

Journal of Political Science

(A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal; JPPS Star Ranked and Indexed in NepJOL)

ISSN 2362-1273 (Print); ISSN 2773-8132 (Online)

Volume 22, February 2022

<http://ejournals.pncampus.edu.np/ejournals/jps/>

Published by

Department of Political Science, Prithvi Narayan Campus, TU, Pokhara, Nepal

Email: polsc@pncampus.edu.np; URL: www.pncampus.edu.np

Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review

Nagendra Bahadur Bhandari, PhD

Department of English

Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University, Pokhara

Corresponding Author: Nagendra Bhandari, Email: nagendra@pncampus.edu.np

Copyright 2022© The Author(s). With permission of the concerned author(s), the publisher shall publish the articles for first edition. The journal is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v22i1.43042>

Submitted 25 Nov. 2021; Reviewed 9 Dec. 2021; Accepted 29 Dec. 2021; Published 15 Feb. 2022

Abstract

This article makes a brief review of the models of resistance in postcolonial discourses and practices. There are mainly four models of resistance. The first model of resistance focuses on rewriting colonial narratives by subverting the negative image of colonized people and culture. In this model, the writers and theories involve in literary activities of reading and rewriting to the colonial discourse to create a positive image of colonized people and country. The second model emphasizes cultural negotiation and the formation of human subjectivities. This model focuses on cultural encounters of the colonizer and colonized in the hybrid space which undermines the total domination of the colonial power. These cultural encounters render hybrid subjectivities of colonized subjects. The third model takes a radical stance. This model advocates the struggle even using violent methods against colonial authority for the liberation of the colonized. Going beyond simply resisting the colonial authority, the fourth model of resistance emphasizes on subverting the colonial power and transforming the material condition and social relationship of colonized people. This transformative model of resistance remains relevant even in other movements of social justice to change the situation of the marginalized group.

Keywords: Resistance, postcolonialism, transformation, discourse, hegemony

Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review

Introduction

There are broadly four models of resistance in postcolonial discourses and practices. The first model of resistance focuses on rewriting the colonial narrative. The practitioners of this model: theorists and writers involved in deconstructing the negative image of colonized people and culture constructed by the colonial discourse. They engage in literary activities of reading and rewriting the colonial discourse, and creating a positive image of colonized people and country. Unlike the first model, the second model; resistance as subversion emphasizes cultural negotiation and the formation of human subjectivities. This model focuses on cultural encounters of the colonizer and colonized in the hybrid space which undermines the total domination of the colonial power and renders hybrid subjectivity that rejects the practice of essentializing the identity of colonized people. In challenging the colonial authority, the third model; resistance as opposition takes a radical stance. This model advocates the struggle even using violent methods against colonial authority for the liberation of the colonized. These models resist colonial power in various ways. However, they fail to address the transformation in the social relationship and material condition of the colonized people. In this context, David Jefferess (2008) postulates a fourth model of resistance as transformation by analyzing the reconciliation practice of South Africa and Gandhi's strategies of resistance in India. This model emphasizes not only subverting the colonial power but also transforming the material condition and social relationship imposed by the colonial power. Reviewing these models of resistance, this article tries to show the relevance of the fourth model: resistance as transformation in various forms of social movements of justice to the marginalized and suppressed groups.

Resistance as Rewriting Colonial Narratives

In postcolonial scholarship, the first form of resistance is cultural resistance which deconstructs the image of the colonized people created by the discourse of colonialism. In Edward Said's analysis, the discourse of colonialism "produces a positive national self-definition for Western nations by contrast with Eastern nations on which the West projects all the negative characteristics it does not want to believe exist among its own people" (Tyson, 2006, p. 420). Said demonstrates that colonial power disseminates the knowledge through literature, education system and other cultural production that would rationalize their colonial mission. For this, they depict the colonized people as "weak-willed, inferior, secondary, effeminate and unable to rule themselves" (Boehmer, 2006, p. 351). Consequently, resistance in the postcolonial project involves creating a positive self-image of the colonized people by presenting them in a positive light and exposing the inherent contradiction within the colonial discourse.

