

# Theorizing Embodied Resistance Practices in International Relations

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**Abstract:** This article will take up the question of the body in order to develop a theoretical map for studying embodied resistance practices in international relations. There has been no systematic approach to either the body or embodied resistance practices and it is rather startling that this has been the case. The material body is key to understanding international politics and yet, except for the work of feminist theorists such as Bordo, Young, and Butler and international relations scholars, including Marlin-Bennett, Wilson and Walton, Cooper, Salter and Shinko working in critical, post structural/postmodern studies, it has been relegated to the status of a cipher, an absent presence, constituting the unacknowledged basis of our field. There is a rich literature on the body that has developed across other disciplines (Scary, Feldman, Stoller, Danto and Komesaroff) and it is imperative that international relations scholars begin to develop theoretical pathways for studying the body. Thus this article will examine how bodies 'speak back', how they respond to structural constraints, societal limitations, and forms of domination and repression in order to develop a conceptual tool kit for mapping embodied resistance practices. In short, this examination will offer an overview of what is involved in theorizing bodies of resistance in international relations.

**Keywords:** body, embodied resistance practices, human security, new materialisms, care of the self and performativity.

The context for this article arises from a confluence of two particular developments in international relations theory which includes first and foremost the conceptual shift from a focus on state security, involving issues such as sovereignty, territorial integrity and norms of nonintervention, to one which privileges the security of individuals as indicative of a broader and more comprehensive understanding of security as human security (Galtung 1971; United Nations Development Programme 1994; Tickner 1995; Axworthy 2001; McRae and Hubert 2001; Newman and Richmond 2001; Alkire 2003). The second important development is the emerging work on new materialisms which stresses attention to both the material realities of everyday life and their linkages with broader geopolitical and socioeconomic structures (Coole and Frost 2010: 7).

"Human security is much more than the absence of military threat; it includes the security against economic privation, an acceptable quality of life, and a guarantee of fundamental human rights" (Axworthy 2004: 249). Burke (2007: 94-97) pushes this line of analysis even further, advocating the creation of 'security after security' which rests upon reciprocity and responsibility coupled with a formulation of security which nurtures and provides for the redignification of life. Thus he regards

security “as an interlocking system of knowledges, representations, practices and institutional forms that imagine, direct and *act upon bodies*, spaces and flows (Burke 2007:28, emphasis added). But what is missing in this account is a specific focus on the concept of embodied security and what this might imply for our understanding of a more comprehensive and critical approach to the issue of human security.<sup>1</sup>

Significantly Coole and Frost’s (2010: 19) work on new materialisms also draws attention to the body highlighting its role as a “visceral protagonist within political encounters.” Their focus on the material efficacy of bodies underscores the “active, self-transformative, practical aspects of corporeality as it participates in relationships of power” (Coole and Frost 2010: 19). Thus these two conceptual frameworks, human security and new materialisms, open an interesting theoretical space for the consideration of how embodied resistance practices emerge in global politics and their connections to questions of security and relationships of power within interlocking sets of international structures. And yet as Sasson-Levy and Rapoport (2003: 379) point out “although the human body is a vehicle of all social protest, analytical questions raised by the ‘protesting body’...have been mostly neglected.” Thus, this article will not only specifically address this oversight in international relations theorizing but will offer a conceptual matrix intended to enable us to systematically study embodied resistance practices.

I suggest we take up the body and begin to interrogate what sparks the reaction and response that would place one’s own body on the line to draw attention to violations of individual security. Such an approach is not merely an effort to ‘bring the body back into’ our discussions of security but to recognize that the body has been the unacknowledged site on which and through which international security practices have been and continue to be conducted. The term ‘embodied resistance’ shifts our focus to the ways in which bodies ‘speak back’ to structures of power and how the body itself is risked or sacrificed in order to draw attention to the insecurities individuals endure.

So what qualifies as an instance of embodied resistance? Perhaps some contemporary examples will help to clarify what types of behaviors would fall within such a rubric. The self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian vegetable seller, comes immediately to mind for two reasons, one of which draws attention to his sense of desperation in a highly charged atmosphere of insecurity and the

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<sup>1</sup> See Nuruzzaman (2006: 300) for a critique of the human security paradigm, which he disparages as still too closely allied with realism’s positivist problem-solving approach and support for the status quo, preferring instead the more “sound theoretical projects’ developed by critical security studies and feminism, as well as Paris (2001) who addresses the vagueness and ambiguity of the concept and argues for a reconsideration of the ways in which human security might be refocused in order to provide a more analytical framework for the study of international relations and security.

increasingly narrowing capacity to sustain his own life. The other aspect of course involves how meanings and interpretations were constructed around this act which served as a rallying point for the protests in Tunisia which eventually led to the overthrow of the government. Certainly Anna Hazare's hunger strikes to publicize corruption within the Indian government could also be included. A more troubling example, however, draws attention to biological insecurity and the complexities of engaging in embodied resistance practices in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The reference above is to the practice of food rationing referred to as a 'power cut' where "on some days, some children eat, others do not. On other days, all the children eat, and the adults do not. Or vice versa" (Nossiter 2012: A1). What is significant about this example is that it clearly draws attention to "what it means to exist as a material individual with biological needs for survival yet inhabiting a world of natural and artificial objects, well-honed micropowers of governmentality, and the more anonymous but no less compelling effects of international economic structures" (Coole and Frost 2010: 28). This survival strategy is embedded in structures of power which reflect the Kabila government's efforts to exploit the mineral wealth of the country, China's insatiable quest for rare earth minerals, all of which is nestled in a verdant landscape where less than one percent of the national economy is used to develop agricultural production. Is power cut an instance of embodied resistance or merely a calculated strategy to survive in unbearably insecure relationships of power? And this I would argue is exactly what a more systematic and thorough approach to the analytical questions, posed by embodied resistance practices, will enable us to examine and discuss.

