between organization studies and the study of social movements, given an association of ‘organization’ with rigidity and control, which “seems incompatible with projects of social change” (Clemens, 2005, p. 352), however, there is an extent to which ‘organizing’ is evident. WSF has an International Council and committees are convened to organize the annual meetings which represent the most centralized manifestation of Forum activity. Participants are wide in range, including individual activists, academics, representatives of CSOs and the charitable sector. But WSF deliberately organizes differently, to “facilitate decentralized coordination and networking among organizations engaged in concrete action towards building another world, at any level from the local to the international” (World Social Forum, 2002a).

Contrasted with WSF is the second setting, the World Economic Forum (WEF), “an independent international organization committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic and other leaders of society to shape global, regional and industry agendas” (World Economic Forum, 2012). WEF has a formally organized structure, including managing directors, senior directors and directors and administrative staff. It has a longer history than WSF and its heritage is academic. Within the managerialist paradigm, it began in 1971 as the European Management Forum. Its founder and current Executive Chairman is
described as “Professor, Manager, Visionary” (Zwick et al., 2009), language that evokes a position of influence, leadership and authority. WEF is a forum for strategies of resistance within perceived dominant hegemony.

The annual meeting, held in Davos, Switzerland, is the flagship event which attracts significant media attention and is attended by the ‘great and the good’ as invited (defined) by WEF. It also comprises a number of additional communities of practice (for example, Global Agenda Councils, Young Global Leaders and Global Shapers), broadening its portfolio of activity and facilitated participation beyond the annual meeting in Davos. Participants are individuals considered to be stakeholders from business, politics, CSOs and celebrity activists (Pigman, 2007). They are installed as powerful and authoritative in the global consciousness, “their claim to govern [is] legitimate” (Dahl, 1961 quoted in Lukes, 1974, p. 23).

The focus of this research is an exploration of the ways in which each form of organizing offers a forum for the proposition of policy, strategy and action in relation to sustainability themes (Brundtland & World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). ‘Sustainability’ corresponds with the economic, social and environmental needs, rights and responsibilities through which our world is constructed and operates. It is understood as being the product of our understanding of the holistic ecology necessary to continue life to a balanced level, the concepts of survival and persistence (Costanza & Patten, 1995).

The analysis in this paper draws on empirical data collected through 38 individual qualitative interviews with participants in WEF and WSF. These interviews
were largely unstructured to draw an understanding of the interviewees’ stories (Mishler, 1991) of participation with either or both fora. They have been co-constructed events in which data has been drawn on the topic through discussion rather than as solely reflecting the interviewees’ account of something outside of the interview setting (Rapley, 2007). Specifically, the interviews were “open to what the interviewee feels is relevant and important to talk about, given the interest of the research project” (Alvesson, 2003, p. 13). The interviews have been concerned with encouraging participants to talk about what they do/have done and why they act/have acted in particular ways in relation to the facilitative nature of each forum, revealing the meaning of these fora to them (Hine, 2000). Data have also emerged through email conversation and reading of documents (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Ybema, Yanow, Wels, & Kamsteeg, 2009), fieldwork notes and research diaries (Haynes, 2012). In this respect, the research has taken an ethnographically informed approach, aiming to be open to a holistic consideration of the research sites and their components of “transcribed talk, spoken narratives, visual artefacts, or material goods” (Delamont & Atkinson, 2005, p. 832) and recognising that things happen in the spaces between these punctuations of data (e.g. Cunliffe & Karunanayake, 2013).

Interviewees were sampled purposively to reflect variation in participation and also for convenience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I aimed to speak with a range of individual and organizational representatives from the private, public and third sector in order to gather a range of perspectives (Rapley, 2007). The sample was not intended to be representative or generalizable (e.g. Bryman, 2001), however, an analysis was undertaken of the profile of participants in the annual congregations in
2013 of each form of organizing in order to take this into account when participants were being approached. This data was publicly available through websites (The Guardian, 2013; World Social Forum, 2013) regarding named attendees and/or the name of their organization. Interviewees were also identified through snowballing (Tilba & McNulty, 2013). Finally, in the course of reading journal articles, newspaper articles, web pages and watching news and other television material, other research participants were identified and approached. Table 1 summarises interviewees’ primary role and/or representation and Table 2 summarises their primary location of residence and/or work.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Interviewees’ Primary Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private Sector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Sector</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2: Interviewees’ Primary Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tunisia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Resistance from Within and Without
This section explores how and why civil society actors choose to resist through each of the global fora and the outcomes of this participation, their strategies for resistance through counter-argument and rhetoric (Symon, 2005) with or against actors perceived to be both in opposition and in power (e.g. Bachrach & Baratz, 1962) in order to resist the current dominant order (Dick, 2008). Interviewee 21 introduces the strategies of participating actors who resist through the forum which facilitates such dialogue (WEF, within) and/or through the forum which operates separately to such a dialogue (WSF, without) (see also Edwards et al., 1995).

