

## THE CONCEPT OF RESISTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY GALICIAN CULTURE: TOWARDS A POETIC ECOLOGY

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**ABSTRACT:** The concept of ‘resistance’ has turned into a critical tool in different areas of political, philosophical and sociological thought. At the same time, the notion seems to be as productive as it is diffuse. ‘Resistance’ is used in very specific contexts in scientific or technical disciplines, and with extreme flexibility in social and cultural studies. In the latter two areas, the concept is often used without prior reflection on its characteristics and limitations. In *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze provides a possible framework for conceiving cultural and political practices of resistance as positions of force, when he defines contraction as ‘a contemplation that preserves the preceding in the following’. The purpose of this article is to understand political ecologism in its activist and poetical dimensions, in light of a Deleuzian interpretation of resistance.

**KEYWORDS:** resistance, force, Chus Pato, Gilles Deleuze, political ecology, contemporary Galician poetry

Despite its high productivity in the field of cultural criticism, the notion of resistance is far from transparent. The term’s polysemic character contributes to this lack of clarity. The word ‘resistance’ can refer to processes as different as the opposition that an electric current meets in its path; a patient’s forsaking of psychoanalytic treatment; the tactics of the guerrilla in Latin America; or the cultural practices of women under the Iranian regime. As a historical description of anti-fascist movements and participants in the Second World War, its meaning becomes even more equivocal. Yet, the semantic crossroads open once more when the term is applied to the contemporary anti-globalization and anti-capitalist movements. Resistance is one of those categories that oscillates between the relative specificity with which it is used in certain scientific and technical disciplines (physics and psychoanalytic therapy in the above examples), and the extreme flexibility with which it is used in social and cultural studies. In this last case the concept becomes more complicated because it is rarely used consciously. This creates the necessity of a reflection upon its characteristics and limits. In this context, it is significant that Daniel Bensaid prefers to use the term “Resistances” in his essay on the evolution of Marxism in the last three decades.

As we can see, the term raises many questions, and here I would like to address only a few of them. I will begin with the concept of resistance as loyalty to place. It can be related to rootedness and belonging, although it cannot be automatically identified with them. The subtitle of David Bensaïd's already cited work, *Essai de taupologie general*, clearly alludes to this spatial context, showing its filiations to the *Communist Manifesto* in the metaphor of a mole capable of piercing history and its subterranean architecture.

But Bensaïd's reflections on space are not exhausted in the play of semiotic filiations between mathematic topology and the operations of infiltration pertaining to the resistance to capital. On various occasions he has emphasized the necessity for a critique of the economy of space, as opposed to the Marxist critique of an economy of time. In the third chapter of his monograph *Révolution! 100 mots pour changer le monde* (2003) (*Revolution! 100 Words to Change the World*), which explores the problem of ecological deterioration, Bensaïd argues that the development of a 'critical ecology' would entail the thinking of the capitalist mode of production not only as a temporal, but also as a spatial totality.

With reference to this spatial understanding of ecology and resistance, and with reference to social movements which understand the defence of nature as the defence of a political subject, I wish to sketch an approach to ecological action in contemporary Galician culture as a practice of resistance. Also, I will explore some features of contemporary poetics which, while taking distance from the clichés of landscape poetry, have developed complex ideas about the interaction between humans and their natural environment. I will argue that by being redeployed in an area of thought as problematic as that of nature, the concept of resistance can acquire new dimensions which in turn can help to illuminate and refine the meaning of the concept.

## TERRITORY, TRAVEL, IDENTITY

In an analysis of Afro-Creole cultures in the Carribean, Richard Burton remarks, in the following terms, the connection between resistance and space:

a given sociopolitical system can be resisted only when it is possible for the dominated group or dominated individuals to place themselves entirely outside the system in question. Resistance requires an elsewhere from which the system may be perceived and grasped as a whole and from which a coherent *strategy* of resistance may be elaborated.

