

Everyday Resistance And Sense Of Alternative Freedom In Arun Ferreira's *Colours Of The Cage: A Prison Memoir*

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Abstract

Since time immemorial, prison is seen as a place of trauma, pain, and agony as argued by Thomas Hobbes' (1651), John Locke's (1690), Cesare Beccaria's (1785), Immanuel Kant's (1788), Jeremy Bentham's (1820) etc. However, the advent of liberalism has brought some reformation in the representation of prison as a place of pain and suffering as it has been explained by Conley's (1992), Rothman's (1971), Hirsh's (1987) Foucault's (1973), et cetera. The *Colours of the Cage* (2014) by the north eastern writer Arun Ferreira, argues that prison, despite being a site of humiliation, repression and subversion, can also act as a space for the prisoners' solidarity and everyday resistance. Acquitted of all charges in September 2011 after spending five years in prison, Ferreira wrote the book to provide an astonishingly powerful account of his stubborn fight for 'justice' and 'the triumph of the human will.' Exploring how the place of oppression can also work as a site of agency via small and continuous acts of 'micro resistance' and 'prison tactics' (Michel de Certeau 1988), the article highlights the transformational experience of the prisoners that brings them a new type of freedom and helps them realize themselves in their truest sense.

Keywords: *Prison literature, micro-resistance, everyday resistance, alternate freedom.*

INTRODUCTION

Prison as a place is a microcosm to the nation. It brings people from different places, different social classes, different educational backgrounds, and different political interests together. Moreover, it allows them to give birth to a tolerant narrative space. This tolerant space gives birth to heteroglossia of multiple voices and a sense of resistance in day-to-day life. James Scott in *Weapons of the Weak* introduced the concept of "everyday resistance" (Scott 1985). Until now, the adopted theoretical and definitional framework for everyday resistance is supposed to be specific kinds of resistance, which is regular in nature yet is not publicly articulated with political claims or formally organised.

Prisons have always been a place for confinement; in a sense, they act as an institution to separate the elements harmful to the society. Since the concept of prison has come into existence, they have always been a place of trauma, pain and agony (Thomas Hobbes, 1651), (John Locke, 1690), (Cesare Beccaria, 1785), (Immanuel Kant, 1788), (Jeremy Bentham, 1820) etc. However, the advent of liberalism has brought some reformation in the representation of prison as a place of pain and suffering as it has been explained by Conley (1992), Rothman (1971), Hirsh (1987) (Foucault, 1973) etc. Resistance in prison writing starts with the mere thought of documenting the pain and grief. Writing acts as a therapy for prisoners who took up pen to vent out their trauma and pain. Cathhy Caruth says that transition of traumatic memory to narrative memory begins the process of healing and the growth of the character. The journey of transforming their 'detainees self' to a 'writerly self' epitomizes prisoners' struggle and courage in breaking the silence imposed on them (Shrivastava, 2020). It provides them a textual space to project their resistance to any stereotyping by the society.

Michel Foucault asserts, "Wherever there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1978). Lila Abu-Lughod argues that this also implies that "when there is opposition, there is power" (Abu-Lughod). Nonetheless, Foucault focused his entire argument on power exploration but he completely neglected the angle of resistance. Since resistance is required for comprehending power, it appears vital to improve resistance studies, even if only for knowing power. This paper explores one kind of resistance, i.e., 'everyday resistance' and tries to establish a theoretical foundation for the same. Everyday resistance is concerned with how individuals engage in their daily lives in ways that may undermine authority but create a sense of being. Daily resistance practices are either disguised or veiled, they are either individual or unarticulated politically, and that is why it is difficult to identify them as public and collective resistance. Hence, everyday resistance presents a unique study case. However, the effort to explore the sense of freedom a prisoner claims while being in prison is of paramount importance.