Since the body represents a complex site where theoretical concepts intersect materiality the first thing this article will do is to examine how the body is conceptualized and what the term 'embodied' indicates about how we grapple with what bodies 'are' and what they 'do'. Next this article will review the concept of resistance and its relationship to the body in order to indicate the conceptual significance entailed in the phrase 'embodied resistance practices'. What follows is a detailed examination of the various aspects of embodied resistance practices and how they can be theoretically mapped in order to create a more comprehensive approach to studying how bodies resist and what this signifies for our understanding of security practices in international relations. Such a discussion entails a careful examination of the various facets of resistance which include: act(s) as response, act(s) as provocation, affectivity of the act(s), intent, meaning/interpretation of the act(s), physicality of the act(s), emotive content of the act(s), impact of the act(s) and finally responses and reactions to the act(s). All of the aforementioned constitute what Foucault means by 'actions upon actions' and thus this

conceptual map will isolate and examine how these various aspects of embodied resistance emerge and what they signify. Looking forward, certainly this line of research has profound implications for helping us understand how and why embodied resistance practices have become so central to the emergent protests recognized as the driving forces behind the democracy movements associated with the Arab Spring.

### **Theorizing the Body**

There is something about the body that we can't quite wrap our minds around and it has to do with the body's role as the coordinating point of reference drawing together the material and the ideational. On the one hand, there is an underlying sense that what happens to the body or bodies is an important record of struggles and achievements and that these various aspects of physicality serve as documentation and confirmation for establishing certain 'truths'. On the other hand, there is a perilous sense of foreboding in attaching 'truths to the body' which in turn serves to script an essentialism that marks some bodies as more acceptable or privileged. And thus there has been an effort to reject stabilizing idealized forms of the body and to conceptualize the body as unfinished, open ended, and continuously in process. But this space between the material and the ideational aspects of the body should not be approached as an either/or dualism but deserves to be explored as a constitutive space denoting where and how the body emerges in international relations.

This complex terrain between the material and the ideational emerges quite clearly in a recent op-ed article by Blow in *The New York Times* (2011:A23) which draws together the physical body, racial discrimination, photographic documentation, discourse and political recognition. What the author finds so troubling is how the revisionist imagery of an integrated American Army recounted in the film "Captain America: The First Avenger" threatens to efface the very real racial discriminations faced by the Buffalo Soldiers who were the only all black company to serve in Europe in WW II. A photograph of his grandfather, Fred Rhodes limping as a result of his war wounds, in combination with historical documentation of his valor and the record of his 1944 Silver Star citation, draws our attention to why the physicality of the body and the political context and historical record in which bodies can be made to appear or disappear must be kept open and studied in tandem. The body marks the site of injury, and serves to document both the war wounds and the racial discriminations Rhodes suffered. The rejection of Rhodes' recommendation for a Distinguished Service Cross in conjunction with the racist attitudes of his commanding officer corroborated the fact that Rhodes could not enjoy the very freedoms for which

he was wounded. And this wounding is what ties the physicality of what happened to Rhodes' body to the ideational spectrum of racial discrimination and the privileging of white soldier's bodies.

Thus Blow (2011: A23) concludes "there are too many *bodies* at the bottom of that swamp [the racial history of the United States] to skim across it with such indifference. Attention must be shown. Respect must be paid (emphasis added)." As is clearly demonstrated bodies serve as both the physical and the ideational link connecting a racialized past with a present that is admonished to pay attention and respect what those bodies suffered and achieved. And it is the attention paid to the body's materiality which provides us with the basis for sustaining and advancing these political claims but the struggle over the ideational aspects of the body indicates how discourses can operate to efface or to bring bodies into clearer relief. So, if we want to understand how bodies resist and to what effect, we need to examine how the materiality of the body interacts with its ideational representations.

There is no clear access point for understanding or comprehending what the body is because the "body is heavily mediated by culture and expresses the social pressure brought to bear on it" (Entwistle 2001:37). And by drawing on Merleau-Ponty, Entwistle (2001:44) further deepens our understanding of the body in that "our body is not just the place from which we come to experience the world, but it is through our bodies that we come to see and be seen in the world." In this respect then the context in which bodies emerge impacts the ways in which bodies are in turn expected to act therefore resistance practices can be said to simultaneously force open and emerge in the disjunctive spaces between cultural expectations and bodily comportment. Our understanding of this link between the individual body and the social context has also been enhanced by Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Habitus, according to Entwistle (2001:51), is significant for understanding embodiment in that it indicates that "the way we come to live in our bodies is structured by our social position in the world but these structures are only reproduced through the embodied actions of individuals." What is so intriguing about the body is how it absorbs and reflects societal cues, directives and strictures and yet how it also serves as the locus for acquiescence or refusal to abide by and enact attributes indicative of those very same social strictures.

It is precisely such a complex conceptualization of the body which leads Shilling (1993:10) to argue that in order "to achieve an adequate analysis of the body we need to regard it as a material, physical and biological phenomenon which is irreducible to immediate social processes or classifications." And this premise opens onto a complex mapping of the body by Blackman (2008) which enables her to identify and analyze categories of bodies which include: regulated and regulating bodies,

communicating bodies, bodies and difference, lived bodies and the body as enactment. Blackman's (2008: 131) conclusions illustrate her rejection of naturalistic views of the body which would "think of them as entities which are singular, bounded, molar and discretely human in origin" and which would refuse the dualistic perspective "that the psychological, biological and social are discrete entities that somehow interact." The key challenge she poses is how to "theorize processes that are thoroughly entangled and interdependent" (Blackmun 2008: 131). So it is not a question of what the body is because just posing the question in this way confirms all of the Cartesian coordinates and merely serves to reconfirm the "body as substance, and that this realm...can be know and contained through the adoption of particular kinds of method" (Blackmun 2008: 132). Rather it is a question of "how bodies both reflect and struggle against the operations of power and how we can understand these two intertwined sets of embodied practices as they unfold in international relations" (Shinko, forthcoming 2012).