“...a few of the NGOs that participate in the World Social Forum process might also be part of the NGOs forum, or the NGO whatever space that is in Davos and in the World Economic Forum setting. Sometimes I think there is an overlap between those NGOs in terms of other spaces, so for example, in the World Trade Organization, or ... the Conference of Parties, the UNF triple C conferences, there’s ministerials that they have, there is often what is called the inside strategy and the outside strategy and there are social movements who are largely in the outside strategy space in terms of mobilisations, in terms of protests, in terms of alternatives that are often preferred and projected but not within the inside, that is the where the negotiations are taking place at the ministerial level and then there are NGOs that are very much in the inside strategy that work with governments often...And then there are some that sort of do both, that have an interaction with the outside as well as the inside.”

Interviewee 21 describes strategies of resistance from within and without various different global fora, including WSF and WEF. He characterises them as ‘internal’ and ‘external’ and offers a description of both. The following sections
explore these strategies in more detail, before considering the implications of each being contested.

*Resistance from without*

WSF has limited centralization and an egalitarian approach to participation through its forum. Its presence emerges from actors who have resonance at a local level, generating belief that things can be made better, and this resonance gives them basis and capacity in their resistance (Evans, 2005). In the words of Interviewee 22, “the WSF helps us build a common, global language of resistance and alternatives to the current world order”. A key benefit of the WSF forum is, therefore, the connection between local experience and a shared global infrastructure, as Interviewee 7 describes.

“I think this is a unique opportunity, the World Social Forum, I think that, to bring so many people together and so many experiences together and so many realisation and different views and, I think there is not such a thing like this on the social level, thinking about you know social movements, or civil society organisations, something so global, there’s not much”.

Resistance from without, in the experience of Interviewee 7, comes from drawing together those actors who share a common commitment to transform the current global system, acting in solidarity with one another. This is a strategy “in which some voices may not be attended to for some time, but which can, if insistent and well organized, make it on to the agenda” (Carter et al., 2011). Interviewee 6 also describes that WSF enables those resistant voices to be heard who do not usually have a platform to express their experiences.
“What [WSF has] at least started to do is to give some sort of platform to movements of people who have in some way been marginalised by Western modernity and globalisation, people of the global south...for example, in the 2004 Forum in Mumbai... I think the thing about that was that the Dalits, the untouchables, came in huge numbers, forest people came in huge numbers, and they really changed a lot of the culture of the Forum I think” (Interviewee 6)

In this respect, expressions of debate about global issues affecting numerous lives come from a multitude of grounds, both as individuals and organizations operating within civil society, and particularly for those who have few available fora through which to enact their resistance (e.g. Courpasson et al., 2012). Interviewee 3 describes his experience of resisting through the WSF forum.

“During the Forum we had many different initiatives, alternatives, new ideas to look globally and think locally, it was a two ways movement because the people from around the world come together they share their experiences and they went back to their places and there they make the changes...the World Social Forum was doing something like from the micro to the macro and back again, it was like a feeding the ideas and spreading is more like capillary structures into the society”

Through WSF, Interviewee 3 describes the ability to resist by considering alternatives to the dominant discursive regime (e.g. Jorgensen, 2007; Thomas & Davies, 2005) and subsequently enacting alternatives in their own practices. In this respect, those who participate in this forum pursue a strategy of acting differently, dialoguing and developing new ways of being and doing that resist existing and dominant global practices (e.g. Dick, 2008). Interviewee 22 explains.
“the WSF’s first commitment is to the poor and marginalized of the planet. To substantially help them one would need, at the very least, to redistribute some of the wealth of the rich to the rest of the world population. The WSF wants to reduce or end inequality while the policies of the WEF do not have this aim in mind.”

In this respect, the WSF aims to support the creation of “another world” (World Social Forum, 2002b) through resistance by actors against and separate from the perceived causes of global issues, and by a focus on those most affected by these global issues. It is committed to achieving this in a very different way to those currently perceived to be perpetuating the current world order (e.g. Courpasson et al., 2012). As Interviewee 22 continues, “The WSF is transforming global culture by introducing, via consultation, a common global set of concerns, a global interpretation of the problems, and many local and global solutions” and it is doing so by its participants acting differently, generating transformation by playing a different game to that played by politicians and corporations perceived to perpetuate the dominant discursive regime in their own interests (e.g. Haunss & Leach, 2007).