By insisting that resistance requires a 'where', Burton posits the existence of a territory which escapes domination, and through which subversive practices can travel. The recognition of a dialectical relationship between travel and territoriality, an insight which is axiomatic to the contemporary study of intercultural processes, means that this 'where' cannot be conceived as a stable and definitive locus. Rather, the construction of identities in social space is often linked to precisely those processes of cultural interchange which result from the movement of agents within the same community, for instance exile and emigration. The history of literature offers many examples of travellers who,

in attempting to define the customs of their cultures in which they found themselves, were ultimately defining the reach and limits of their own communities of origin. Dionýz Ďurišin (1989), a theorist of the Bratislava School, approaches the phenomenon of interliterarity in terms of the correlation between processes of cultural auto- and hetero-definition. In this way, certain texts from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, today identifiable as orientalist, managed to become a specific mode of moral and philosophic literature, where the notion of *ethos* transcended both the description of the singularity of the home community and the incomprehension of the exotic. The *Lettres Persiennes* (Persian Letters) [1721] or the *Cartas Marruecas* (Moroccan Letters) [1789] of José Cadalso both illustrate, in different contexts, this same principle.

From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the globalization of migratory movements became a decisive element in the process of defining emergent national literatures. In the case of Galicia, cultural identity was formed in large part due to the initiative of the emigrant communities: the Galician national anthem was first played in Havana's Galician Centre, and the publication of *Follas Novas* (New Leaves) [1880], Rosalia de Castro's second collection of poems, was funded by the Galician emigrant associations in Cuba.

Yet, even though the dialogue between two communities is inherent to the attempt to define—or redefine—their same cultural identity, it is also true that the notion of territory continues to have a decisive influence on the conception of the nations that underwent a process of 'renaissance' during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. To refer once again to the Galician experience, one might wish to consider the territorial significance of the term 'fifth province'. The term refers to the city of Buenos Aires, the point of arrival for successive waves of migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a favoured destination of Republican exiles after the Spanish Civil War. The Argentinean 'fifth province', added to the four 'natural' Galician regions, highlights that the small non-state entities of Europe constructed themselves historically with territorial conceptions as their model. At the same time, they resisted their integration into the territorial identity postulated by the nation-state.

At the same time, there seems to be an element inherent to the idea of resistance which escapes the logic of permanent foundations. It invites, rather, the thinking of strategic movements through space or, to speak in Deleuzian terms, escape routes beyond territoriality. It is not an accident that protests, marches, and other forms of occupation of urban space are some of the most evident figures of expression for collective subjectivities that emerge from resistance movements.

This apparent antinomy can be better understood if we start from the two notions Gilles Deleuze uses in relation to the concept 'territoriality'. On the one hand, territoriality is linked to the state, but the state constructs it as a transcendent form of the primitive model of immanent territoriality. Therefore, according to Deleuze, territory is an immanent form of being on the earth, defined by relation and distance. Territory itself gives rise to thought about the formation of the material and the difference between territorialization, degrees of territorialization, and deterritorialization (MP 49).

This model of territoriality is very productive for an analysis of the relation between the state and nations without a state. Nowadays, projects of resistance linked to non-state cultural groups oscillates between two possibilities: local and particularized practices of resistance, and the search for models of resistance that are not based on territoriality. These two possibilities are not diametrically opposed to each other. For example, the effect of the actions of an ecologist movement might be limited to the natural environment of each specific claim; yet, what Bensaïd terms 'critical ecology' is based on political positions that are highly conscious of the effects of global capitalism on a local scale. Conversely, the commitment to the deterritorialization of cultural resistance is usually projected onto a territory, in a to and fro which always has repercussions on the area taken as a starting point. A characteristic example of this are the results of outward projections of culture in the Galician literary field. The objective of these practices—fomented with special intensity by the autonomous government of 2005-2009—was to publicize Galician culture abroad through initiatives such as the subsidizing of translations and the participation of Galician writers in international book fairs. However, these practices of 'going abroad' were above all significant in the local arena, where they gave rise to numerous and diverse controversies. This situation demonstrates that the possibility—or impossibility—of exporting a cultural repertoire, and the debate over which elements should be exported to the exterior, has become one of the conditions through which nations without a state can be placed 'on the map'. Their visibility as territorial units will depend, to a large degree, on their capacity to survive within a globalized society.