### **Care of the Self and Performativity**

One of the more productive ways to respond to this challenge to theorize these entangled and interdependent processes is by exploring the overlapping trajectories of Butler's focus on creative repeatability and the possibilities for self-transformation identified by Foucault to examine how performativity and care for the self provide a context for understanding embodied resistance practices.

Foucault's work on the aesthetics of care for the self indicates "a critical attitude towards the self that both is aware of the contingency of the self's traits and displays a willingness to rework them" (Moss 1998:4). The ethical impact of such a critical attitude is that it implicates us in the formulation of our own subjectivity, such that we can identify our present formulation of subjectivity and make determined choices to become the subject that we would ethically prefer to be.<sup>2</sup> In furtherance of the processes by which the self constitutes itself as a subject, Foucault (1993:203) initiated an investigation into those "techniques which permit individuals to effect, by their own means, a certain number of

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<sup>2</sup> These essays include "Self Writing"; "Technologies of the Self" and "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom" in Rabinow, P. Ed., (1994). *Michel Foucault Ethics Subjectivity and Truth*. New York: New Press. Also see Martin, L., Gutman H. and Hutton, P. (Eds.). (1998) *Technologies of the Self A Seminar with Michel Foucault*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press;

operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in a manner so as to transform themselves.” This of course is what he meant by the term ‘technology of the self’. But Foucault never explicitly picked up on the relationship of self-fashioning to embodied resistance practices because he never really developed a fully fleshed out theory of resistance. Yet his focus on the recuperative aspects of power demonstrates why power always engenders some type of response so that even when one acquiesces, power’s grasp is rarely comprehensive or sufficiently totalizable. There is always something which escapes power’s full grasp and that is the space that embodied resistance creates within and in response to power’s operations. Such a nuanced understanding of the productive capacities of power provides a context for mapping the ways in which embodied resistance practices operate.

Thus Foucault’s insights are relatively rich with regard to this issue of resistance because his examination of the body/power nexus enables us to consider how resistance emerges within, on and through the body. As McLaren (2002:106) insightfully demonstrates, Foucault renders a complex view of the body as “oscillating between modes of inscription, internalization, and interpretation.” Foucauldian terms such as ‘marked and engraved’ refer to bodily processes of inscription, while his use of ‘molded, shaped and trained’ alludes to the body/power nexus, and finally when he references how bodies ‘respond and increase their forces’ he implies an active body (McLaren 2002:106). Such a formulation disaggregates the various phases that resistance encompasses.

Resistance emanates from within societal norms and cultural contexts in which subjects emerge and are produced, and it also provides for the capacity to respond to those forces and in so doing to develop new capacities and explore openings for reworking one’s subjectivity. It is resistance that enables these new iterations of subjectivity to arise and flourish. This multifaceted view of bodily subjectification is complimented by Foucault’s concern with ethics and the care of the self. Care of the

self draws upon the ability to recognize the ethical limitations of one's position and to be able to work from that location in repressive or oppressive structures of power, in order to affect changes in those structures of power by focusing on changes in the self. Thus these two processes of change, structural and individual, are not only linked but interrelated because they unfold in complicated patterns of response and counter response. Power produces bodily effects but as Foucault (1980:56) reminds us, "power, after investing itself in the body, finds itself exposed to a counter attack in that same body." So this investment and exposure of power draws our attention to examining how social, historical and cultural processes impact and in turn are impacted by embodied resistance practices.

This fluid understanding of the processes of inscription, reinscription and resistance is further elaborated in Butler's concept of performativity. She "accepts the postmodern suspicion of an empowered subject existing outside and prior to social formations without renouncing the possibility of a position of agency to oppose the oppressions of these formations" (Carlson 1996: 173). This is why performativity is key to understanding how "the constitution of the self through social performance is viewed as a dynamic simultaneously coercive and enabling" (Carlson 1996: 173) Butler (1990:136) alerts us to the ways in which performativity embodies processes of signification, as well as possibilities for resignification due to the fact that "acts, gestures, enactments are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications *manufactured* and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means". The strength of Butler's (1990; 1993; 1994) inquiry into the performative aspects of gender is that she opens a conceptual space for analyzing embodied iterations of subversion. Gender norms require repetition in order to make them function as natural attributes of particular bodies and due to this constant need for reconfirmation they open the space for such repetitious acts to be altered or revised in ways that contest or subvert established patterns.



However, with respect to drag, Butler (1993) acknowledges that not all performatives constitute challenges to existing social, political or cultural modes of life. So how is it that performativity could rise to the level of challenging exclusionary historical practices which validate the lives of some culturally recognized bodies but not those demarcated as the abject? What makes performative acts subversive relates to the ways in which abjection is itself politicized and that it is unequivocally an 'inside job'. As Lloyd (2007: 75-76) explains

Regulatory regimes are sustained by reiteration. Reiteration lends itself to resignification. Resignification can lead to reconfiguration of the norms governing society. So, making ontological claims on behalf of those politically unimportant and unreal bodies is one way to contest, and reshape, the terms of cultural intelligibility.