In this form of resistance, postcolonial scholars take writing and reading from the margin as acts of resistance to "expose the underlying cultural assumption of colonial authority and provide alternative readings" (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 222). They resist and rewrite the dominant cultural values, codes, narratives, and behaviors of colonial discourse. In this sense, writing acts as a form of resistance to displace the colonial discourse about the colonized. As a result, many postcolonial writers and theorists involve in writing to create a positive image of the colonized. They also involve reading the colonial narratives to expose the underlying colonialist ideology of the colonial discourse. However, this form of cultural resistance which is mainly based on the writing and reading act has some limitations.

Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review

Resisting colonialism only through literary activities of reading and writing diminishes the colonial exploitation as a cultural project and ignore the material concern. Cultural resistance fails to address the ground reality or the daily lived experiences of material inequalities. Mainly, such resistance “fails to transform the social relations of power and maintains the metropolis as the normative reference point” (Shahjahan, 2011, p. 275). The literary acts of writing and reading expose the historical injustice and inherent contradiction of colonial discourse, however, it fails to bring out any change in the underlying power structure of a society and substantial change in the lives of the marginalized people.

Resistance as Subversion

The second model of resistance in postcolonialism aims at subverting the domination of the colonial hegemony and authority of colonial knowledge production. In this model, postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1995) envisions the in-between space of the encounter of the colonizer and colonized which he calls the third space of cultural enunciation. This space primarily subverts, “the binary thought and essentialist identities produced by colonial knowledge” (Bhabha, 1995, p. 276). Bhabha examines, “the psychic and cultural fault-lines which are generated around and constantly threaten, any simple ‘black-and-white’ distinction between two conventional parties to the colonial relationship” (Boehmer, 2006, p. 355). Deconstructing the binary of the colonized and colonizer, the cultural encounters render hybridity and ambivalence in colonized subjects in the third space.

In Bhabha’s argument, the third space goes beyond the polarity of the self and the other, and the colonizer and colonized. Rather, it is a liminal and interstitial space where multiple cultures negotiate rendering ambivalence. The hybrid in-between space can be defined as: “the creative, malleable indeterminacy involving feelings of simultaneously repulsion and desire that exist at the interface between self and other, or between the polarities of the unequal world” (Boehmer, 2006, p. 355). Living in the third space, the colonized people simultaneously manifest attraction toward and repulsion from the colonized. This space is also a fertile ground for the formation of their new subjectivities as it provides them “the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (Bhabha, 1995, pp. 1-2). This is the place where the crossing over of time and cultural differences occurs and where new signs of identity are formed. The pre-existing cultural codes and ethnic traits get redefined in this space.

The cultural differences of the colonizer and colonized are shaped by tradition but they are negotiated and redefined through the conditions of contingency and contradictions in the third space. The cultural negotiation in the third space undermines the total and absolute power of the colonizer. The colonized subjects resist the total subjugation to the colonial authority in their ambivalent retention which creates the gap between the expectation of the colonizer and the response of the colonized. The subversion of the colonial power results in hybridity and ambivalence in the liminal in-between space. In this sense, Bhabha’s interstitial in-between space provides postcolonialism with a form of resistance which, “illuminates how more material forms of opposition, struggle, and protest can be seen as enabling, and enabled by, modes of discursive *refusal*, wherein the colonial narrative does not simply fail but is transformed by the colonized in politically meaningful ways” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 29). So, this form of resistance provides a platform for the political struggle by discursively rejecting colonial identities and binary dichotomies.

Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review

However, such discursive subversion of colonial power may help to psychological and spiritual liberation; the decolonization of the mind does not involuntarily render the physical and material liberation. Similarly, it does not talk about the condition of labour exploitation, unequal access to resources, and the use of state apparatus for economic gain. Rather, it concentrates on the formation of subjectivities of the colonized in the in-between space of the cultural encounter of the colonizer and colonized. In Jefferess' opinion, this form of resistance reduces colonialism into cultural projects. It ignores the material conditions and the role of ideology that structures the material relationships. In its focus on cultural interaction and subjectivities formation, this model does not talk about the liberation of the colonized people from political and economic exploitation.

