The Isolated Warrior: The Impact of Everyday Forms of Individual Public Servants’ Resistance on New Public Management Reforms in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

This paper analyses the impact of the everyday forms of resistance performed by individual public servants following the implementation of New Public Management (NPM) reforms in Sri Lanka. Many elements of the NPM reforms, such as productivity improvement and performance targets affect individual public servants in a highly personalised nature. For this reason they are unable to garner the widespread support required to prompt collective action as form of resistance. This paper argues that this highly personalised nature of reforms pushes individual public servants to adopt everyday forms of resistance, which eventually make a cumulative impact on the reforms. The conceptual framework developed by James C. Scott to analyse the everyday forms of peasant resistance is used in this paper to infer a model of the public servants’ everyday forms of resistance. Analysing stories of individual public servants who were accused of being resisters, this paper reveals the nature and limitations of the everyday forms of resistance that public servants have adopted as well as their impact on the NPM reforms.

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November 05, 2009
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the many people who gave me their support and
openly shared their thoughts.

Special thanks to Dr. Peter Larmour
who supervised my work, generously sharing his time and expertise,
directing me to relevant material, commenting on many drafts and for
providing much invaluable insight.
INTRODUCTION

The restructuring of the Sri Lankan public service became a dominant phenomenon in the development discourse of the country especially post-1980. Since independence in 1948, a multi-party parliamentary system promoted government-led development programs in which the role of the public service became crucial. However, the Sri Lankan public service was significantly influenced by the British and was therefore highly centralized and more focused on process rather than results. This rigidity was criticized as one of the main impediments to achieving the development goals of the country. Consequently, public service reform was considered imperative and donor agencies pushed the government to initiate them urgently. Responding to both internal and external rising demand for a better public service, New Public Management (NPM) reforms were implemented in Sri Lanka beginning in the early 1990s.

In an attempt to ensure political support for the implementation of NPM reforms, the President of Sri Lanka emphasized the need to move public management away from the traditional administration. Addressing public officials, the President stated that:

It is imperative that members of the public service got accustomed to the growing needs of the modern world… (for the public service) has not been restructured in such a manner in consonance with development needs of the country in the last thirty years (Daily News (Sri Lanka) 28 February 2001, cited in Samaratunge 2002, p.96).

Accordingly, measures have been taken to implement different elements of NPM including privatization, cost-cutting, outsourcing, decentralization, employment contracts, performance related pay, emphasis on customized services and emphasis on performance target indicators and output objectives.

After nearly 20 years of implementation, there is dissatisfaction over the
progress of the reforms, especially from donors and NPM proponents. Several studies have been done to assess the success of NPM reforms in Sri Lanka (Samaratunge & Bennington 2002; Priyanths 2007). Although there is ongoing debate over the factors that have hindered the expected outcomes of the reforms, lack of public servant support seems to be one of the major impediments on which most critics agree (Samaratunge & Bennington 2002; Priyanths 2007).

The elements of NPM reforms can be divided into two groups according to their impact on public servants. The first category includes reforms such as privatization and staff reduction, which attract political attention. Since these reforms affect a large portion of public servants in very similar ways, an overarching class consciousness creates cooperation among them to resist such reforms. Therefore, there exists the possibility of organizing open resistance such as strikes and picketing. The second category includes NPM reforms such as customized services, productivity improvement and performance targets which affect individual public servants, but are unable to garner enough political attention to openly resist them. Due to the highly personalized nature of the effect of these reforms, they are unlikely to provoke enough cooperation among public servants to spark open resistance. How individual public servants who were affected by these types of reforms react to the consequences of them has not yet been studied in Sri Lanka, and has equally been looked at very rarely in Western literature. Therefore, this research seeks to contribute to this under-researched area by arguing that due to the inability of using open and organised resistance, individual public servants have tended to adopt everyday forms of individual resistance against the consequences of NPM reform in Sri Lanka.