Drag reworks the norms of gender from within the culturally acceptable patterns of female and male gestures, dress, and bodily enactments to expose the fabricated aspects of gender and sex. Drag doesn't copy an original expression of gender but reveals instead that those culturally acceptable and recognizable expressions of gender are themselves merely a copy without an original. If we think about the role of embodied resistance practices and how they may enable the reworking of cultural norms we can immediately grasp the significance of Butler's notion of performativity because it emphasizes the role of repetition as an emergent instance of agentic constraint and freedom. But of course the crucial determination turns on identifying the moments of subversion immanent in the processes of embodied resistance which is always accompanied by the acknowledgment that performativity "arises from the dangerous game it plays as a double-agent, recognizing that in the postmodern world complicity and subversion are inextricably intertwined" (Carlson 1996: 173).

Taken together care of the self and performativity provide a complex context for grasping the fact that individuals emerge within a tangled web of constitutive and constraining societal practices and cultural norms, explaining why they might recognize these operations of power as limitations that need

to be contested or transgressed and how they might move to affect such alterations in the structures of power. Care of the self provides the ethical context for this reflexive interrogation of the subject that one is while performativity engages each choice the subject faces in deciding how to repeat and enact their subjectivity. Every instance of iteration offers an opportunity to do one's subjectivity other than it has been done in the past but each iteration also takes place within the press of opposing structures of power and in a social and cultural milieu that might indeed be quite forbidding. Performativity supplies the flexibility of response that an ethic of care would seem to require. Thus it is imperative to pay attention to the ways in which care for the self and performativity coalesce in embodied resistance practices in order to draw upon and respond to the productive capacities of power.

### **Performance Art: Embodied Resistance**

This next section will create a contextual backdrop against which performative acts of embodied resistance can be viewed in clearer relief in order to hone in on the ways in which bodies can 'speak back'. As mentioned previously, there is this tension within Foucault between the vision of a body entangled within disciplinary constraints and the body as a stylized, ethical referent open to self-reflexivity and self-fashioning. Interestingly enough this tension reveals his "understanding of the 'grip' of systemic power on the body" in conjunction with his "appreciation for the creative 'powers' of bodies to *resist* that grip," as equally essential components in any sustained effort to grasp the complex interactions between the body and power (Bordo 1999:255). In sum, Foucault's references to the body have opened up spaces for us to reflexively interrogate the effects we strive to inscribe via the stylization of our own bodies, the ways in which we conceptually characterize the body's roles, and how those conceptualizations inform and are informed by the larger body politic.

Focusing on performance art alerts us to the lived experiences of the body and how bodies craft their responses to the disciplinary effects of power and attempt to reshape or alter their social and

cultural contexts. Interesting linkages can be drawn between performance art, resistance, and Butler's concept of performativity which helps us to identify the various facets of embodied resistance practices. Performance art (Carlson 1996) first emerged as its own separate and original genre in the 1970's and its earliest efforts were directed at exploring the expressive activities of the body. Jones and Stephenson (1999) laud embodied performances for rendering obsolete the notion of an objective and disengaged viewer while encouraging the opening for more intersubjective processes of meaning making. Klein (2000: 78) observes that "performance has been the medium of choice for artists who wish to stage social interventions" and one of the hallmarks of such events is their courageous willingness to risk their own bodies to do so. What renders body art politically significant is that "every form of violence can be demonstrated in the body, factually and symbolically, with great immediacy."<sup>3</sup> Thus body art offers up the body as an artistic material to trace various permutations of power in play. Zhang Huan, a performance artist, has openly admitted that he wants to provoke feelings of discomfort and to confront spectators with expressions of pain and violence in order to make them think about responsibility for the infliction of pain.

The body of the artist serves as the performative site which "makes visible the micro-processes of iteration and the non-commensurability of repetition" (Reinelt 2002: 212). For instance, Sheldon Hsiao-Peng Lu (2000: 156) characterized 65 Kilograms by Zhang Huan as a body art performance which provoked "the audience to think about the condition of life and art in China." Zhang Huan's body art pieces have been driven by his own experiences growing up in the poverty of rural China and his life among the artists in the equally squalid and poor East Village of Beijing. He deploys his body to effect a sense of dread and panic derived from his own psychological and physical experiences of contemporary

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<sup>3</sup> Hans Gunter Golinske, 'The Body as Intercultural Medium of Communication', [21 June, 2005], <http://www.zhanghuan.com>.. His reference is to Zhang's 1993 performance, *Angel*, which Golinski characterizes as "politically explosive and radical[ly] sociocritical." *Angel* referenced the bloody events of Tiananmen Square and the effects of China's one-child policy.

societal and political violence.<sup>4</sup> He believes that “the body is the only direct way through which I come to know society and society comes to know me.”<sup>5</sup> Zhang uses his body to mirror the intolerance of the social and political ills that he sees, the unjust persecution of intellectuals during the Cultural Revolution, the 1989 massacres at Tiananmen Square, the impact of the one-child policies, rural poverty, and the punishing results of China’s ever-widening income gap, just to name a few.

What ultimately connects performance art to Butler’s concept of performativity is the recognition that “it is bodies that resist” and that resistance occurs “both through the individual body and the collective, social body” (McLaren 2002: 116; 110). The caveat of course is that “we can’t create ourselves as ourselves in an unmediated sense” but what we can do is “to aim at alternative significations in the course of our repetition of these acts (Jagger 2008:33-34). Focusing on what bodies do, either through performative art pieces or through the politics of performativity, brings together the cognitive processes of self-making [within the context of] the lived and felt body which in turn “introduces an aliveness or viscosity” into our understanding of the creative energy and motion implicit in embodied resistance practices (Blackmun 2008: 30-32). What is most clearly revealed in this analysis is that the body may in fact be regarded as socially constituted but that does not imply that it is determined and it is this realization which opens the space for embodied resistance to emerge (Lloyd 2008: 61).

