

# Time, power and resistance

## – *Guest editors introduction*

### **Abstract**

Time, power and resistance are all central sociological concepts, but only rarely have the intertwining between all three been explored. Here the guest editors of the special issue of *Sociologisk Forskning* called "Time, power and resistance" introduce five empirical research articles. The articles all investigate time and temporality in relation to forms of power, ranging from discursive power to dominant norms and state power. The resistances vary from organised, collective resistance to subtle and discreet forms of everyday and constructive resistance. Additionally, the guest editors point towards future avenues of research in the area and show sociologically interesting links between the three concepts.

*Keywords:* time, power, resistance, introduction, future research

IN JUNE 2019, the small island community of Sommarøy in Northern Norway issued a press release about its efforts to abolish clock time. Clocks create stress and with the midnight sun they are superfluous. Sommarøy is therefore planning to apply to the Norwegian parliament to become a time-free zone. The initiative is described as the result of a strong engagement among the islanders. They are simply tired of being governed by the clock when not needed. The story caught headlines around the world, with reports in the media such as The Guardian, Independent, CNN, Spiegel and India Today. However, a few weeks later it transpired that it was all a PR stunt organised by state-owned "Innovation Norway", in order to promote Northern Norway as a tourist destination (Press release n.d., NRK (2019)).

The example above illustrates how time, power and resistance are intertwined. Clock time is a central organising principle in the industrialised world (Adams 1998; Jönsson 1999; Rosengren 2006; Wigerfeldt 1990). Through this temporality modern people have been disciplined and the "time is money" ideology has come to dominate, therefore also shaping how power circulates. Castree (2009) even claims that clock time is the very glue of a capitalistic social order. When the islanders apparently collectively resisted clock time it looked like a challenge to a fundamental order in modern societies. Perhaps that is why the story caught so much attention? The dream of abandoning

abstract and standardised clock time and returning to a more contextualised sense of time – sensitive to the rhythms in nature and subjective experiences – appears to be strong (Adams 1998; Jönsson 1999). With Jönsson (1999) we can say that the islanders apparently refused to be "in the hands of artificial time" (1999:86). The revelation that the story was a PR stunt punctures the dream and leaves a bitter taste – after all, there was no organised collective resistance, it was simply another commodification of a dream to lure more tourists to consume more.

This special issue of *Sociologisk Forskning* focuses on the intertwining of time, power and resistance, and includes five articles which each explore some of the links between all three concepts. Studying time has a long history in sociology, and the close links between power and resistance have been well known since Foucault wrote his famous words, "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault 1990:95). However, how power and resistance are related to time and temporality has seldom been explicitly addressed (but see Lilja 2018 for an exception). Thus we see an obvious need to explore all three concepts simultaneously. Resistance has for decades been a theme of sociological inquiry (Hollander & Einwohner 2004) and many Swedish sociologists have contributed to developing the field of resistance studies (see for instance Baaz, Lilja, Schulz, & Vinthagen 2016; Johansson & Vinthagen 2016; Lilja & Vinthagen 2009). Nevertheless, since "resistance" is the newcomer to sociology compared to power or time, we take this aspect of the special issue as the starting point for introducing the theme and the five articles.

The term "resistance" is often associated with riots, protests and revolutions, and within sociology there is a long tradition of social movement studies investigating collectively organised efforts to further the interests of various groups. In the contributions to this issue, Brown's article "Digital media and the acceleration of resistance: Findings from the 2010/11 Tunisian revolution", concerning the revolution in Tunisia which ignited the so-called Arab Spring, is an illustration of this type of resistance. Brown focuses on the use of digital media in relation to Rosa's theory of acceleration. During and after the revolution, political commentators pointed out the use of social media like Facebook and Twitter as a decisive part of the revolution, which shaped and accelerated the dynamics of organisation and mobilisation. Drawing on interview data with participants in the revolution, Brown demonstrates how such an understanding of the role of digital media is simplified and ignores just how complex resistance is. Digital media was indeed a useful tool for the protesters, but the narrative about a "Facebook revolution" reflects a western perspective. Exploring this in relation to Rosa theory of acceleration, Brown suggests this narrative of digital media's prominence alludes to the broader assumptions over what these revolutions were for, namely economic and political modernity in accordance with 'western' understanding. Although this narrative reduces resistance in the so-called Arab Spring to a 'frenetic standstill', this overlooks a significant aspect of the Tunisian revolution that Brown draws attention to and which had little to do with digital media, the "Councils for the Protection of the Revolution". He analyses these as a form of "constructive resistance". Resistance can be much more than the openly declared rebellious intentions and organised protest