This study intends to review the attempts that have been taken to reform the Sri Lankan public service based on NPM principles, and the results that this reform process has achieved. The analysis extends to critically review existing studies on NPM reforms in Sri Lanka and their impact. As well, the research examines the prevailing studies on resistance strategies, especially within the field of
organizational studies. The prevailing studies which are still mainly framed within the worker-resistance dialectic predominantly concentrate on collective, conscious and organized resistance. Contrary to these approaches, the framework of everyday forms of individual resistance developed by James C. Scott is used for the purposes of this research. Based on studies of peasant resistance, Scott developed the notion of everyday forms of individual resistance, arguing that having realized their disadvantageous condition, peasants manage their behaviour for their own safety without using open resistance.

A conceptual framework is required to analyse public servants’ everyday forms of resistance in order assess their impact on the public sector reforms based on NPM principles. Given that there is no such conceptual framework available in studies of public administration, Scott’s framework is applied to infer a model of public servants’ everyday forms of resistance. However, considering the different origin of Scott’s framework, this research paper critically applies his concepts in the analysis. Due to the dominant nature of the NPM reforms, individual public servants seem to have been rendered voiceless. This justifies the application of Scott’s framework, which is based on voiceless peasants in the face of dominant elites. In this scenario, in order to capture the authentic voices of the public servants, the methodologies of subaltern studies are used.

Based on subaltern studies methodologies, which were originally developed to reinterpret the history of subaltern resistance from a ground-up perspective, this research paper has collected the stories of individual public servants involved in everyday forms of resistance and analysed them through the critical application of Scott’s framework. Although it is not as obvious as open and organized resistance, everyday forms of public servant resistance have considerably impacted on NPM-based public sector reforms in Sri Lanka. Interestingly, these everyday forms of individual resistance tend to shift from covert to overt during the course of the resistance, which is likely to jeopardize the situation of resisters. This runs contrary to the Scott’s framework and his hypothesis that everyday forms of resistance are an inherently safe strategy.
2. PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS AND RESISTANCE: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This section outlines the conceptual understandings of NPM reforms and reviews the prevailing academic assessments of its implementation in Sri Lanka. Its analysis mainly focuses on the importance of the role of public servants in implementing NPM reforms. As well, in order to build a foundation from which to analyse the effects of public servant resistance to NPM reforms, this section reviews the theoretical approaches to this resistance. The main focus is given over to a discussion of the individual forms of resistance and to analyse key studies that attempt to connect these resistance theories to organizational studies.

2.1 New Public Management (NPM) Reforms

2.1.1 The rise of New Public Management (NPM) reforms

In the early 1980s, with the emergence of neo-liberal ideology, new ideas led to a re-examination of the role of the public service. During this period, concerns were raised over the cost and size of governments, criticising the ineffectiveness and inefficiency of the public sector relative to the increasing performance and growth of the private sector. The ultimate result was the formation of a new market-driven mode of governance that initially emerged in developed countries and subsequently was imported to developing countries with donor assistance (Hoggett 1996, p.24). Although this new paradigm was labelled differently by various scholars, for example, Managerialism (Pollitt 1993), Market Based Public Administration (Lan & Rosenblom 1992), and Entrepreneurial Government (Osborne and Gaebler 1993), it has been popularised as New Public Management (NPM) (Priyantha 2007, p.2).

These new administrative reforms were heavily inspired by economic considerations and economic theories of organization. One of the main
assumptions underpinning these reforms was that the private sector is more efficient than the public sector (Samaratunge & Bennington 2002, p.87). Accordingly, the whole reform process, by and large, is based on the introduction of market principles into the operation and regulation of administrative services giving preference to minimal interference by the state in service provision (Berg 2006, p.595). These reforms focus on achieving greater financial accountability and efficiency, and on changing the relationship between service provider and customer (Haque 1996, p.192).