Resistance from within

WEF as a global forum, in contrast to WSF, mobilizes resources of the powerful; those who participate include the elite who hold a range of economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1996) on a global scale. The civil society actors who attend do so on the basis of having been invited, participation is not open. Therefore, those who are invited consider strategically whether or not to accept or decline the invitation. Interviewee 19 expresses the benefits of this opportunity to interact with the elite from the point of view of trying to transform through a
collaborative or cooperative strategy of resistance (e.g. Valley & Thompson, 1998) to the current world order.

“… the melting pot of those stakeholders, government, non-profit, corporate and development, because World Bank, UN, they all have people there as well, means that it is the most perfect forum for thinking about some of these big questions, and rarely do you have a salon, or a round table, or a conference that’s going to bring together not just the level of leader, which of course is what WEF is all about, but that diversity of sectors.”

Through these interactions, Interviewee 19 sees an opportunity to resist, as existing points of view can be raised, challenged and debated between those who manifest accepted and legitimized power in the dominant world order (e.g. Thomas & Davies, 2005) in the world (especially the US, UK and western Europe). It could be argued that WEF offers a more direct opportunity for resisters to realign existing power relations (Courpasson et al., 2012) towards a transformational goal given these interactions. Interviewee 11 reflects on the extent to which change has and can be achieved through this strategy of resistance.

“[WEF] changed from being a forum where business and political leaders met and had a few radical people like me on the fringes, to now somewhere where there’s actually thought going in to what sort of world do we want…Now how much change it has actually brought around is another big question…we get value from the contacts, we get value from our voice being heard, we get value from being seen as a player by other organizations that are there…I think we might have influenced some people.”
Through this particular strategy of collaboration, cooperation and/or coalition (Haunss & Leach, 2007; Valley & Thompson, 1998) Interviewee 11 identifies the value gained from his perspective, the productive nature of the resistance is through contact, presence and voice in this forum, resulting in some influence (Courpasson et al., 2012). This strategy considers that WEF, as with WSF, also offers a platform for resistant voices to be heard (Carter et al., 2011), but there is a key difference in who is hearing the voices and a selection of these voices to participate in the first place. Interviewee 15 reflects further.

“...now I think that...there’s a very strong influence of the social, the sustainable, so for example in the recent global risk analysis I think inequality comes out as number one risk as perceived by the World Economic Forum, and you have people like Joe Stiglitz and others who are there, who are reminding the big shots that capitalism will fail if it’s seen to be unjust”

In the experience of Interviewee 15, there appears to be evidence of some influence of those promoting alternatives having an effect over time, pointing to the place of inequality as being recognized and published as a global risk by WEF participants. This perhaps indicates evidence of the type of influence resisters utilising this strategy aim to achieve (Courpasson, 2011) through the co-construction of revised power relations (Courpasson et al., 2012) and voices gradually being attended to (Carter et al., 2008). This is supported by interviewee 18,

“...there’s no way you can solve the problems of the world just with non-profits...you need to mobilise business to move in a different direction...that’s the only way forward...there’re some people who say business is not the solution either...certainly the legal system that can help
us…the leaders of the big NGOs have been interacting with Davos to such an extent that their agendas are more represented, it’s still not the World Social Forum, and it will never be...there’re a lot of people inside the WEF, from what I know, who are a lot more inclined to embrace the social and environmental agenda.” (Interviewee 18)

Through WEF, Interviewee 18 describes the increased representation of the alternative agendas of NGOs in particular (Carter et al., 2011) promoting alternatives (e.g. Jorgensen, 2007; Thomas & Davies, 2005). In contrast to those who participate in WSF, participants act with the politicians and corporations perceived to perpetuate the dominant discursive regime (e.g. Haunss & Leach, 2007; Spicer & Bohm, 2007)). This strategy aims to generate transformation by playing the same game as those representing perceived hegemony.

Strategic tensions and conflict

It is apparent that the two strategies outlined above are not mutually exclusive in their enactment, however, there are those who privilege resistance from without over resistance from within (e.g. Dick, 2008) as illustrated by Interviewee 5.