taking place here and now. It can work slowly, over a long time, dispersed and very subtle. In the emerging cross-disciplinary field of resistance studies, there is a growing interest in these kinds of subtler, fleeting, discreet and hidden forms of resistance, and a developing terminology to catch them for analytical purposes. The *constructive resistance* which Brown uses is one example of this. It refers to the efforts to build the desired society within the shell of the old, in other words bringing visions of the future into the present, independent of dominant power structures (Sørensen 2016, see also Koefeed 2018). Rather than protest and object to what they consider undesirable, the constructive resisters expend their effort on activities such as establishing independent spaces (like the aforementioned councils in Tunisia) and new norms concerning relationships with other people. Instead of demanding that others (such as governments, authorities and businesses) act, they themselves start to create what they want here and now. The concept has overlaps with the part of social movement studies exploring the prefigurative aspect of movements (see for instance Maeckelbergh 2011; Yates 2014), although it includes types of resistance that are not organised in social movements.

Two other contributions in this issue explicitly refer to constructive resistance; in the contribution called "Taking back control: Minimalism as a reaction to high speed and overload in contemporary society", Ugglå has analysed the narratives that well-known American minimalist bloggers convey about their journeys towards a minimalist lifestyle as a way to achieve personal autonomy. Her conclusion is that although minimalism is attracting a growing interest and can be combined with criticism of consumption and higher resource awareness, in its present form minimalism is not particularly challenging or threatening to the system and the focus is clearly on improved personal well-being for the person who chooses to resist the consumer culture by owning less. Although minimalism can be understood as constructive resistance against a discourse of consumption, the individualisation entailed means that in the present form, minimalist narratives are not threatening the discourse of economic growth. When it comes to time and tempo, Ugglå finds that the minimalist narratives include two contradictory temporalities. On the one hand, minimalism appears to be a critique of the temporal norms of capitalist society. A major explanation for why the minimalist authors have abandoned their previous way of life is because of the stress caused by time pressure at work and in relation to managing possessions. This is obviously an implicit critique of the capitalist norm, and the narratives include ideas about living in the moment and being free to live at a slower pace. On the other hand, the minimalists advocate time management strategies that demonstrate how the capitalist norm of not wasting time has been internalised. As is central in capitalist temporality, time is a commodity which should not be wasted, and the minimalist authors present ideas about how personal autonomy can be reached through routines, self-discipline and efficient time management.

Sørensen and Wiksell in their article "Constructive resistance to the dominant capitalist temporality" also write about constructive resistance. Whereas Ugglå's focus is on individualised forms of resistance, these authors bring attention to the complexity of organised and collective efforts to resist the dominant aspects of capitalist tempo-

rality. Sørensen and Wiksell use the two illustrative cases of worker cooperatives and timebanks to discuss the complexity of constructive resistance. Both worker cooperatives and timebanks are explicit attempts to cooperate around work and leisure in non-capitalist ways, but the authors' conclusion has parallels to Uggla's – the efforts are so small and far apart that they are not posing any threat to capitalism. As Sørensen and Wiksell write, this is unsurprising, given capitalist temporality's increasing dominance over the centuries. The way Sørensen and Wiksell illustrate the complexity is to first identify two dominant aspects of capitalist temporality, which they draw from Adams (1998) work. One aspect is the decontextualized and abstract clock time which developed alongside capitalism, best symbolised by the clock. The other aspect is the way capitalism has commodified time, caught by the absurd phrase that "time is money". Sørensen and Wiksell show that even when groups such as the worker cooperatives and timebanks have explicit intentions of resistance and manage to do that in one of these temporal aspects, through their practice they might nevertheless contribute to upholding the status quo from another aspect. Although their cases are very different, Uggla as well as Sørensen and Wiksell's articles show the complexities involved in resisting capitalist temporality even with explicit and intentional attempts.