### **Embodied Resistance Practices: A Conceptual Matrix**

This final section will identify and explore the various facets of embodied resistance by drawing upon specific examples where bodies were deployed in direct political actions to contest structures of power by drawing attention to their deleterious effects. In an effort to systematically analyze and comprehensively understand the significance of embodied resistance I have created a conceptual matrix

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<sup>4</sup> Zaya, O. ‘Zhang Huan: A Deeper Panic’, [21 June, 2005], <http://www.zhanghuan.com>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 3.

to help further this line of scholarly inquiry. To that end I have identified the following key aspects of embodied resistance which include: the question of intentionality, the act as response and/or provocation, the physicality of the act, its emotive content, the affectivity of the act, the responses it engenders, the meanings and interpretations that are attached to it, and finally what can be concluded about the impact(s) of embodied resistance practices on existing structures of power and knowledge.

First it is necessary to preface this discussion with a brief review of resistance and what it entails. Resistance is linked very clearly with subjectivity in Foucault's work on disciplinarity. And because bodies are the carriers of our subjectivities, resistance inevitably accompanies processes of subjectivity because the body is not merely an inert mass but responsive to and interactive with its physical environment and its social and historical context. Foucault's aesthetics of existence is the *sine qua non* of resistance because "subjects should be geared towards a dynamic self-creation, an experimental expansion of the possibilities of subjectivity in open defiance of the modes of being that are [constantly being impressed upon us throughout our daily lives]" (Mansfield 2000:63).

In 'open defiance' is the key phrase which captures the essence of resistance and interestingly enough, Hollander and Einwohner (2004: 535) confirm that the "most commonly studied mode of resistance is material or physical, involving the resister's use of their bodies or other material objects." The two most commonly identified core elements of resistance are action and opposition, but a difference of opinion exists regarding the necessity of recognition and the consciousness of intent (Hollander and Einwohner 2004:538). The question of recognition involves various aspects of visibility and whether or not acts of resistance are required to be publicly accessible and apparent. The second controversial aspect raises the question of self-consciousness and if resistance requires that actors actually intend to deliberately resist structures of power. But what Hollander and Einwohner (2004: 548) draw prominent attention to is the complex interplay of power between resisters, targets and third

party observes which they argue is central to understanding resistance. However resistance is further complicated by the fact that there is no “pure” formulation of resistance because “even while resisting power, individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place and that “neither resisters nor dominators are monolithic due to the existence of “multiple systems of hierarchy” in which “individuals can be simultaneously powerful and powerless” (Hollander and Einwohner 2004: 549-550). Resistance is a complex matrix of actions upon actions where bodies confront limitations, as well as opportunities in their efforts to expand and enhance their life-making prospects.

### *Intentionality*

The question of intentionality is controversial due in part to the ways in which performativity operates, especially since it embeds identity in the act and regards subjectivity as emergent in the doing and repetition of certain acts and gestures.<sup>6</sup> This poses some interesting questions with respect to embodied resistance practices. As Hollander and Einwohner (2004: 542-543) indicate there are three different approaches to intent: one which regards an actor’s conscious intent as the key indicator of what constitutes resistance, the second questions how reliable actor’s statements regarding their intentions might actually be while the third, doubts if resisters may even be aware of their actions as resistant. The real problem with efforts to assess and locate intent arises from the fact that resistance is a complex nexus of actions upon actions and in such a scenario it is difficult if not impossible to clearly locate intent. Embodied resistance implies that “the body is both active and acted upon (by other bodies)” functioning as both “body-subject and body power” so that bodies are constantly responding to various permutations of power, their own subjection and the capabilities that they discover, develop and deploy (Crossley 1996: 114-115).

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<sup>6</sup> Much of this discussion draws upon the work of Merleau-Ponty including *Phenomenology of Perception*, Colin Smith (trans.), New York: Humanities Press, 1962 and *The Structure of Behavior*, Alden L. Fisher (trans.), Boston: Beacon Press, 1963.

An interesting approach to this issue of intent is to think about the ways in which people “employ an embodied intentionality to act that is embedded in intersubjective practices” and this takes us much closer to a performative understanding of embodied resistance (Farnell 1999: 343). Specialized bodily techniques range from the mundane skills and practices bodies acquire as part of everyday life to very complex and highly skilled actions bodies may undertake as they participate in the creation of their cultural contexts. “Such dynamically embodied signifying acts generate an enormous variety of forms of embodied knowledge, systematized in various ways and to varying degrees, involving cultural convention as well as creative performativity” (Farnell 1999:343). Such an approach draws attention to the dynamic capacities of bodies and attempts to distinguish between behaviors and actions, in that actions require intersubjective meaning –making and interpretation. Thus individuals may indeed possess “reasons for and purposes to [their] actions” (Best 1974: 193 as cited in Farnell 1999: 360) but this formulation of intent rests squarely within an intersubjective social context and does not posit a formulation of consciousness which emanates from some Archimedean point outside.

A perfect example of this is Leymah Gbowee who is threatened with arrest for ‘obstructing justice’ as the leader of the Liberian Women’s Peace movement. The women decided to block the exit doors in order to force the rebel leaders and the representatives of Charles Taylor to negotiate an end to the civil war in Liberia. As she recounts, threatening her with ‘obstruction of justice’ and the impact of that word, *justice* reduced her to desperation. How could she be accused of obstructing justice when the warlords and Taylor’s men were refusing to end the violence? The term ‘justice’ shattered upon its very utterance and its meaninglessness became clearly visible. Thus her only response was to threaten to strip naked, she had not intended to do this but for the context and the ludicrousness of charging her with obstructing justice.