Resistance as Opposition

Resistance as an opposition model advocates the liberation of the colonized people through the materialist and collective resistance against the colonial power. Unlike resistance as subversion, it advocates a concrete decolonization process relying on the bipolar Manichean frame of the colonizer and colonization. The liberation of the colonized challenges "social material relations produced by colonial difference, and constitutes organized political and military struggle against colonial rule and the structure of the colonial economy" (Jefferess, 2008, p. 3). Such struggles focus on "collective opposition to the totality of capital and changing underlying social relations that intersect with multiple lines of inequality based on race, gender and class" (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 226). Dismantling the material structures of the colonial authority is the primary aim of this model of resistance.

In this model of resistance, Frantz Fanon even supports the use of violence in the fight for liberation against the colonial power. He supports "revolutionary violence as the most effective mode of opposition to the violence of colonial oppression" (Boehmer, 2006, p. 347). In his support of violence, he departs from the strategy of non-violence propounded by Mahatma Gandhi as a means of exposing the inhumanity caused by colonizers. He insists that

It is only through exercising oppositional violence that the colonized 'non-entity' takes history into its own hands as if were, and so becomes a maker of its own future, a historical agent for the first time. Under colonial conditions, no compromise can be made with the colonizer, no strategic ground given, that will not eventually reproduce in one form or another the Manichaeian conflict of colonizer versus colonized. (Boehmer, 2006, p. 347)

His emphasis is on the destruction of colonialism by deploying the revolutionary power which will guarantee the liberation of the colonized people. However, such opposition of colonial authority undermines the inherent heterogeneities among the colonized and the structural transformation of the power structure after the decolonization process.

The opposition as resistance model, which supports a Manichean struggle between oppressor and oppressed overlooks the heterogeneities inherent among colonized people. The poor and underprivileged people may suffer another form of suppression, even in the colonized community. The resistance to one form of power may liberate from the certain relationship of power, not from the whole structure. Moreover, "this model reinforces the binary framework of colonial knowledge by essentializing the past and manipulating colonial knowledge to forge an identity. In other words, resistance-as-opposition perpetuates

Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review

the colonial identities produced by the colonizers” (Shahjahan, 2011, p. 277). Such identities need to be deconstructed and redefined. Jefferess, in a sense, admires the spirit for liberation in Fanon’s vision. However, he is more interested in “forms of social and cultural ‘resistance’ that are performed as an animation of an alternative to the direct and structural violence of colonialism rather than merely a refusal or manipulation of, or protest against, colonial power” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 21). He advocates the alternative material condition that will ensure the transformation in the lives of the colonized after the decolonization.

Resistance as Transformation

David Jefferess (2008) proposes the fourth model of resistance; resistance as transformation departing from the other three types of resistance. In retrospect, the first model focuses on rewriting the colonial narratives to create a positive self-image of the colonized. Unlike the first model, the second model explores the formation of subjectivities of the colonial subjects in the in-between space of colonial encounters. Such subjectivities subvert the domination of colonial power and essentialist bipolar identity of the colonizer and colonized. The third model, in its radical stance, departs from the earlier two models and emphasizes opposition of the colonial power even by using violence to liberate the colonized. Departing from all these models of postcolonial resistance, Jefferess (2008) emphasizes the transformation of the material and cultural condition of colonized in his model of resistance as transformation.

Jefferess (2008) emphasizes both a new type of human relationship and change in material condition in his transformative resistance. He advocates a mutual interdependence of human beings rejecting the antagonistic bipolar dichotomies of the self and the other; the colonized and colonizer, along with the transformation of material condition. The transformative resistance “requires both the affirmation of human connection (i.e. as the disruption of the binary framework for social difference) and the alteration of structures of exploitation” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 105). He analyzes Mahatma Gandhi’s resistance to colonial power in India and South African reconciliation initiatives as case studies to postulate his transformative model of resistance.