Another development within resistance studies is the growing interest in *everyday resistance*. In their influential attempt to develop an analytical framework for analysing everyday resistance, Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) focus on everyday resistance as an everyday *practice* which is entangled with forms of power. In the contributions in this special issue, this is exemplified by Ambjörnsson's text "Time to clean: On resistance and the temporality of cleaning". Ambjörnsson suggests embracing the practice of cleaning as a form of resistance to dominant norms which delegate cleaning to be the least attractive household chore. Cleaning has a low status both in the home and professionally, as a result of traditionally being women's work, while also being despised by feminists. Whereas other domestic activities such as child rearing, home decoration and cooking now have a higher status, cleaning is still relegated to the bottom. Ambjörnsson explores how this is related to its temporality – cleaning is repetitive and does not create anything new, it is always sideways and backwards, meaning that it cannot be part of the growth and forward-looking activities which are so cherished in late modern capitalist society. This is where Ambjörnsson's suggestion that we embrace cleaning as a form of resistance comes in. She is basing her argument on the critique of chrononormativity proposed by authors such as Baraitser (2017) and Halberstam (2005), who are using the notion "queer time". Chrononormativity refers to the culturally privileged way of living a life temporally – to move from adolescence, to early adulthood, to marriage, reproduction, child rearing, retirement and death. This temporal standardisation serves to naturalise heteronormative as well as capitalist power structures and consequently force a sociocultural other into a peripheral temporal position. In contrast, within a "queer temporality", the "here and now" is celebrated, resisting the future orientated focus on family, reproduction and accumulation of capital found elsewhere. Ambjörnsson suggests that embracing cleaning and its backwardness and dealing with

decay (which is nevertheless also a form of care) might be another feminist way to formulate a starting point for our common needs.

The interest in everyday resistance has its origin in James Scott's work on poor peasants in Malaysia (Scott, 1985), and subsequent studies (both those inspired by and critical of Scott) have frequently focused on everyday resistance of the poor and/or the so-called third world (see for instance Abu-Lughod 1990; Adnan 2007; Bayat 2000; Jenkins 2017; Scott 1990). Recently there has been a growing number of studies taking their point of departure in welfare societies, for instance in relation to mothers with disabilities (Frederick 2017), and care for the elderly (Grenier & Hanley 2007; Ward, Campbell & Keady 2016). However, there remains much to investigate about the meaning of everyday resistance in a welfare society, not least how it evokes narratives, practices and technologies related to time and temporality – an obvious sociological area of inquiry.

Everyday practices of resistance have been studied within several disciplines, such as feminist studies and work studies, where the term *organizational misbehaviour* covers much everyday resistance which takes place in the work place (Ackroyd & Thompson 1999; Karlsson 2012; Lindqvist & Olsson 2017). However, the term "misbehaviour" in itself clearly has an employer perspective (although this might not be the intention of everyone who uses it), whereas resistance studies – as articulated for instance in the *Journal of Resistance Studies* – takes the perspective of the subordinate (Vinthagen 2015). The naming of oppositional activities cannot be isolated from questions of power – the misbehaviour or laziness that the employer sees can just as well be termed time theft or liberation of time from the employee's perspective, a form of resistance against ever-increasing acceleration in work life, demanding higher productivity and more "efficiency" in both the private and public sector.

The attention to more subtle and discreet forms of resistance also raises the issue of exactly what is being resisted. In the Tunisian case that Brown writes about in this issue, the obvious power being resisted is the Tunisian state. In the other articles, the power being resisted manifests itself in more subtle ways, such as dominant discourses and social norms. Sørensen and Wiksell point towards the two essential aspects of dominant capitalist temporality – decontextualized and abstract clock time and the commodification of time as powerful temporal norms. Uggla writes about consumption norms and Ambjörnsson about cleaning norms. Most of the contributions are only writing implicitly about power, although Wall, Selander and Bergman write explicitly about how exercise of power can be linked to discursive practices and how individuals try to resist this. In their contribution, titled "Makt och motstånd i rehabiliteringsprocessen: Sanningen om tidig återgång i arbete utmanad", Wall, Selander and Bergman investigate power and resistance in the rehabilitation process of women who have been on long term sick leave due to psychological health problems. The SOU 1988:41 "Tidig och samordnad rehabilitering" was the core document for Sweden's 1992 reform of rehabilitation, and Wall, Selander and Bergman's Foucault inspired discourse analysis of this SOU reveals how the norm of paid work prevails, and how a discursive practice of "quick return" disciplines women's bodies. Statements regarding the importance of