In the last fifteen years, traditional ecological politics, based on the conceptualization of the environment as national wealth and on the central importance of the conservation of nature, have been accompanied—if not completely replaced—by new forms of understanding the defence of the environment. The conservationist paradigm has to some extent entered into conflict with political ecology, which recognizes the socially conditioned character of the environment and is able to strategically take advantage of the conservationist viewpoint to strengthen its own claims.

The differences between both models are highlighted by the efficacy with which the defenders or drivers of global capitalism can neutralize the claims of ecological conservationism. Almost all of the representatives of formal democracy in Europe—whether they are conservative or progressive—have incorporated into their programs a certain level of 'ecological conscience.' The term 'conscience' reflects the idealistic character of these proposals. In opposition to this green political modishness, critical ecology underlines the link between nature and the forces and means of production, insisting that environmental policies can only be applied by questioning the principles of the productive model which operates on a global scale.

A brief overview of measures taken by international institutions in defence of the environment demonstrates the transition from a conservationist model to a model based on sustainable development. The United Nations Environment Programme was founded at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972.

This entity coordinates actions that aim to protect the environment. Twenty years later, during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio de Janeiro 1992), a Global Citizens Forum took place which approved a Treaty on Environmental Education for Sustainable Societies and Global Responsibility. The paradigm of sustainability was again ratified at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 2002. Since then, the concept 'sustainable development' has been incorporated into neoliberal discourse. Moreover, despite the popularity of environmentally motivated discourses such as that on climate change, the application of environmental policies has advanced little. During the 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP15) in Copenhagen in 2009, no consensus could be established about the modification of the Kyoto Protocol, which expires in 2012. For these reasons, and to confront residual models such as conservationism or hegemonic models such as 'sustainable development', the emergence of a critical ecologism that foregrounds the extricable link between environmental struggle and the theoretical and practical questioning of capitalism, becomes ever more necessary.

The way in which a specific culture configures and designs the environment in which it develops has an unequivocal relationship with the norms operating within that community. This is confirmed in the work of Tom Jagtenberg and David McKie (1997), which highlights the necessary connection between semiosphere and biosphere. This fact is especially visible in the so-called Information Society, in which two contradictory movements are produced: on the one hand, that which is newsworthy (and thus visible) is filled, following market tendencies, with references to respect for nature. On the other hand, there is an amplification of the different levels of alarm about the danger faced by the natural world, at times in an apocalyptic tone.

#### ECOLOGICAL POLITICS AS PRACTICE OF RESISTANCE

Like so many other announced but never really occurring deaths, that of nature has fed many post-modern philosophies. Nearly thirty years later, and considering the proliferation of discourses on global warming and climate change, it is not nature, but post-modernism—at least in the sense in which it was understood by its first theorists—that seems to have died. But even disobeying the post-modern dictate which attempts to bury certain persistent categories, such as nation, gender, and class, what appears clear is that it is not feasible, either in theory or in practice, to accept an essentialist and a-historical vision of nature. The mutability of the term has been brought out by Raymond Williams, who distinguished between four major notions of nature. These notions developed at different moments and converged to a greater or lesser extent during the second half of the twentieth century.

The first model of comprehension of the natural is, according to Williams, that of traditional cultures, where a vision derived ultimately from animism, which converts nature into an entity that is 'singular, abstract and personified,' predominates. This is

the culture proper of societies in which there is a strong contact with the earth, due primarily to an economy of subsistence, or which are based on the primary sector.

The second model interprets nature as a space of savage innocence, from which industrial societies find themselves in need of salvation. The earth is seen as imbued with a spiritual power which needs to be defended from human aggression. This idea, which has its modern origin in Romanticism, has its contemporary equivalent in ecological groups which hold to an idea of Gaia.

Thirdly, Williams recognizes the presence of an enlightened model of interpretation of the natural world. He argues that European thought converted nature into a type of 'constitutional law' between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This provoked a meticulous project of classification, valuation, and territorial organization which is to a large extent still in force today.