A notable disadvantage of the idea of 'everyday resistance' is that it risks categorizing an excessive number of other utterances as 'resistance.' Not all manifestations of diversity, deviance, or originality should be put into the category of 'resistance.' Every term, which is too comprehensive, loses its attraction and use. The emphasis on daily resistance has included activities ranging from violent reactions, demonstrations, and boycotts to non-compliance and unintentional subversive actions. Although there have been many attempts to study everyday resistance, few have focused on providing a coherent methodological framework to assess resistance.

Resistance studies in general and everyday resistance in particular is not a new field of study. It is a response to a widespread urge in the social sciences, particularly from critical theorists, to link the micro dynamics of everyday life with macro structures and processes, even as a means of embodying them (Bleiker, 2000; Davies and Niemann, 2009; Enloe, 1989; Marchand, 2000; Tickner, 2005; Wilcox, 2015). James Scott and Michel de Certeau are often connected with everyday resistance; they are far from the only thinkers. As Bleiker points out, the roots may be traced back to Rabelais's satirical works (Bleiker, 2000). Anna Johansson in her work "Dimensions of Everyday Resistance: An Analytical Framework" gives a more comprehensive and systematic approach to analyse this phenomenon. Repertoires of everyday

resistance are accounted for along with relationships between actors, as well as the specialization and temporalization of resistance. Hollander and Einwohner give a conceptual understanding of assessing resistance. They give a clear-cut typology to recognise an act as resistance or if an act is intended to resist. Through various arguments that are contradictory in nature, they are able to find an agreement that resistance is an “oppositional act”.

As previously noted, an all-inclusive theory of resistance is hard to develop without sacrificing subtlety and understanding. An explanation is required, which is capable of clearly delineating what resistance is, its subjects, its purpose, and the tactics they use. The daily framework of resistance does this by constructing a pattern of both individual and community activities in subordination to everyday experiences of domination as defining elements. It is impossible to examine resistance in isolation from power relations. This is not to say that resistance cannot disrupt such connections; rather, it means that studying resistance necessitates an examination of power relationships. In addition, it is not confined to investigating a single act but rather examines patterns of actions (practises) that occur on a regular basis and are repeated through time.

Over the past several decades, prison as a site has garnered critical attention. The majority of research on state-prison systems and its coercive regimes on the person has concentrated on Michel Foucault's theoretical framework and his claims in *Discipline and Punish* concerning the disciplinary force of the prison setting. His focus on the all-controlling features of power, on the other hand, has been attacked for obliterating any possibility of opposition or challenge to power regimes. Michel de Certeau is one of Foucault's detractors, particularly in terms of daily resistances. He called our attention to micro resistances, in which the everyday acts as a sort of resistance to authority. Everyday activities are “deft manoeuvres of the 'weak' inside the order imposed by the 'strong,' an art of outwitting the opponent on his own territory, hunter's tricks, manoeuvrable, polymorph mobilities, joyous, lyrical, and warlike discoveries.” His term "tactics" alludes to the resourcefulness of average people in the face of overwhelming “strategies.” He describes how less powerful individuals devise their own techniques for responding to the dominant structures and strategies of authoritative organisations, along routes that are somewhat constrained. De Certeau differed from Foucault's analysis of discipline in *Discipline and Punish* in that he sought to illuminate the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups of individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline' (Certeau). Within the context of this research, de Certeau's idea of ‘tactics’ aids in comprehending the ways used by prisoners to undermine and oppose the prison system's all-controlling authority.

Prison memoirs tell a lot about the establishment and the prisoners themselves. It is often a critique on the ruling system and to the very institution of literature as an autonomous arena of activity as they demand to be a part of the larger context. One such work of resistance and freedom is *Colours of the Cage: A Prison Memoir* written by Arun Ferreria. Ferreria was arrested in 2007 on the preliminary charges of involvement in Naxalite violence but soon eleven different cases were filed against him. In his memoir, he talks about the proceedings of the case, the media circus, and the psychological trauma that comes with all of this. His accounts make us wonder about the justice system and how none of the cases was on merits yet he had to go

through such turmoil locked away for years. His memoir brings out a very different aspect of the prisoners called undertrail prisoners. He tells us that prison served as a restraining place for “Kaydi” who were convicted prisoners and “Haulat” for the ones undertrail and “innocent until proven guilty” (23). Ferreira’s work *Colours of the Cage*, primarily focused upon the mechanics of prison, gives a detailed account of prison conditions, the politics of power amongst the inmates, torture routine, sadistic police officers, corruptions, and cover-ups done by authority to maintain a sense of domination above the detainees. Ferreira’s work confronts a common conception about the prison narratives and describes prison as a place for resistance, growth, and freedom.