Jefferess asserts that Gandhi’s resistance model emphasizes changes in the material condition and human relation both. Gandhi advocates *swaraj* (self-government), *sardoya* (the welfare of all), *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (truth-force) in his struggle for liberation from British colonial rule. Jefferess (2008) argues:

for the way in which what Gandhi called his ‘experiments with truth’ and particularly concepts of *swaraj* (‘self-government’), *sardoya* (‘the welfare of all’), *ahimsa* (‘nonviolence’), and *satyagraha* (‘truth-force’), which guided and were the subject of those experiments – provide insight into ways in which resistance can be imagined and articulated alternatively to the dominant theories of resistance within postcolonial studies. (p. 96)

Gandhi advocates an “anticipatory discourse of transformation” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 101) by criticizing modern civilization as a form of suppression, not only focusing on colonial exploitation. He rejects violent opposition strategies in his advocacy of *swaraj*, *ahimsa*, *satyagraha* and *sardoya* while seeking liberation from all social relationships within the repressive structures of modernity.

Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review

Resistance, in the Gandhian model, “does not signify the insurgency of the ‘oppressed’ against the ‘oppressor’ but the transformation of the material and discursive structures that maintain oppression” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 134). He advocated the social changes which include “a broad social, cultural and material transformation of society that went beyond deconstruction of the narrow parameters of colonial power, authority and identity politics” (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 227). His political resistance also includes the spiritual transformation of the self which, “he experimented with a lived subjectivity of truth rooted in concepts of self-government, the welfare of all, and non-violence derived from Christian and Hindu traditions” (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 227). For Gandhi, “the transformation of the material and discursive structures that maintain oppression, and a ‘new humanism’ is resistance rather than its after-effect or aim” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 134). He focuses on new humanism deconstructing the binary of the self and the other, the social structures of producing inequality and conflict, along with exploitative colonial power in his resistance process. Jefferess also finds space for new human relationships in the South Africa peace process led by Nelson Mandela.

Jefferess takes the South African post-apartheid reconciliation process as his second example of the transformative model of resistance. This process is linked to material and social transformation, depending not on an antagonistic relationship, but the production of a discourse of mutual responsibility which “deconstructs the antagonistic discourse of apartheid power” (p. 172). He argues that “this project of reconciliation deconstructs colonial knowledge and produces an alternative discourse demanding an alternative structure of relations through recognition, redistribution, and connection” (Shahjahan, 2011, p. 277). This process attempts to change the colonial discourse of knowledge and meaning, not for the past, but the present and the future. Michael Foucault (1972) underscores the imperative of transforming the discourse as it circulates and reinforces the ideology of the dominant group. Similarly, Antonio Gramsci (1999) critically examines the role of discourse in creating consent of the marginalized group in their subjugation to the hegemonic power. So, the transformation of discourse requires the proposal of an alternative structure of relation for mutual harmony by acknowledging the past. So, this process provides “space for the memories of the past and acknowledges the abuse, violence and ideology of apartheid” (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 228). By acknowledging the past, this process attempts to foster new human relationships based on the new discourse which has been jeopardized by apartheid policies. This process has “great transformative potential because it does not merely say ‘no’ to power; rather, it moves outside of the antagonistic binaries central to colonial ideology towards an ethics and politics of connection” (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 228). So it is a constant process of transformation of both the narratives within which people make sense of their experience and the material and social structure produced by these narratives.