Finally, nature can be considered a productive space, as a source of economic resources the control of which is key to the planetary distribution of wealth. The eco-feminist movement, which shares some postulates with the second of the interpretive models described above, also sees nature as a force of production. It proposes a reassignment of control over natural resources in territories that are economically dominated by foreign capital. In the words of Gaard and Murphy: 'Ecofeminism is a practical movement for social change [...] against the "maldevelopment" and environmental degradation caused by patriarchal societies, multinational corporations and global capitalism'. In linking patriarchal domination with other types of domination such as the predatory relation of humanity with nature, eco-feminism conceives itself as an anti-hierarchical movement.

These last two models appear to be predominant in ecological politics, when those can be considered as a practice of resistance. Ecological politics is resistant because it takes as its objective the defence of a space threatened by economic power. It appropriates the bellicose metaphor of resistance as a position which defies aggressions that originate from a location considered external. At the same time, it escapes the temptation of presuming the existence of an uncontaminated prior space which must be re-appropriated through practices which oppose the ruling order. Perhaps one of the phrases most linked to historical resistance in the Hispanic sphere is 'No pasarán' (They will not pass), the battle-cry of the Republican troops—with which Madrid was plastered during the Spanish Civil War, and which can gain, here and now, new connotations. Resistance, in effect, means: 'Do not let them get through!'

#### LANDSCAPE AS A SITE OF FORCES: FROM ENCROBAS TO PRESTIGE

Thus, ecological politics allow us to rethink some conceptual aspects of practices of resistance in the contemporary world. In Galicia, the disaster of the oil tanker *Prestige* in November 2002 made social movements appreciate the need to consider the political repercussions of environmental damage. Historical experiences of resistance, such as the citizens' movement against Encrobas in 1977, had already shown the possibility of

understanding landscape as a site of forces which allows for the unfurling of antagonistic positions in social space.

The conflict around As Encrobas, a village in the municipality of Cerceda in the province of A Coruña, was the largest agrarian revolt of recent decades in Galicia. It started after the expropriation of local farmers' land for the exploitation of lignite and the installation of a thermal power station by the energy company Fenosa. The slogan 'A nosa terra é nosa, non de Fenosa' ('Our land is ours, not Fenosa's'), chosen by landowners and activists as their catchphrase, synthesizes how ecological politics operate as a critique of capitalist exploitation. In the political context of the 1970s, this conflict brought to the fore the link between the tradition of anti-Franco struggle in Galicia, and the affirmation of peripheral cultural identities. The slogan 'a nosa terra é nosa' ('our land is ours') can consequently be taken to call for the defence not only of the natural environment, but also of an immanent territoriality, here conceived as the site of a political and cultural project that posited an alternative to the dominant one. Almost ten years after the conflict of 'As Encrobas', the crisis caused by forest fires in the summer of 2006 confirmed the need to revisit the modes of organization of territory. More recently, the platform 'Galiza Non se Vende' ('Galicia is not for sale') has shown great sensitivity towards the repercussions of economic speculation on a terrain that public bodies increasingly conceived of as a building site. All of these protest movements ultimately understand nature as an 'ecological machine', in Toni Negri's sense. Negri invites us to leave behind a passive conception of the natural environment—the *natura naturata* of scholastic thought—and instead, to understand nature as an agential and desiring mechanism. Negri's conceptualization of the ecological is articulated in the context of critical theory, and it entails a suggestion for an ecological praxis in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Thus, it can be taken as a point of departure for rethinking models of nature as they are manifested in poetry. For the purpose of this argument, an enquiry into the ways in which contemporary poetry has contributed to the activation of this ecological machine is of particular relevance. In the case of Galician poetry, landscape has inspired poetic thought since the 19th century, in texts which often draw on the Romantic ideology of *Volkgeist*. Landscape poetry, often with a particular interest in the rural, was one element of the postulation of a common ground for the nation. It was usually conceived of as a (generally idealized) place, which allowed for the hosting of a collective identity. However, even in the 19th century there were divergent conceptions of the political and poetical significance of the natural world in Galician literature. The poetic environmentalism of Nicodemes Pastor Díaz—a poet who has been considered a precursor of the Galician literary renaissance (Rexurdamento)—was indebted to the neo-classical understanding of nature as an aesthetic framework for human action. On the other hand, Rosalía de Castro often converts nature into the agent of the emotions evoked in her poems. Closer to the pathos of the sublime than to the restraint of the beautiful, Castro makes nature the basis of a defence of an imagined territory (López Sández, 2008). Especially in her *Cantares Gallegos* (Galician Songs, 1863), Galicia's natural beauty is contrasted with the ugliness of the Castilian landscape which, in turn,