early and quick return are linked to arguments about reduced sick leave and saving societal costs. They also find practises of categorisation which describe those who deviate from the norm as "passive receivers" or "slow" in recovering. The aspect of resistance in the article is taken from an open-ended question in a questionnaire, to which women repeatedly responded by asking for more time to recover at their own pace. They are highly aware of the norm of early and quick return which they encounter through their meetings with employers and Försäkringskassan, yet they still express wishes of being able to recover at their own speed and explicate the barriers to early and quick return. Based on Wall, Selander and Bergman's findings, we see great potential for further investigations into what other forms of everyday resistance people in the rehabilitation process engage in. This can both develop the field of everyday resistance and create greater understanding of the temporal aspects of individual rehabilitation at a time when an increasing number of employees experience depression and burn out.

In a recent theoretical article, Mona Lilja (2018) has analysed the intertwinings of time, power and resistance in Foucault's writing. The resistance of the women in Wall, Selander and Bergman's article mentioned above resembles what Foucault calls "critique as the art of voluntary insubordination" (Lilja 2018: 429). Regardless of the disciplining practices which seem hard to avoid, it can be interpreted as resistance in the form of critique when the women express other wishes, point towards obstacles for a quick recovery and see the "normal" rehabilitation process as problematic. How "voluntary" their insubordination is might be questioned since the women's bodies say no, but the women are not just passive and accepting, rather they articulate the limitations of the system. Lilja shows the diversity in Foucault's articulations of crossroads of power and resistance as well as the temporal aspects involved. She points out how resistance as counter-conduct, such as resistance against governance, is often based on an image of Utopia or another future when the current governing has ended. She also speaks about the discursive resistance which is dispersed and consists of a diverse set of points of resistance in the network of power. These are not synchronised, but combined they might contribute to changes in the discourse after a time-lag. In Wall, Selander and Bergman's case, one can at least imagine the women's critique of the limitations of the system combined with other forms of resistance sometime in the future, thus building momentum and contributing to change. Lilja (2018) also introduce how resistance in the form of technologies of the self are often based on narratives about the past, present and future that the subject uses to transform itself. As illustrated, Foucault's thought can be used to analyse the intertwining of time, power and resistance in a multitude of ways, another future avenue of research with great potential.

Several of the contributions draw on Rosa's (2013) influential theory of social acceleration, where he describes how our experience of time has changed with the industrialisation and urbanisation which has driven modern and late modern societal development. Rosa identifies three aspects of acceleration—technical acceleration, acceleration of social change and acceleration in the pace of life. Time has always been important for human beings and their social life, but now it has acquired a special place in our lives and societies. Previously, changes did not take place within the same

generation, maybe not even several generations, but today change is increasingly accelerated across all areas of life.

Rosa (2013) is not explicitly writing about resistance to this acceleration, but he does mention forces of "deceleration". Some of these are natural (for instance there is a limit to how fast we can think); other forms of deceleration are dysfunctional results of acceleration, such as traffic jams which occur because of overload. Rosa has also identified "islands of deceleration", specifically mentioning the Amish as an example of a community where time appears to be "standing still". More interesting in terms of resistance are his examples of "intentional deceleration", which he divides into two: One is ideological motivated movements for deceleration, such as the slow food movement and the movement for voluntary simplicity. The other is "slowdown as a strategy of acceleration". By intentionally slowing down, people can find temporary relief through practicing yoga or mindfulness, and after a short break re-enter the rat race with renewed energy. However, Rosa is not advocating any of these as solutions to the problems associated with acceleration, but rather suggests that we create spaces where people can experience relatedness to themselves, other people and the world.