2.1.2 NPM reforms in Sri Lanka

Responding to internal demand and external pressure, measures have been taken to implement NPM reforms in Sri Lanka since the early 1990s. Prior to this, there had been long-term internal criticism regarding the performance of the public sector there. The public service was deemed highly inefficient and an ineffective deadlock that was unable to meet expectations and improve productivity, all of which was considered imperative for development. The Administrative Reform Committee appointed to study the public service and recommend improvements, identified three factors it alleged where the causes of the sector’s failure: Structural deficiencies, deficiencies in personnel systems, and deficiencies in work systems and procedures (Administrative Reforms Committee Report, No: 01, 1987, cited in Priyantha 2007, pp. 6-7). Additionally, the emergence of NPM as a dominant doctrine of public sector reforms in the international arena during this period highly influenced policy makers, who had been searching for strategies to reshape the Sri Lankan public sector. International donor agencies, highly concerned with public sector reform, encouraged the government to adopt NPM principles by providing financial assistance with which to ensure its implementation (Priyantha 2007, pp. 6-7).

A management reform policy framework was set up to implement NPM strategies that focused on shrinking the public sector, while facilitating the private sector to emerge as the driving force for development in the country (Priyantha 2007, p.10). Measures were taken to implement the following
elements of NPM reforms, although the extent of their implementation and progress are contestable: privatization, decentralization, outsourcing, employment contracts, performance related pay, customised service, government business enterprises, cost-cutting, and transparency (Priyantha 2007, p. 19; Samaratunge 2002, p.98). Subsequently, training and capacity building programs were implemented to facilitate these reforms by improving human capital, strengthening institutions and enhancing process and procedures (Priyantha 2007, p.4).

2.1.3 Progress of NPM Reforms in Sri Lanka

There is a strong consensus among scholars who have studied NPM reforms in Sri Lanka that the country has not been able to implement them successfully (Priyantha 2007; Samaratunge & Bennington 2002). The Regaining Sri Lanka report, which was funded by donor agencies and released in early 2000, pointed out that over-staffing, an excessive number of institutions, and weak institutional control mechanisms still undermine the contemporary public service (Priyantha 2007, p.11). Analysing the reasons for its failure, various scholars take various stances. For example, Samaratunge and Bennington argue that due to external pressure, the elements of NPM have been implemented in Sri Lanka in a piecemeal and ad hoc manner without any long term vision (2002, p.98). However, among the different factors limiting the scope, speed, quality and overall performance of the reforms, the prevailing literature has identified lack of public servant support as the major impediment (Priyantha 2007; Samaratunge & Bennington 2002). This identification provides justification for this study, which argues that the everyday forms of public servant resistance considerably impede the implementation of NPM reforms. Therefore, it is imperative to identify the role of public servants in this reform process and examine how NPM reforms affect them as individuals.

2.1.4 The Impact of NPM on Individual Public Servants

The role of public servants as implementers of these reforms directly relates to
their successful implementation. However, since reforms eventually intend to change the role of public servants, there is a paradox created by the way in which public servants themselves implement and initiate the reforms. Priyantha argues that since the position of public servants is protected under the constitution and by tenure provisions, they have become a powerful interest group resistant to any reforms that may challenge their privileges (2007, p.19). Similarly, Samaratunge & Bennington point out that due to the nature of Sri Lanka’s working culture, performance related pay has become the most difficult element to be introduced (2002, p. 100). They further argue that although the automatic promotion system currently in place adversely affects the overall performance of the public sector, ‘delaying an employee’s promotion on the basis of their performance was reported to be a difficult task’ (Samaratunge & Bennington 2002, p.100).

Under NPM reforms, in order to strengthen the role of managers in providing high quality service, emphasis was placed on improving the practices and techniques of personnel management in the public sector (Priyantha 2007, p.3). Performance appraisal systems were introduced, which measure both organizational and individual performance, advocating managerial autonomy particularly through decentralization, and promoting receptiveness to competition (Samaratunge & Bennington 2002, p.89). These reforms were expected to inject new values into the public service on which public servants could be assessed. These new values included productivity, efficiency, risk-taking and initiative, the ability to work to objectives, independence and accountability (Caron & Giauque 2006, pp. 533-534).