is metonymically conceived as the territorial base of the oppressors of the Galician people. Her poem 'Los robles' (The Oaks), part of the collection *En las orillas del Sar* (On the Banks of the Sar, 1884), which links the deforestation of the autochthonous forest with the disappearance of the material forms of existence linked to a traditional culture with its attendant myths and legends, can be considered an early example of critical eco-poetry.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the appearance of new literary figurations of nature, including the Franciscanism of some lyrical approaches and so-called poetic *hilozoísmo*. This doctrine assumes an animistic conception of nature which comes close to the second of the models identified by Williams. The pastoral tone of these texts would be partially substituted and on occasion questioned, by a new understanding of the natural: telluric poetry makes the song and the material place equivalent; resistant poetics focus on political nature and actively combat any conjecture of a naïve insertion of nature into a stable place.

The notion of nature expressed in the poetry of Chus Pato expresses the poetics of resistance that I describe here. One can distinguish at least two conceptions of the natural in her work. These conceptions often enter into a conflictive dialogue with each other. Works such as *m-Talá* (2000) express Pato's explicit resistance to the concept of nature as mother:

Aquí escoitarás falar, todo esto sobre da capacidade reproductora das femias da especie biolóxica e non tan biolóxica, modélica para outras tantas formas, tamén o estado -) queda claro? porque debe quedar claro; a saber: que NINGUNHA MADRE-NATUREZA agarda para nós. E tampouco a NÓS-defuntos, que ningún de nós poderá xa máis nunca disolverse en ningunha MADRE-natureza.

Here you will hear speak, all this about the reproductive capacity of the females of the biological species and the not so biological model for other forms, also the state -) is it clear? Because it should be clear; that is: NO MOTHER-NATURE waits for us. And not for a defunct US, none of us now will ever dissolve ourselves in any MOTHER-nature.

On the other hand, her collection *Hordas de escritura* (Hordes of Writing) from 2008 constitutes in many ways the communication of wonder before the power of the natural world. The poem 'Being Born is a Republic of Trees' is placed at the very beginning of the collection. In this poem, the poet metaphorically evokes the birth of a regime of political organization, whose members—one might say citizens, according to the metaphor—are trees. The trope can be read in two ways. On the one hand, it suggests that the notion of a political right reaches beyond the human; thus, the egalitarianism proper to the republican system includes the natural world. On the other hand, if 'to be born is a republic of trees', the mode of our arrival in human life implies that we cannot be separated from nature, and that nature can only be thought of as political. In the arboreal community evoked by Pato, the testimony of the bio-political capacity of the imagination constitutes one of the defining figures of the alliance between the natural and the communitarian. This alliance is characterized by its critical approach,



expressed by the voice deliberately showing itself to be far from the elegiac accent which nearly always characterizes bucolic poetry. At the same time, the voice supports the weight implied by taking into account the irreconcilable distance between words and objects:

A destrución en Galicia non atinxe ao inorgánico, por iso non podemos dicir que teñamos ruínas; a destrución en Galicia correspóndese coa desarticulación do tecido social e con parámetros morais, por iso non podemos soste que teñamos ruínas (as ruínas lingüísticas, a ruína de unidades de produción e mentais non son avaliábeles). Noutros países a destrución abrangue tamén ao inorgánico (bombardeos); non podemos afirmar que un infarto sexa unha ruína do corazón, un corazón arruinado

un corazón non é un músculo

Destruction in Galicia does not reach the inorganic, because of this we cannot say that we have ruins; destruction in Galicia corresponds to the disarticulation of the social fabric and moral parameters, because of this we cannot say that we have ruins

(linguistic ruins, the ruin of productive mental unities are not evaluable). In other countries destruction also covers the inorganic (fires). We cannot affirm that a heart-attack is a ruin of the heart, a ruined heart, a heart is not a muscle.