“…the idea of collaboration by the NGOs in [WEF] is politically extremely tense as an issue and is why we as an organization identify absolutely with the World Social Forum and would never go near the WEF unless we’re going to throw things at it or have big demos outside, participation with it is absolutely out of the question, whereas for the bigger NGOs, for them, the idea of being within the tent trying to influence these things is very important for them. And particularly for us, this is very, very problematic… I use it in the same sense as it is used in France in the Nazi era, when I say collaboration I mean as in ‘collaboration’, I don’t mean it in a nice way”
Interviewee 5 above demonstrates the strength of negative feeling regarding those who choose to resist through participation in the WEF. In the view of this interviewee, such a strategy perpetuates and legitimates the behaviours and beliefs of those in hegemonic power. Interviewee 31 commented that “there can be “spies” who are there to investigate what is going on in WEF to improve WSF in order to better “attack” it. If there are people who genuinely believe in both, then I don’t think they are for global alternative.” In this respect, there is a perception that this strategy of resistance has the effect of maintaining the status quo as “legitimized through powerful consent structures in the wider realms of civil society” (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1679). Interviewee 22 expresses an irreconcilable division between the ways in which each forum seeks to achieve global transformation.

“The economic, political and cultural assumptions of the WEF and the WSF are for the most part completely opposed. There may be a few overlaps but it is very clear that the emphasis of the former is on economic productivity and trade that will never go against the interests of the global top economic 1%”

Despite the experiences of those civil society actors who have participated in WEF, resisting therein, Interviewee 22 considers the assumptions of each forum in direct opposition and therefore participation in WEF marks collusion with the perceived hegemony (Sewell, 2008). It is important to recognize, as illustrated by Interviewee 18, “[WEF’s] a membership organization”, that is, representatives of business and industry pay significant sums of money to be part of it and this source of finance underpins the activities as offered, especially the invitation of civil society participants who do not pay to participate in the same way and whose inclusion or
exclusion rests with those perceived to be incumbents (e.g. Courpasson, 2011; Hensmans, 2003; Ylä-Anttila, 2005). This has implications for how the agenda for discussion can be set, as Interviewee 10 alludes in the following quote.

“…if you were a cynic, you would say well [WEF] talks about being multi-stakeholder platform and challenging to, addressing I should say sorry, the global existential threats that the world is facing…the mission statement of the Forum is ‘committed to improving the state of the world’, now if you were a cynic you might say well you can’t start to improve the state of the world unless you can have a debate about some of the, well, anything should be on the table to debate, and if it’s not on the table then you’re not going to improve the state of the world if you can’t even talk about it”

This raises two main problematic elements: firstly, those that choose to accept the invitation from those perceived to be in opposition and in power (e.g. Bachrach & Baratz, 1962) appear to be collaborating and/or colluding (Sewell, 2008) and thus perpetuating the dominant discourses (Thomas & Davies, 2005). Interviewee 33 illustrates this point.

“I’m not sure which participants attend both, but I’d guess that many of these would be ‘respectable’ NGOs, which just highlights the problems with the NGO system and the ways in which NGOs often end up being agents of neoliberalism.”

Secondly, there is resultant exclusion of voices because of the selective nature of participation in the debate (Ylä-Anttila, 2005). Interviewee 15 considers the limited extent of challenge evident within the WEF forum and that those who resist from within are considered moderate, perhaps even ‘safe’, in their challenge, restricting the amount of transformation that can be achieved.
“... for the most part, most World Economic Forum meetings consist of the chorus singing to the chorus and the choir singing to the choir, with some dissonant voices, I mean there are debates, there are disagreements, but they are within parameters, it's not an anything can goes kind of situation... I don't think that you can discuss with a dogmatist... on breaking the impasse I think if you have a company from Hamas or a settler it's very unlikely that either one of them would say 'hey, well yeah that's true isn't it, let's try and compromise'”.

Without wishing to present a “pick and mix” model of resistance (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1691), it is apparent that there are those resisting actors who see the benefit of pursuing multiple strategies of resistance rather than contesting different approaches and privileging one over another (Dick, 2008). Interviewee 11 explains further.

“we’re not under any illusion at all that going to Davos is the prime change strategy, our prime change strategy is really trying to both create a new narrative or going for different goals, different values, how it will work... co-creating a compelling new story to excite people and secondly getting leaders in civil society and faith groups and progressive leaders from all different, who believe that radical change is necessary to start working together. So that’s our change strategy and therefore going to Davos is just one bit, one way of identifying some of those progressive leaders and then work with some of them outside it. But we don’t think that just talking at Davos alone is going to deliver.” (Interviewee 11)

Whilst this position is problematic, so is trying to reach a consensus on resistance (Mumby, 2005) and, as Interviewee 8 below suggests, multiple and
layered forms of resistance enable the promotion of new systems to move the debate from contestation to transformation.