These new values conflict with the principles of the Weberian model, in which the public interest ethics (such as the fair treatment of citizens) are highly valued. Weberian values include procedural correctness, equality of treatment, risk avoidance and strict adherence to rules and regulations (Horton 2006, p. 538). This traditional model believes that individual behaviour and decisions inform the process with which public goods are produced and public interests are satisfied. In order to frame this process, the Weberian model established a
complex codification system that was expected to facilitate and maintain a certain level of ethical behaviour. The logic behind this codification and regulation was that the results can be foreseen and assessed in advance (Caron & Giauque 2006, p.548). Accordingly, the effectiveness of public servants and organizations are measured in terms of successful adherence to codifications rather than the results they achieve.

NPM reforms challenge this aspect of the Weberian model by emphasising the importance of achieving better results. These results are rarely defined in terms of public interests but are rather based on individual performance. In order to achieve greater productivity and improved results, NPM proposes to re-orient the role of public servants by relaxing administrative codifications that are considered to be expensive “red tape” (Caron & Giauque 2006, p.550). Since these new results-oriented ethics focus on the individual, public servants are increasingly evaluated on their personal performance, which eventually leads to them being rewarded or penalised. Therefore, the suitability of public servants’ behaviour is judged by these new values, which increases their dependency on their organization or administrative service (Caron & Giauque 2006, p.548). As well, these changing values require considerable congruent attitudinal changes among public servants. Based on the significant impact of NPM reforms on the individual public servant, this study takes a different view from the prevailing literature of their resistance strategy and its counter-impact on NPM reforms. Hence, to justify the rationale of this research, a brief analysis of the current literature relating to the role of public servants and their impact on reforms is required.

2.1.5 Perspectives on Public Servant Resistance to NPM reforms in Sri Lanka

The attention of the literature has mainly been focused on reforms that attract popular political concern. Accordingly, many interpret lack of public servant support as a politically sensitive issue that initiates open resistance. For example, with respect of cadre reduction, it is argued that ‘public servants and
their trade unions will organize their sole support in favour of the opposition’ (Priyantha 2007, p.10). As well, it further argues that politicians are more careful about the implementation of cadre reduction since it may impact voter preferences. Samaratunge & Bennington argue that without a proper safety net in place, it is politically controversial to introduce changes in promotion schemes and a performance appraisal system (2002, p.100). Consequently, these researchers concluded that lack of political will and commitment has been the main impediments hindering the successful implementation of NPM reforms (Priyantha, 2007; Samaratunge & Bennington 2002). Contrary to the perspective of the prevailing literature, this study believes that individual resistance intensified by non-politically sensitive elements of NPM reforms has still impacted considerably on the implementation of those reforms. However, because these kinds of resistant acts are ‘micro-acts’, in that they are so small, they fail to attract most researchers’ attention. To understand these small but important acts of resistance, an analysis of the behaviours of individual public servants in organizations where NPM reforms have been implemented is necessary.

The prevailing literature treats resistance to NPM reforms as a negative phenomenon. This perspective implies that NPM reforms are necessarily positive and hence recommends different policy measures in order to overcome such resistance. The rationale behind resistance is interpreted as a lack of knowledge and dearth of skills on the part of the public servants. Therefore, the literature mainly recommends capacity building and training programs as a panacea to overcome resistance. Furthermore, Priyantha argues that ‘there should be a capable institutional structure with flexible and proactive legal provision, sufficient resources and compatible inter-organizational communication to overcome barriers and ensure the successful NPM reform implementation’ (2007, p.1). It seems that this perspective has been influenced by the dominant ideologies of international organizations, especially donor agencies and governments that promote NPM reforms in developing countries. Deviating from this elite perspective, this study emphasizes the importance of listening to individual public servants who have been affected by NPM reforms.
With the assistance of resistance theories, which focus on individuals, this study narrates public servant resistance from an individual perspective and examines its impact on the progress of NPM reforms.