In short, thinking intentionality in terms of performativity requires that we take a dynamic intersubjective approach to identifying and describing the emergence of embodied resistance practices

which focuses in on how the resister emerges in the act of resistance. An interesting example emerges from within the Women In Black protests against the Israeli Occupation because here “the body was the message, as it produced and articulated political ideology, simultaneously challenging the national security legacy and the gender order in Israel” (Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003: 379). Their bodily resistance enacted a new form of subjectivity as “autonomous political citizens” claiming for themselves what had been heretofore regarded as men’s natural place in the public sphere. Thus their embodied protests simultaneously opened a space for their bodies to appear and in so doing brought them into existence as political citizens. Intentionality alerts us to the ways in which enactment draws various roles and subject positions into being.

#### *Act as Response/Act as Provocation*

In the complex matrix of actions upon other actions, embodied resistance practices simultaneously operate as a response and as a provocation due to the fact that “power requires a person who acts and a person who acts upon these actions” (Crossley 1996: 105). So what resistance entails is a series of responses and provocations wherein the spaces for maneuverability remain open and fluid. An excellent example of this interplay occurred in the lunch counter sit-ins during the civil rights movement in the 60’s in the United States. Although the protestors had carefully “rehearsed specific procedures of non-cooperation” their sit-ins were volatile and provocative encounters where they had to learn how to respond to other bodies (white and black) around them and how to maintain their posture of non-violent resistance (Foster 2003: 396). Their embodied resistance practices were first and foremost a response to racial inequality while the presence of “their bodies [seated at the whites only lunch counter] posed the provocative question ‘Why can’t we be served?’” (Foster 2003: 398).

With reference to the performative aspects of the Women in Black protests and to similar effect, “the lunch counter sit-ins performed the function of the very action they were protesting” in that the students drew attention to the fact that they weren’t the wrong bodies just the wrong color bodies to be served. Thus their embodied protests enacted their status as equal and full citizens. Their protests also revealed the complex interplay between responses and provocations as black bodies encountered white bodies and the sit-in resisters learned to retain their composure, for the most part responding nonviolently to the taunts and provocations of whites who deliberately bumped into them, spilled things



on them, assaulted them verbally and sometimes physically as well. What is significant here is how the protesters learned to monitor the movements of all bodies in the space especially their own, to sit quietly, respectfully and with dignity, and thus they were able to exert a subtle pressure on everyone's actions (Foster 2003: 401).

Exploring the complex matrix of actions upon other actions alerts us to pay close and careful attention to the choreographies of protest and how techniques of the body are refined and practiced to effect changes in their social relationships with other bodies and how there is a deliberate effort to draw opposing bodies into close proximity with one another in order to enact equality and respect. These unfolding responses and provocations also demand us to think about the ways in which "space is...an achieved structuring, simultaneously physical, conceptual, moral, and ethical" (Farnell 1999: 352). Black bodies were allowed access to other public spaces in dime stores and were free to shop unhindered, but they were prohibited from sitting at lunch counters with whites (Foster 2003: 398-399) thus the sit-ins drew attention to the line of segregation drawn between these two spaces and its unsustainable inequity. In short, Farnell (1999: 351; 361) recommends that we examine and account for "dynamically embodied actions within structured spaces" because what people do and say with their bodies and where they choose to do and say it has significant implications for understanding the spectrum of responses to embodied resistance and just how provocative such acts can be.

### *Physicality of the Act*

Embodied resistance entails putting bodies on the line which the phrase *poner el cuerpo*, a common expression used by some activists in Argentina, captures succinctly (Sutton 2007: 130). It literally means 'to put the body' but it encompasses a much wider sense of activism, commitment, and the willingness "to assume the bodily risks, work and demands" of embodied resistance (Sutton 2007: 130). Responding to the economic and social crises in Argentina in early 2000, Argentine women "voiced discontent in the streets, put their bodies on the line in protest, and engaged in embodied practices of care and solidarity in their neighborhoods, communities, and social movements" (Sutton 2007: 133). Not only did they put their bodies they also moved bodily issues such as "the bodies tortured and "disappeared" by the dictatorship, food security and adequate health care, reproductive and sexual freedom, and the right to lead lives without physical violence" to the forefront of politics (Sutton 2007: 134).

Perhaps the most famous instance of *poner el cuerpo* is witnessed in the resistance practices of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. They “fought with their own bodies which they offered as evidence of the existence of the children the regime had disappeared” ( Bergman and Szurmuk 2001: 390). These embodied resistance practices demonstrate why the physical, material body is so politically salient. Sutton (2007: 140-141) identifies four key aspects of embodied resistance which include the following: “protest happens through the body”; “activists often use their bodies [to] convey political meanings”; “material characteristics, needs, vulnerabilities, and resiliency of activist bodies cannot be separated from activist practices”; and “numbers of bodies are the fourth way that bodies are important to political protest”. Physicality encompasses issues such as vulnerability, physical needs, risk, speaking and acting in public spaces, making the body physically present in order to draw attention to what has happened or is happening to one’s own and/or other bodies. Any examination of embodied resistance must explore the physicality of the lived body and the limitations and constraints which give rise to the willingness to risk one’s body in order to sustain and open opportunities for life.

#### *Affectivity and the Emotive Content of the Act*

Affectivity encapsulates the ways in which bodies respond not only to their surroundings but to other bodies, as well as the ways in which they “experience their own bodily powers and capacities” (Sutton 2007: 141). Such an approach to the sentient body draws together what bodies do, feel and think thus it offers a way to think mind/body in more integrated and relational terms. One of the reasons why the body has emerged as such an important focus of scholarly research is precisely due to the fact that bodies have the capacity to affect others and to be affected (Blackmun 2008: 138) and it is in these interstices that questions of ethics and relationships between self and other inevitably arise. This sense of openness and ethical responsibility to others is captured in Shapiro’s (1999: 80) call for an ethical approach to international politics which would be framed in terms of a “willingness to be afflicted by the performance of the other.” This ethical formulation is expressive of an understanding of the body as an enactment because it highlights the understanding that our bodies are in some ways open to being shaped and reshaped through our physical and emotional interactions with one another. In sum, as Blackmun(2008: 53) observes “affect both inheres within people’s bodies, and is thus felt, and also passes between them, meaning that we can affect and be affected.”