“…there is something deeper, there are systemic issues, there are root causes and if you don’t tackle the root causes then you will never fix these problems, that then means that it’s not about just typical business as usual of protest and cooperation, so neither the protest of Greenpeace nor the cooperation of Oxfam or WWF with corporates is really transformative, but it requires movement building, it requires a bigger agenda of resistance but also of emergence of the new systems”

The comments of Interviewee 8 suggest that an approach to resistance that moves away from those strategies of protest (from without) and/or those strategies of cooperation (from within) is needed.

**Discussion and conclusion**

Extant research has looked at various categories and typologies of resistance (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Prasad & Prasad, 2000) but this present work seeks not to privilege a particular type of resistance (Dick, 2008), nor does it seek to define a singular alternative world (Tormey, 2005), rather it aims to explore the relationship between different strategies of resistance and those who enact them through different fora, in order to examine the implications for the achievement of co-produced, shared ends (challenging the way things are) (Courpasson et al., 2012; Spicer & Bohm, 2007). It builds on our understanding of “combined or hybrid forms of struggle” (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1690) and examines the resistance created through both engagement with and rejection of dominant discourses (Thomas & Davies, 2005), recognizing that “what seems resistant can turn out to be collusive,
and apparent accommodation can produce possibilities for change. The same act can be resistant in one context and reproduce extant power relations in another” (Mumby, 2005, p. 37). This is problematic because “it becomes difficult to see who wins and who loses, or what counts as acts of dominance, consent, and subversion.” (Ashcraft, 2008, p. 382).

Through the analysis above it is argued that variable interpretations of appropriate strategies of resistance are present within the same ideological field. Actors manifest their responses of resistance in different forms and contexts which exist alongside one another as part of a complex picture of struggle (Spicer & Bohm, 2007). Those strategies that appear collaborative with the status quo are perceived to compete with those that appear directly confrontational in the context of global power relations (Dick, 2008). This results in inconsistent and contested actions towards a transformative goal against perceived hegemony, with strategies from without privileged over strategies from within (see Ashcraft, 2008; Dick, 2008). In addition, the strategies of resistance from within are subject to management by dominant groups, selecting who can participate in the debate (Ylä-Anttila, 2005) and how, thereby allowing resistance to happen and perpetuating a veneer of inclusivity and welcoming challenge. It is acknowledged that the data presented here represents a partial and indicative expression of actors’ resistant strategies and that the contexts described are temporary and dynamic.

The implications of contested resistance responses for transformation in global discursive regimes (e.g. Jorgensen, 2007) are manifest in the relationship between the different strategies enacted and the motivations of those who enact
them. There is no doubt that actors share resonance in their aim to achieve co-produced outcomes (Courpasson et al., 2012; Spicer & Bohm, 2007), albeit that the mode of co-production differs according to context and opportunity (Mumby, 2005) and the spaces of resistance created through both engagement with and rejection of dominant discourses (e.g. Symon, 2005). Three main elements can be drawn from this research, as follows.

Firstly, there is a lack of resolution between those who perceive collusion and/or collaboration and those who perceive resistance and subversion (Ashcraft, 2008). However, what is clear is that there is conscious reflection by those who pursue strategies to participate within existing systems and recognition of the limitations of consenting to the invitation to participate. Despite this, these actors consider these strategies beneficial and as such, continue to see the value in their actions.

Secondly, inappropriate focus about what is the privileged strategy of resistance (Dick, 2008) risks shifting the priority from the co-constructed ends to the quality of the means, potentially constraining what can be achieved. Following Mumby (2005), recognising the actions of resisters in a mutually constitutive relationship is important to understand how participation can reshape discursive regimes (e.g. Jorgensen, 2007; Thomas & Davies, 2005) of global significance through these fora, rather than becoming introspective about the right way to go about resisting. To avoid privileging one over another, there is recognition of “combined or hybrid forms of struggle” (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1690), understanding that the relationships maintain one another, understanding the place
of dialogue and debate and who excludes or includes from the dialogue and debate (Ylä-Anttila, 2005).

Finally, whilst the pursuit of different strategies of resistance risks fragmentation of resonant identities (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1998; Courpasson et al., 2012; Thomas & Davies, 2005) and potentially dilutes the impact of resistance, it is theorized that multiple responses are needed for transformation, therefore contestation can be accepted. Knowledge of participants and ideologies in a field of interest enables response to be formulated, in order to try to realize one interest over another (Hensmans, 2003). Disruption can be provoked through varying strategies of resistance, both those which are manifest between fora at a macro-level, which do not follow a formalized structure and offer collective action, advocacy and networks which are dispersed and flexible to respond to the issues under debate (Tarrow, 2011) and the micro-political events enacted through engagement with extant power elites (e.g. Spicer & Bohm, 2007).
References