2.2 Conceptualizing Resistance

Resistance can be seen at all echelons of human life including the individual, collective and institutional levels. Therefore, defining the term has become challenging and different scholars use different interpretations depending on the context. As Weitz argues, ‘the term resistance remains loosely defined, allowing some scholars to see it almost everywhere and others almost nowhere’ (2001, p.669). As well, resistance may erupt as a result of the different power relations found in political systems, literature, entertainment and workplaces (Gregg 1993, p.172). Considering these different conditions, Seymour presents a general definition for resistance as ‘acting autonomously, in (one’s) own interests’ (2006, p.305). Profitt argues that resistance is ‘active efforts to oppose, fight, and refuse cooperate or submit to...abusive behaviour and...control’ (1996, cited in Hollander & Einwohner 2004, p.534).

Scholars have identified two modes of resistance: physical/material resistance and symbolic resistance (Ciccone 2004, p.787). The physical/material resistance represents instances where actors use their bodies or other material objects in order to resist. Two broader categories can be identified within physical resistance. The first category, which is labelled ‘social movement’ by some scholars, includes activities associated with the formation of organizations, marches, picketing, strikes and so on. The second type of physical resistance describes some behaviours that are not openly organised, for example, working slowly, feigning sickness, or stealing from one’s employer (Prasad & Prasad 1998 and Scott 1995 cited in Hollander & Einwohner 2004, pp.536-537). In addition to physical/material resistance, scholars have also identified resistance accomplished through symbolic behaviours such as talk, rumours, and signs.
Hollander & Einwohner argue that although there are different approaches used to define the term ‘resistance’, there are two elements that are common to nearly all its uses: a sense of action and a sense of opposition (Hollander & Einwohner 2004, p.538). A sense of action means that in order for something to be recognised as resistance, there should be some active behaviour; it is not merely the quality of an actor or a state of being. Active behaviour, whether verbal, cognitive or physical, is considered as the first requirement for something to be recognised as resistance. The second element is that this particular act of behaviour should represent a sense of opposition. Hollander & Einwohner argue that this sense of opposition may take different forms, depending on the context (2004, p.538). Accordingly, opposition to a particular behaviour is defined differently: counter, contradict, reject, challenge, damage and disrupt. This research paper interprets the sense of opposition as a combination of some of these attributes, because individual behaviour is influenced by a multitude of factors (such as context), as will be discussed in later.

2.2.1 Traditional Theories of Resistance

Studies which focus on resistance within the field of organizational studies have mainly concentrated on the collective, conscious, and organized forms of resistance by workers in factory settings (Thomas & Davies, 2005, p.685). Many earlier studies on resistance within organizational settings claim that such resistance is the inevitable outcome of antagonistic structural relations between capital and labour. These studies were mainly inspired by the ideas of labour process theorists, who reject the idea that resistance is the result of a rational individual agent trying to achieve their own personal goals. Rather, they argue that the objective exploitation of labour by capital will result in resistance (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1669). Roscihno and Hodson explain that Marx clearly denoted the structural and technological innovations that would alienate workers from their creative potential, labour processes and create conflicts amongst fellow workers (2004, p. 15). Braverman argues that specialization, as a result of structural and technological innovation would lead to deskill
workers, which eventually creates a separation of mental and physical labour (1971 cited in Roscigno & Hodson 2004, p.15). Therefore, the rationale behind the resistance is to ‘re-appropriate the critical goods which labour process systematically takes from the workers such as time, work, products and their sense of self’ (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1669). Furthermore, the cooperation of workers, in contrast to resistance, is conceptualised by labour process theorists using the ‘false consciousness argument’. As Thomas & Davies explain, the ‘false consciousness argument implies that those who cooperate are unaware of the objective condition of exploitation’ (2005, p.685). Therefore, the effectiveness of management is measured according to its ability to preclude resistance and obtain the cooperation of workers.