Jefferess takes examples of the Gandhian resistance model and the idea of reconciliation in South Africa to propose his alternative model of transformative resistance. He argues that postcolonial theory neglects such models of transformational resistance exemplified by both Gandhi and the South African liberation struggle. With these examples, he asserts that resistance is “multi-faceted and involves the transformation of relationships, material reality, and perception of both self and other” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 22). He reframes resistance as an attempt to propose a new form of human relationship and to transform the exploitative narratives and material structures. It is not simply a reactive movement of opposing and subverting the colonial rule. Rather, it is a matter of personal and social transformation which are inextricably tied together. So, transformational resistance “foregrounds individual agency as a core component in a praxis based on connection, human dignity and mutual

Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review

interdependence” (Shahjahan, 2014, p. 228). This model focuses on the creation of new humanism, new ways of being based on mutual interdependence and transformative social structure.

Jefferess problematizes the notion of resistance as opposition as well as the binary, simplistic constructions of victim and perpetrator. His resistance as a transformation model does not only aim to liberate the oppressed from dominating structures and subvert the colonial power, but also to liberate the deep structures of human society. In this sense, resistance is an attempt at the transformation of both discursive and material consequences of power imbalance. It is a “radical restructuring of global relationships” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 4). Moreover, he deconstructs the antagonistic binary of the self and other of colonial discourse and proposes a “discourse of human dignity and interdependence” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 9). For this, he emphasizes love as a way to endorse the notion of interdependence and connectivity that he stressed in his explorations of *ahimsa* and reconciliation. He argues that “the idea of love may be one way of contending with that disjunctive, and seemingly indescribable ‘how’ and somehow that Spivak and Said identify, a caesura in postcolonial thought” (Jefferess, 2008, p. 184). He hopes that love can figure as the mechanism that connects a politics of resistance with a dream of liberation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jefferess (2008) takes resistance as a process of liberating suppressed people from the social structure of unequal power relationships by transforming the material condition, social structure and human relationship; and the discourse of exploitation. His transformative model of resistance acknowledges both the discourse of colonial power and the social structure that produces the discourse. Moreover, resistance is more than the oppositional strategies of the dominant power which is based on the binary opposition of the self and the other. It deconstructs the binary opposition in creating a new form of humanism based on mutual interdependence. Precisely, the transformative model of resistance comprises the transformation from social, cultural and material oppression with a new social relationship of mutual interdependence. The implication of such a model of resistance goes beyond the postcolonial struggle. This resistance model has its relevance in various social movements of marginalized groups like women, poor, Dalit, third gender, ethnic minority to bring out substantial changes in their lives. Such movements should aim to transform all the power structures and socio-economic conditions of their marginalization. Moreover, the discourses of exploitation and exclusion which the hegemonic group produces to sustain and perpetuate their domination need to be transformed. such transformation opens an avenue for a new type of human relationship of mutual respect and love. Briefly, the resistance process encompasses the transformation of material condition, discourse, and human relationships.

References

- Bhabha, H. (1995). *The location of culture*. Routledge.
- Boehmer, E. (2006). Postcolonialism. In P. Waugh (Ed.), *Literary theory and criticism* (pp. 340-361). Oxford.
- Fanon, F. (1986). *The wretched of the earth* (C. Farrington, Trans.). Penguin.

Resistance and Postcolonialism: A Critical Review

Foucault, M. (1972). *Archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language* (A. M. S. Smith, Trans.). Pantheon Books.

Gramsci, A. (1999). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith, Trans.). ElecBook.

Jeffress, D. (2008). *Postcolonial resistance: Culture, liberation and transformation*. Toronto UP.

Said, E. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon.

Shahjahan, R.A. (2011). Engaging the faces of 'resistance' and social change from decolonizing perspectives toward transforming neoliberal higher education. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 27(3), 273-286.

[file:///C:/Users/Vision/Downloads/178-Article%20Text-1210-1-10-20111128%20\(1\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Vision/Downloads/178-Article%20Text-1210-1-10-20111128%20(1).pdf)

Shahjahan, R. A. (2014). From 'no' to 'yes': Postcolonial perspectives on resistance to neoliberal higher education. *Discourse: Studies in the cultural politics of education*, 35(2), 219-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2012.745732>

Tyson, L. (2006). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide* (2nd ed.). Routledge.