The purpose of the paper is to show that Arun does not assume a passive stance; rather, he along with his inmates build everyday venues and tactics of resistance that serve as an empowering space for the memoir writer's narrative portrayal. Among these areas and modes of resistance are the artistic dimensions of prison narratives—the dimensions that need reflection.

Looking for artistic qualities of the jail experience may not be the most traditional approach considering the prison system's constraints and terrible environment. However, jails have their own distinct style. According to anthropologist Janet Hart, "contrary to the belief that aesthetics can only have value in contrast to ordinary politics, the political prison aesthetic tries to influence and is moulded by the rocky, dirty, concrete aspects of daily existence". This approach avoids viewing prison space as an all-controlling experience, as Michel Foucault theorizes, in favour of identifying areas and strategies, albeit limited in scope, through which the prisoner inscribes a different account of his/her personal, cultural, historical, and political existence. As Paul Gready remarked in his study of autobiographical writing during apartheid, such writing, "relocates the axis of narrative authority". While Foucault contextualised the prison within circuits of ‘power-knowledge,’ he overlooked the inmates' creative and strategic tools.

Literature is a great example of “dissociative-associative trope” as explained by Doran Larson. The narration in Ferreira’s work seems like an autobiographical work but it can also be translated as a work of public interest. The use of ‘I’ narrating the daily ordeal of the author is also an observation of communal life in prison, thereby invoking a shared and collective ‘I’ which also represents the pain and agony of the fellow detainees. Arun’s narrative connects the political and biographical subject i.e. it connects the narrating ‘I’ with an ‘I’ which is an observer of community life, both in jail and across the country, conjuring a shared and common ‘I.’

Memoir is another genre that combines the communal with the personal, capturing the nexus of history and human experience. In that sense, a memoir is the individual's personal chronicle of the events, people, and experiences that shaped him or her. In that way, memoir is a hybrid between history and fiction, being a type of writing in which objective truths coexist with the author's subjective interpretation and memory. With these characteristics, a memoir has a strong resemblance to the testimonial genre. As so, it also pulls together the intimate and the public, weaving them into the same narrative realm. The well-known feminist axiom that the personal is political also contributes to the popularity of memoir. Additionally, the memoir format enables prisoners to input and record their own opinions and perspectives on public social, cultural, and political concerns. Additionally, it allows individuals to reconsider the social and political circumstances from which they are excluded. Similarly, Ferreira's description of

prisoners' experiences in a political jail rewrites the stereotypes. Additionally, it provides an alternate 'little' history to the state's official history, which solely records these prisoners as "rebels against the state." It elevates these prisoners to the stature of historians and writers of history, and gives them a narrative space in which their experiences are documented.

Prison memoir serves as a multifaceted repository of personal and communal anguish. Ferreira states that the inmates spend their nights singing revolutionary songs to keep their spirits up, and in the morning, they listen to the finished execution order given over the radio: "Once again, the TRT [National Radio and Television Broadcasting] speaker reads the finalised execution order." In prison, those who do not often share tales or talk much suddenly want to share their stories in these moments. The author states, pointing at one of the oldest inmates: "His experience from all his years of dealing with inmates had obviously taught him that since he could not solve our problems, he'd be better off claiming to share them" (37). He also adds: "Execution is such an anti-human behaviour that it is only logical that one would wish to portray more humane tales" (153).