However, excessive concern for structural causes prevents these studies from understanding the other various and complex conditions connected to worker’ resistance. Some scholars criticize this approach, arguing that labour process theory provides an overly deterministic account of resistance in the workplace (Spicer & Bohm, 2007, p. 1670). As well, they are unable to capture the complexity of resistant activities on an individual level (Thomas & Davies 2005, p. 685). Spicer and Bohm argue that labour process theory has failed to provide sufficient explanation of how employees subjectively engage with and understand their workplace (2007, p. 1669). As well, labour process theorists conceptualise cooperation as a case of false consciousness and as such, are unable to describe incidents where the notion of false consciousness is rejected at an individual level (Thomas & Davies 2005, p.685). This research paper argues that workers are conscious of what serves their interests, which is contrary to the false consciousness argument. By drawing attention to instances where public servants are consciously involved in resistance, this research paper rejects the false consciousness argument. Since traditional labour process theory fails to capture the complex nature of individual-level resistance, it does not provide insights into everyday forms of employees’ resistance, in which personal behaviour takes prominent importance. Therefore, for the purpose of this research, an analysis of the theoretical approaches that address resistance on an individual level is required.
2.2.2 Theories on Individual Resistance

Studies on resistance have been stimulated by concepts developed in other disciplines, such as the conceptualization of power and subject as developed by Foucault. This approach imagines resistance as a constant process of adaptation, subversion and re-inscription of dominant discourses (Thomas & Davies 2005, p.687). It is argued that in the modern workplace, feelings of vulnerability and insecurity are increasing mainly due to the more sophisticated strategies employed by new, emerging waves of management. Therefore, workers are forced to find alternatives to secure their sense of self in the workplace (Trader-Leigh 2002, p.143). Thomas and Davies argue that resistance is stimulated by these contradictions, weaknesses and discrepancies between managerial strategies and the alternative subjective position of workers (2005, p.685). Therefore, these researchers focus on power relations and understand power as a way of isolating one individual from another. Applying this power relation in an organizational context, it is argued that management control in modern workplaces isolates workers and causes material and symbolic forces that weaken their individuality (Knight & McCabe 2000, p. 424).

Foucault’s analysis provides insight into everyday micro-level resistance that is contrary to traditional resistance theories. Foucault argues that ‘social reality is produced by a range of disciplinary, everyday micro-practices that amount to powerful institutional discourses constructing modern subjectivities such as worker, the prisoners and patients’ (1982, p.781). Additionally, Foucault’s and other similar analyses, in going beyond the structural and class-based analyses, provide a much broader framework through which to understand the intricacies of resistance because they connect it with epistemological and ethical complexities (Spicer and Bohm 2007, p.1670). These analyses provide insight into micro-politics of resistance rather solely addressing the economic relationship emphasised by labour process theory. However, these studies don’t grant sufficient attention to different resistance strategies at an individual level or its rationale. Since this research analyses the impact of public servant resistance on NPM reforms, it is important to discuss their individual-level
resistance strategies as enacted against the reforms. In order to fill this gap, the theoretical analysis of everyday forms of individual resistance and its strategies, as developed by James C. Scott, will be highlighted.

2.2.3 Everyday Forms of Individual Resistance - James C. Scott's Approach

Based on extensive research on peasant societies, especially the social and economic preconditions of unrest, Scott develops a conceptual framework to examine how peasants would react if their subsistence was undermined. Scott emphasizes the importance of analysing the ordinary, everyday forms of peasant resistance rather than the rare occurrence of open revolt by them. Scott’s analysis was based on studies undertaken in a village in Kedah state, Malaysia, during the introduction of the Green Revolution and new agricultural technologies. He examines the affect of these changes on the peasants. Due to commercialization inherent in these changes, land was taken back from small tenant farmers and wealthy landlords began farming it themselves, or leased it for cash to powerful entrepreneurs. Since these reforms have marginalised farmers, they must struggle to retain their status as full members of the community. Consequently, they engage everyday actions such as poaching, foot-dragging, pilfering and other forms of physical resistance such as withdrawal of labour and killing animals. Analysing the rationale behind these strategies, Scott argues that due to the marginalised position of the peasants, taking other resistant strategies that would more directly challenge the power of the elite would jeopardize their livelihood. As well, using this empirical evidence, Scott rejects the false consciousness argument. Rather than accepting the ideological hegemony imposed by the state or elites, peasants challenge the prevailing system through everyday resistance while being capable of seeing the disadvantages of open revolt (Scott 1986, p. 345).