Examples of how embodied resistance practices draw upon and reflect these aspects of affectivity are clearly evident in the Sebastian Acevedo Movement against Torture (Agosin and Ben-Ur 1988) and the Children for Identity and Justice against Forgetting and Silence or H.I.J.O.S (Taylor 2002).

Both of these movements are directed at the silences and invisibility upon which practices of torture depend. So both attempt to make these practices visible by embodying and giving voice to the victim's suffering (Acevedo Movement) and by engaging in acts of public shaming of those responsible for the commission of acts of torture and forced disappearances (H.I.J.O.S.). The trauma experienced and embodied by Acevedo, who immolated himself as a result of the torture and death of his two children, is reproduced through a series of physical interventions staged by the movement. These acts include chaining themselves to fences, singing, wearing names of victims on their own clothing and in one particular instance, a poster declaring "They are torturing now" was held by a group of 20 blind men (Agosin and Ben-Ur 1998: 341). The children of the disappeared organize protests which draws upon elements of carnival which are loud, boisterous and rowdy in order to draw as much public attention/participation as possible in their parades which lead to and culminate in a protest outside of a torturer's home or office, or at the site of a clandestine torture center (Taylor 2002: 151).

The affective elements involve the embodiment of the pain and humiliation of the victims of torture by engaging in resistance acts which deploy the activists' bodies in similarly constrained ways or by speaking out in very public and crowded areas to denounce the use of terror and give voice to those who have been silenced. What is also demonstrated in these movements is "the potential of the body as a freeing agent and a catalyst for change... [and how these evolving strengths and capacities felt by the movement's participants then becomes] part of their poetics" (Agosin and Ben -Ur 1998:342). The key aspects of affectivity involve recognition of how bodies interact and how these interactions can be coordinated and directed in order to speak back to domination and against repressive structural constraints. But it also makes us realize that by engaging in these physical acts of protest, bodies develop capacities for these resistance practices and continually engage in the refining of these embodied interferences in the operations of power.

### *Responses to the Act*

One of the main aspects of embodied resistance practices is their stress on visibility, drawing strategies and technologies of power out into the open and identifying both the structural components and individual actors implicated in these power relations. Thus it is imperative to think about the ways in which structures of power speak back and respond to these embodied provocations. If we think about bodies as "a vast reservoir of signs and symbols...capable of both persuasion and obstinate recalcitrance," (Foster 2003: 395) we must clearly recognize that bodies are arrayed in complex patterns of interrelationships and that these interconnections cut across all political, social and economic vectors.

Thus responses to embodied resistance practices emanate not just from those in positions of institutional authority but also from the observing public and from within the ranks of the activists themselves. So in this sense we must be cognizant of how these actions upon other actions unfold and create complex patterns of response.

Taking one slice of this complex matrix by illuminating the ways in which structures of power respond to provocative acts will zero in on efforts to reestablish the 'smooth' operation of power in the wake of these embodied interferences. The hooded ones or the Encapuchados have had a thirty year run of staged protests against the Venezuelan government which have basically depoliticized protests for social justice among the undereducated poor into a regularized antagonism of political theater (Calzadillo 2002). The Encapuchados take off their T shirts, wrap them over their faces and enact an embodied protest which on a weekly basis repeats the same movements and acts involving the hijacking of a truck, looting its contents and setting it on fire (Calzadillo 2002: 107). These acts take on the appearance of theater because of their staged elements, coordinated movements and repetitive patterns. As long as civilians are not directly targeted and the police only respond with plastic bullets, the hooded ones can perform their protest in the streets across campuses and after they have been restrained by the police, they put their T shirts back on and disperse. These student protestors engage in these violent displays in an effort to reclaim some semblance of political agency but the fact that these protests have become so stabilized and function as part of an elaborate political ritual dance between the police and the Encapuchados, illustrates how structures of power can operate to depoliticize the impact of embodied resistance practices precisely because they have been granted an official space replete with an accepted interactive set of actions against actions. The impact of these choreographed movements not only ensures political stability but they operate to disempower "forces that might combine to change society" (Calzadillo 2002: 116). Thus this has become a very controlled enactment of violence which does little to actually address issues of inequity or social justice.

#### *Meaning/Interpretation of the Act*

Embodied acts of resistance always run the risk of being absorbed back into the very structures of power they are attempting to resist or contest however, the actual presence of the physical body always carries the potential for disruption and subversion in the very enactments and sequencing of bodily movements and physical motions. Thus as Carlson notes (1996: 172) Butler's concept of performativity illustrates the inevitable slippage arising from the enforced repetition and citation of social performance". This space where the slippage occurs is precisely the space where this double-

agency of complicity and subversion encounters the coercive and enabling structures of subjectivity (Carlson 1996: 173). The problem of course is how to decipher when the body's enactments merely reproduce socially accepted meanings as opposed to those instances where meanings are being challenged and or varied. Due to the fact that embodied acts require interpretation their "cultural associations –the display of gender, the frame of reference, the spectator's narrative expectations— which form part of the controlling mechanisms preventing a challenge to convention" impact whether or not an act or series of acts are regarded as resistant and transformative or reinscriptive and reinforcing (Carlson 1996: 174).