Prison memoir is a complex form of literature, which is constantly challenging the accepted truth about the prison and the prisoners. Prison is an institute of isolation, punishment, and reform in a manner that is in the interest of the authorities. Through memoirs, one can see the hidden nature of the imprisonment and the social dynamics that have an immense impression upon the people and the way they perceive things. The memoir tells us about a constant struggle for power and control amongst the inmates and the authorities. Ferreira mentions: "As I stay silent, they would get frustrated and they would get even more violent. Instead of me breaking down, it was my torturers who cracked as they failed to meet the expectations of their superiors" (8).

One of the motivations for writing in prison is to restore a sense of the self and the world. Ferreria, in his work, goes into detail about the loss of sense during his time in "Anda," an isolation cell. The lack of human contact and a sense of losing oneself seems to be more brutal than the claustrophobic and dark aesthetic of Anda. Hence, he tends to write to restore a sense of self, to reclaim the "truth," to seek empowerment in an oppositional "power of writing" by writing against the official text (Gready).

In his work, Gready also highlights the significance of the aesthetic aspect of prison narrative. The concept of aesthetic deals with the micro resistance at many levels. The concept of micro resistance, coined by Michel de Certeau, provides resistance on daily basis. Ferreria's time in jail, describes many acts of micro resistance. He states, "My mind however refused to submit" (8). He further adds that the non-vegetarian food was illegal in the jail but the prisoners would catch birds, squirrels, rats and even locusts, and cook them behind the toilet. He describes that giant bandicoot which tastes a lot like pork became a sizable feast for the group of meat-starved prisoners. Simple act of making candle or going to pottery class daily can be a source of great freedom over bodily confinement, says the author. Writing, drawing, and other daily acts of keeping oneself sane is a part of micro-resistance aesthetics that gives detainees some control over their lives.

As Hardt (1999) observes, "the multiple self's language" exemplifies the ethos of community existence in prison memoirs. Other such tales stress the captives' adoption of a collective language to express their political solidarity in their prison narratives. Indres Naidoo adds, in reference to the apartheid regime's infamous jail Robben Island, that "prison laws prohibited us from using the term 'we'... We were imprisoned as individuals, not as a collective, yet we insisted on using the pronouns 'we' and 'us' while communicating with those in authority, regardless of their status" (Naidoo, 1982).

Ferreira's memoir gives a very painstaking account of torture techniques like body stretching, sole beating, and torture by petrol and unjudicial use of dubious ECG test and Narco-analysis being implemented by the authority as per the theory of disciplinary power. This ordeal of torture and pain strengthened the conviction that Ferreria had. His body became a site of struggle and resistance that gave much required power and meaning to his mind (Elisabeth Groz). Ferreira comments: "The pain of the piercing, hair pulling and the like would be sharp and intense, but the body tried to and even succeeded in quickly forgetting it" (8). The struggle became the foundation of his transformation from prisoner self to a writerly self.

As Elaine Scarry puts it, bodily pain "does not merely fight language; it destroys it, precipitating an abrupt retreat to a pre-linguistic stage" (Scarry, 1985). Arun Ferreira's story establishes that the prisoner had been tortured but leaves much unspoken about the nature of the torture in order to preserve the prisoner's privacy and quiet. What other inmates do is look after the abused detainee's spirit. The author mentions, "I thought he would be contemplative, perhaps even bitter, at having been wrongly confined for so long. Instead, his wide smile and his infectious optimism filled the room. He'd bought along sketches he'd made of prison life and wanted advice on publishing them as a pamphlet," referring to one of the inmates (xi). Prison memoir can constitute an act of political protest and extend human rights discourse as per Yenna Wu.

Jane Hart (1999), the proponent of the term "political prison aesthetic," talks about women political prisoners. Quoting her "prisons as place of residence, marked by quotidian practices, rituals of communication and survival, negotiation of power and desire have not received adequate critical attention from scholars". She talks about a political prison aesthetic as a stylized response to operation. Even though the prison did not provide much to the prisoners, the memoirs threw light on various protocols and power hierarchy situations that ensured the survival of the prisoners. This in itself became a subject of political prison aesthetics. The response involves requiring dreams, nightmares, and coping mechanisms, which can transform dire circumstances into a fabrication of pride. Ferreira affirms: "That is the beauty of one's imagination and dreams—no four prison walls can ever contain them [Prisoners]" (48).