This research adopts Scott’s conceptualization of resistance and its strategies to analyse the everyday forms of resistance by public servants against NPM reforms in Sri Lanka. Although Scott’s analysis was based on peasant societies,
it is possible to apply his arguments to analyse the Sri Lankan public servant case. Although the Sri Lankan public service was dominated by the elite class in the early 1950s, social, economic and political transformation during the last half century following independence created opportunities for lower and middle class members to enter into it (Gamage 1999, p.332). Consequently, by 2000, 91.69 percent of the public service was comprised of employees from rural areas of the country, including those from peasant backgrounds (Rajandran 2009, p.8). As well, Scott’s empirical studies were based on the impact of the Green Revolution and peasant reactions to the resultant commercialization. Similarly, NPM reforms that are based on economic considerations challenge the prevailing systems and attitudes of public servants, emphasising results and performance that jeopardise their understanding of their existence. Since many elements of the NPM are not politically sensitive but are individual-centred, there is little possibility of organizing open resistance. However, this does not mean that individual public servants cooperate with NPM policies that challenge their subsistence. Rejecting false consciousness arguments as Scott does, this research argues that public servants would prefer to be involved in everyday forms of resistance rather than cooperating with institutional changes based on NPM principles.

As yet there has not been any scholarly attempt to apply the concepts of everyday individual resistance in analysing the effects of NPM reforms in Sri Lanka. This research attempts to address this gap by predominantly using Scott’s analytical framework. However, contrary to the research method adopted in Scott’s study (living two years in a village in Kedah state, Malaysia) this research follows the approach of subaltern studies groups, which focus on subaltern peoples and their resistance. Since similarly to Scott’s perspective, subaltern studies attempt to reveal the voice of marginalised people, this research adopts their strategies in order to find the voice of public servants who have suffered from, and resist against, NPM reforms.
2.2.4 The Subaltern Studies Approach to Resistance

Subaltern studies emerged in India as a project aimed at re-writing the history of subaltern people in South Asia. Later, these methodologies were expanded to study the history of the subaltern in Latin America and Africa. Subalterns are considered as groups of people who live outside of a society’s hegemonic system due to poverty or other forms of discrimination. These studies were inspired by the writings of scholars such as EP Thompson and Eric Hobsbawrn who brought ‘culture’ as a focus point in the writing of working-class history’ (Bahl 200, p2). This approach was called ‘history from below’.

Subaltern studies are dedicated to identifying the nature and strategies of resistance of marginalised people. Accordingly, it is argued that the interpretations of Indian history developed by colonialists, nationalists and Marxists do not include the role of common people and their agency. It is asserted that these people have been misinterpreted due to the bias in academic research approaches, which are generally informed by a dominant hegemonic system (Guha 2000. P.2). As well, these scholars emphasise the importance of describing the subjects on their own terms rather than representing them as the ‘other’ of the dominant class (Guha 2000, p. 3). In order to rectify this situation, subaltern studies turned to new methodologies that were significantly different from traditional research approaches.

Overall, it seems that NPM reforms based on economic considerations affect public servants differently than that of the traditional Weberian model. Although many of these reforms challenge the survival of the public servants, they find themselves unable to form open and organised resistance against them. This is primarily because the reforms impact the public servants on a narrow, individual level and in very personal ways. Though the reforms are unpopular, the impact they have on the public servants is not sufficiently uniform to spark widespread class consciousness. Unfortunately, traditional resistance theories found in management studies have little to contribute to an analysis of this situation because they focus too much on the public and too little on the private. In order
to overcome this dearth in methodological approaches, this research has adopted the conceptual framework of ‘everyday forms of resistance’ as developed by James C. Scott. Additionally, in an effort to garner a more holistic and comprehensive analysis, methodological approaches used by subaltern studies will also be adopted to guide the analysis. These are discussed below.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This research attempts to understand public servants’ everyday forms of resistance, not from an elite perspective but from the resister’s perspective. Therefore, contrary to many previous methodological approaches found in the prevailing literature, which lead researchers to consider public servant resistance against NPM reforms as a negative phenomenon, this research focuses on alternative methodologies that allow for a more nuanced view of the subject matter.