Pato's poetry has always maintained a productive dialogue with the thought of Deleuze, and his conception of the resistance of the natural is also relevant to her work. The concept of horde, which Deleuze and Guatarri (1972) take from Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* (*Genealogía de la moral*, II 17), is one of the indices of this proximity. In the poetry of Chus Pato, the notion of the horde is connected to her political and poetic use of the concept of nomadism. In her particular use of the concept, the poet places herself closer to an immanent territoriality—as defined by Deleuze and Guatarri in *A Thousand Plateaus*—than to an identitary essentialism. In an interview with Montse Dopico, Pato initially recognizes the relationship between the horde and identity as origin; however, she later explains the link between the horde and nomadism:

The horde is the perfect sphere, which lives centred on itself and for itself. It is a perfect mode of human relations. Because it is a perfectly covered space for the human being, like the maternal womb. On the other hand, it points us towards continuous movement, towards mobility, like that of the barbarians, with absolute freedom (...) I wanted to write a book that would not be based on free verse but on a horde of words: a measure protective of itself, but with mobility and the greatest possible freedom.

Returning to the question of 'what does resistance mean?', the stimulus and guide of these reflections, Deleuze teaches us that force is not solely active. This means that the politics of resistance are often based not on acts of opposition but on acts of permanence, of contestation and affiliation. Thus, they can be understood as politics of force. In his revision of the Kantian analysis of perceptive modes, Deleuze (1986) argues that

the constitutive synthesis occurs in the order of force, and that it is not an act, but a 'contraction'. At the same time, according to Felix Guattari in his *What is Philosophy*, 'contraction is not an action but a pure passion, a contemplation that preserves the before in the after'. The temporal dimension of the practices of resistance discussed in this article can be conceptualized as a contraction of forces in the Deleuzian sense. Conserving the before in the after means being loyal simultaneously to the past and to the future. The conservationist ecological paradigm is based on the defence of a heritage understood as essence, and therefore carries the risk of the paralysis involved in all forms of nostalgia, a risk which is also present in the poetics of the naturally beautiful. The expression 'defence of the environment' lacks the problematization which derives from the consideration of nature as an ecological machine. Therefore, the practices that evoke it are not exactly resistant, but rather reactive—and in extreme cases, as in so-called eco-fascism, openly reactionary. In their seminal study of the origins of modern ecologism, David Pepper, John W. Perkins and Martyn J. Youngs argue that ecofascism is characterized by the presence of

elements of emotionalism and romanticism wedded to the above [ecologism], to produce a belief in a quasi-mystical unity of people and their land, of the state as an organism, and of the 'naturalness' and therefore rightness of hierarchy, of struggle and survival of the fittest.

The challenge consists of conceiving and practicing an ecologism that recognizes the relationship of mutual dependence between civilization and nature and that, instead of positing the environment as an uncontaminated area, conceives of environmental politics as a stage for social struggle. In line with these arguments, ecological politics is a practice of resistance capable of conserving the before in the after. Its proponents oppose change when change implies a threat to the identity of a place; yet these movements also have the capacity to project strategies of resistance which open up possibilities for changes in other directions.

Certain poetics can anticipate more hopeful scenarios than those with which we are confronted almost daily. These poetics follow the trajectory taken by some social movements, generally those of a non-institutional character. The republic of trees evoked by Chus Pato describes a movement which, to use Deleuze's terminology once again, is not so much action as passion. Its fortune resides in the fact that it is a faithful image of the terrain without being completely unfaithful to the rootlessness which involves the discovery of a—sometimes irretrievable—distance between subject and world. Resistance, therefore, could well be the force which circles between the body of the autochthonous trees and the desire for a future republic.

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