Cvetkovich defines crafting as a "kind of body politics in which agency takes a different shape than will application," arguing that it "promotes modes of being in the environment in which the body moves the mind rather than the other way around". Ferreira adds that the work was one way "to relieve the monotony of prison" (42). Cvetkovich views crafts as a means of coping with daily despair without resorting to the disempowering influence of drugs and medical terminology. Inspired by de Certeau's everyday resistance and Cvetkovich's reading of crafting as the political strength of everyday struggle and the art of living, the widespread engagement

with various forms of crafting in prisons can be considered as a means of coping with imprisonment and recognising the rejuvenating power of creation. During the most stressful period of their stay, when news of another group of their friends being apprehended and tortured by military officers arrives daily, the prisoners turn to crafting to occupy their minds and begin knitting toy animals to send to their friends and relatives as tokens of "joy sent out to the outside world" (207).

Ferreira says that by spending their time in prison, engaging in creative activities such as knitting, reading and writing poetry, teaching one another foreign languages, singing, acting, and dancing, detainees demonstrate an intervention in the given time and space and reconfigure their distribution through daily acts of political aesthetics in the Rancièrian sense. Another kind of everyday tactic is the establishment of one's own laws in opposition to martial law. Prisoners are obliged to rise early, and prepare themselves and their wards for inspection. Ferreira chooses to wake up earlier than needed and begins exercising in the ward, and rather than purchasing, the tea served in the prison cafeteria that was costly they would prepare their own tea in the ward's toilet. Arun's time in jail was also fruitful. During his time in prison, one of his self-imposed restrictions was to write eight pages every day. In some ways, his writing time is also his time of liberation, when he may retreat into the fictitious and emancipatory world of fiction. Thus, political inmates try to enforce their own regulations, which are often stricter than those imposed by martial law as a kind of struggle and resistance, reminding us of what is political about prison life

CONCLUSION

Everyday resistance as an umbrella term includes activities ranging from violent reactions, demonstrations, and boycotts to non-compliance and unintentional subversive actions. Scott defines resistance as the struggle that arises from the lived experience of the powerless. This paper manages to see everyday resistance as a struggle of resistance to existing physical and mental conditions to raise the consciousness of the mind. Scott originally intended *Weapons of the Weak* to be the study of class relations, but he later expanded this definition to encompass a general theory of resistance, arguing that similar structures of domination, other things being equal, tend to elicit responses and forms of resistance that bear a family resemblance to one another (Scotts).

Certeau takes inspiration from Bourdieu, Foucault, and Freud, but inverts them. Scott and Certeau both saw themselves as anatomizing resistance technologies in the same manner that Foucault did with power technologies (Certeau and Scott). After all, Foucault uses resistance to conceptualise authority. According to Foucault, studying resistance acts as a 'chemical catalyst for locating their location, bringing to light power relations, determining their point of application, and determining the tactics utilised' (Foucault). As a result, Banu Bargu asserts, "we lack a persuasive Foucauldian philosophy of resistance."

Ferreira uses writing as a tool to preserve his sense of being. Through writing, he has managed to liberate himself by offering the resistance to existing physical as well as mental conditions. In a confined space of a prison with no connectivity with the outside world, it

becomes difficult to remind ourselves about the nature of our own being. This has turned into a first step on the road to liberation and rebellion against the oppressive regime (Sheikh Hishmeh). Moreover, just the thought of deciding to write an autobiography or a memoir gives a contextual space to project their resistance. Writing can be associated with the construction and evolution of self as writing about self acts as a therapy to get rid of the trauma. Memoir also provides them with a space to open up about themselves and reflect upon their own souls (Shrivastva). Prison memoir stands as a statement against the authoritarian structure and state apparatus, becoming a space for emancipation and resistance in various ways.

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