In his book "Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World" (2019), Rosa presents resonance and alienation as two basic categories. Rosa's starting point is that we are "wired" towards longing for resonant relationships, indeed it is through resonance that we first experience and relate to the world. Resonance is a relational concept which describes a mode of being-in-the-world where people and world respond to each other and the same time as each speak with its own voice. It is both a descriptive and a normative concept, since a life with many moments of resonance is likely to be experienced as a good life. However, Rosa is not first and foremost concerned with the individual experience, but with the factors which enable or inhibit the possibility for resonant spaces to exist and people to find stable axes of resonance. Some of the factors Rosa identifies as a hindrance to resonant relationships are acceleration and competition, which instead lead to alienation. Resonance is closely interlinked with alienation, which Rosa understands as a relationship of repulsion or indifference. During depression and burnout, which he identifies as major symptoms of alienation in late modern societies, "all axes of resonance have become mute and deaf. A person may "have" a family, work, social clubs, religion etc., but these no longer "speak" to them" (Rosa 2019:184). In his previous work, Rosa (2010, 2013) also wrote about how people in late modern societies frequently experience alienation from the things, places and people around them, and even from time itself. Almost all things, places and people can easily be replaced with somebody or something, for instance when we move, change jobs and place of living or feel forced to buy new technical devices in order to keep up. The more flexible we are in this regard, the better we have adapted to living in the accelerated society. Thanks to TV, internet and social media people also have many "episodes of experience" which have nothing to do with their own lives and leave few traces in their memory. Rosa thinks that late modern life is characterised by many such "episodes of experience" but few "experiences which leave a mark". Time passes quickly in an endless stream of episodes, but it has little meaning for the late

modern subject and shrinks or disappears from memory. When people do not acquire their own lived experiences, they get alienated from the flow of time.

Since Rosa's book on resonance has just become available in English, the authors of this special issue have not been able to engage with it, but a future avenue of interesting research concerns how resonance as an answer to acceleration can be understood in relation to power and resistance. Rosa is very brief on the issue of what should be done about the crisis of resonance he describes so vividly, and only hint at where possible solutions for a better balance between a reified and a resonant relationship to world can be developed in what he calls a "post-growth society". However, he is very clear that solutions cannot be top-down but have to be developed bottom-up. Although Rosa is not using the vocabulary of resistance studies, what he calls for sounds similar to more experiments with constructive resistance, so they can develop from oases of resonance into more widespread structures. The timebanks and worker cooperatives that Sørensen and Wiksell write about, revolutionary councils in Tunisia and the minimalists attempt to develop another temporality can all be understood as attempts, however limited and unsuccessful, to develop more resonant spaces.

The five articles in this special issue can only provide a glimpse into the vast area of temporal aspects of power and resistance. As a way of concluding we would like to point towards one area that we find particularly interesting for future research, and which is only hinted at in some of the articles: When does sporadic and unorganised everyday resistance develop into strategic and organised resistance? Much everyday resistance will probably never be anything other than everyday resistance, but organised resistance is always preceded and accompanied by more discreet and subtle forms of resistance. An aspect of this is also to explore the borders between coping and resistance, a distinction which has yet to be empirically and theoretically developed. To give an example, in a study about the working conditions of social workers that Alfredsson Olsson participated in, the researchers found that it might be difficult to distinguish between coping and resistance. The social workers who participated in the study reported many shortcomings in their work environment when it came to stress and time. For instance, they described how they often had to work overtime without compensation, and that they frequently had to skip lunch or coffee breaks. Likewise, it was not unusual with long-term sick leave, high turnover of staff and shortcomings in how leadership was exercised. The social workers coped with the problems by shortening or skipping the regular breaks they are entitled to on scheduled time, working overtime, become sick or change jobs. To change job is an exit strategy which can be understood as individual resistance, while the others are examples of coping. However, there were also more subtle ways of coping which border on everyday resistance. In some work places it was the norm to be late for meetings, to recover through a few minutes of chatting with a colleague, taking mini breaks to eat an apple or grab a coffee at unscheduled times, go to the toilet "unnecessarily", use social media and so forth. These strategies might be understood both as coping and resistance, depending on the context. In one place, leadership might be completely aware that these microbreaks are necessary for the staff to keep

doing a good job. Employees who skip regular breaks but take microbreaks instead in order to cope are not considered a problem at all, and it is a grey zone whether this is resistance. However, in a different place, there might be an outspoken policy against unregulated breaks and the same activities then become obvious examples of everyday resistance. In relation to the theme of resistance, the most striking finding in the study was the lack of organised and articulated resistance. How come social workers are so quiet and careful in their protests? One explanation is solidarity with their clients, which makes it impossible to strike or "misbehave" in ways that cause trouble for the clients (Astvik, Melin & Allvin 2013; Tham & Meagher 2009). This raises the question of who is in a position to engage in organised and articulated resistance? These are more areas for future empirical and theoretical research.

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#### Author presentation

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