The agentic production of meaning takes place through the performance of actions that may be "out of awareness through habit and skill or may be highly deliberate choreographies" (Farnell 1999: 348). Agentic production unfolds within and against established structures of meaning thus we need to be attentive to the possibility that these productions of meaning may simply reinforce the beliefs, attitudes and values of those supportive of existing structures of power. Meaning is intersubjective but resistance cannot rely on this fact alone because "before people can change the existing connotations they first have to be able to create new words and new meanings" (Gordon 2002: 13). This capacity for the creation of new words and new meanings is exemplified by the Meira Paibi women's movement who deployed the injunction 'Indian Army rape us' as a provocative inversion of sexualized gender roles. In July of 2004 a 32 year old woman, Thangjam Manorama, suspected of being involved in the armed struggle for Meitei independence, was tortured, raped and murdered at the hands of the Assam Rifles Battalion of the Indian Army. The women involved in the protest of her death collectively claimed the murdered woman as their daughter and implored the soldiers to rape them too. The key to their provocative embodied protest was the nakedness of their own bodies which as Misri (2011: 607) argues serves as a crucial strategy of resistance because their acts were intended to "frustrate legibility by becoming suddenly unknowable." One way to create new words and meanings is to force interpretation to fail through behavior that is rendered uninterpretable (Misri 2011: 608). What rendered their bodies unreadable was their refusal to abide by the script of shame and to "evidence a shameless challenge" to how the abject body of the raped tribal women should act, should respond (Misri 2011: 608).

In addition, their naked protests mimed but also inverted the forced exposure and vulnerability associated with the act of rape. It is this complex interaction of mime and reversal that draws attention to codes of shame in an effort to shift shame to those who not only perpetrate those secretive acts of rape but to call into question the very structure of a system that would hide behind secretiveness as a

way to reinforce codes of shame. One way to displace these structures of meaning is to make the very terms of its power and authority visible in a way that turns vulnerability into agency by exhorting the army to rape them in public, in the open where all can witness it. The Meitei women's naked protest draws attention to the importance of understanding resistance as performative action because it is the performative which brings the acting agent into view. Thus as Kulynych (1997: 331) concludes "the character to which the action refers...only comes into being through the action itself." The most perplexing aspect of attempts to interpret (either transformative or reaffirmative) performative acts of resistance is precisely its novel character. The very newness or originality of embodied resistance is what opens the space for reconsideration of socially accepted forms of interpretation and existing structures of meaning. Thus what we should be attentive to is how these irruptive practices of embodied resistance attempt to break established patterns of referentiality and how they attempt to leave us scrambling for words, phrases and contexts to make sense of what we are seeing bodies do, say, feel and expose.

#### *Impact of Acts of Embodied Resistance*

Thus how do we know when an embodied act of resistance or a series of such acts will lead to groundbreaking shifts or changes or when they will merely be recouped by the existing power structure and their impact deflected or dismissed altogether? The honest answer is that we don't know and much of this analysis is backward looking as we attempt to identify points at which contestation and resistance emerge and to formulate a narrative of actions upon actions which charts and tracks these emergent moments of shifting power relations. Returning to the naked protests of the Meitei women, Misri (2011: 615) asks "do the protests achieve anything, do they succeed?" However the limitation to approaching the impact of embodied resistance practices from this perspective is that it fails to distinguish between the broader objectives of social movements and the more narrowly focused analysis of how putting the body on the line impacts processes of recognition, individual identity and their connections to individual political practices along the repression/acceptance axis.

The key is to try to isolate those moments when the willingness to risk the body coupled with the publicly exposed vulnerability of the body engenders a moment of ethical pause or as Michael Shapiro (2008: 216) would say the subjunctive space of uncertainty and doubt between performative bodies that can refuse the already said of identity. An interesting example of this would be when Leymah Gbowee threatened to strip naked in the hall outside where the peace talks to end the Liberian civil war had bogged down. The women were threatened with removal and Gbowee herself was

accused of obstructing justice and threatened with arrest. In this highly charged and desperate moment she threatened to strip and the moral consequences of her desperation resonated with one of the warlords who admitted that such an act, threatening to expose the body of the mother, redirected responsibility for such desperation back onto the male participants engaged in the peace talks.

In this instance of embodied resistance a space opened wherein the mere threatened act prompted an ethical pause and in that moment the realization dawned that enabling such an act would signal the abandonment of the moral discourse. In terms of impact we should be looking to locate and identify emergent moments of recognition/misrecognition. Kochi (2009: 145) draws upon Hegel's ethics of recognition to remind us that the process of recognition is not one singular event but an ongoing series of actions upon actions which are played out time and time again. Recognition involves an ethical sense of mutuality and co-constitution between self and other where self comprehension and affirmation of the other's difference and autonomy are inextricably intertwined (Kochi 2009: 144). Conversely, moments of misrecognition reaffirm the drive for self-identity, self-certainty, self-referentiality wherein negation of the other affirms the significance of the self. Both moments of recognition and misrecognition have very real physical and material consequences thus we need to analyze how these moments emerge between specific individuals and then radiate outwards to envelop other individuals and groups variously located within the existing structures of power.

## **Conclusion**

Focusing on these various aspects of embodied resistance practices enables us to understand the complex and at times ambiguous ways in which bodies can be deployed as sites of political protest. This has profound implications for our understanding of human security and its reliance on bodies as both targets of domination and sites of resistance. Focusing on the body as a 'visceral protagonist' will force us to critically interrogate what constitutes human security. Thus this line of research has the potential to fulfill the promises of a renewed critical focus on the concept of human security. The conceptual matrix I have developed acknowledges the material circumstances of individual embodied lives, enables us to directly confront the physical insecurities of daily life, and redirects our focus to the operation of economic, social and political structures of power and how/why human security is linked to these operations of power. The key elements of this conceptual matrix are visibility, physicality and the ability to analytically focus on the materiality of what happens to bodies ensnared in inhospitable and life threatening structures of power and how they resist and speak back to structures of power.

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