Accordingly, the following approaches were adopted and utilised:

Strategies used by subaltern studies for data and information gathering;

The conceptual framework of everyday forms of resistance as developed by James C. Scott to analyse the gathered data and information.

3.1 Methodologies used by Subaltern Studies

In the process of identifying resistance enacted by subaltern peoples, methodologies supposed to be capable of capturing their authentic voice were adopted. The following are a few important techniques that subaltern studies scholars use to collect information and re-interpret history in a more precise fashion.
Individual stories

Research based on individual stories is common in subaltern studies. As Bahl states, researchers believe that by studying individual stories, folklore, indigenous languages or mythologies, and other non-conventional sources, they can give voice to silent, subordinated groups (2000, p.2).

Reading available official and ‘event-based’ documents

Since subalterns do not keep diaries or other types of personal records as elites do, it is difficult to identify their authentic voice. Therefore, researchers tended to use relevant, available documents (such as court cases) in order to help locate the subaltern voice. Reading of these documents is considered as finding the source of meaning as well as the production of meaning.

Literature

Subaltern studies scholars are sometimes able to use literature such as poetry, dialogues, and metaphors produced from eyewitness, or first-hand source, perspectives called ‘testimonies’ in order to understand historical events and environments (Guha 2000, p.2).

The first two strategies were adopted for this research because they are more appropriate for studying public servant resistance in Sri Lanka. Literature examination, particularly of the kind used by subaltern studies scholars, was not considered to be accessible or widely available enough to be used in this case.

3.1.1 Justification for Applying Subaltern Studies Research Methodologies

Subaltern studies originally developed in South Asia. Scholars of the discipline
have traditionally focused on resistance performed by subaltern people, arguing that the ‘acts of resistance of subaltern people link up with, interact with and intersect with what is happening around them’ (Pandey 2000, p.283). Subaltern studies provide an alternative framework to understand everyday forms of subaltern resistance by departing from colonial and Marxist interpretations. These researchers believe that subaltern people do not experience their circumstances passively. They argue that subalterns are autonomous persons who act their own circumstances rather than simply accepting hegemony imposed by elites, which implies that these scholars reject the false consciousness argument. Similarly, this research also focuses on everyday forms of resistance by rejecting the false consciousness argument and Marxist interpretations of worker resistance. Therefore, given that the purposes and context of subaltern studies is similar to those of this research, the methodologies adopted by that discipline were used for this piece of research.

3.1.2 Information-Gathering Methodologies Adopted for this Research

a) Individual stories

The following sources were used to collect these stories:

i. Disciplinary inquiry reports

Reports of the disciplinary inquiries conducted against public servants suspected to be involved in individual resistance against institutional reforms and development programs were collected for this study.

ii. Complaints to Ombudsmen

This includes complaints against institutional reforms decisions that are considered to jeopardize the condition of some individual public servants.

iii. Complaints to the Human Right Commission
This includes complaints made by both public servants and the general public regarding the actions of public servants that violate human rights.

b) Reading available official and ‘event-based’ documents

Court cases lodged by individual public servants against reforms were collected for analysis.

3.2 James C. Scott’s Conceptual Framework for Analysis of Data and Information

Scott’s framework is useful for understanding how individuals who are marginalised, or suffer through the acts of power-holding elites, manage their behaviour in order to pretext consent and to resist when free from those power-holders’ view. This research applies Scott’s framework in order to analyse the behaviour of individual public servants in the face of NPM-based institutional reforms. Scott’s framework introduces two concepts:

a) Public transcript

Public transcript is the open discourse between dominant and subordinate groups. Although subalterns may want to express their disappointment regarding the prevailing conditions, they are prevented from speaking honestly to authority due to their disadvantageous position. Therefore, the public transcript generally gives a false impression of harmony and consensus.

b) Hidden transcript

The hidden transcript of subordinate groups takes place ‘off-stage’. The discourse occurs within the group or on an individual, one-to-one level and frequently contradicts the public transcript. Subordinate groups try to create occasions where they can speak with relative freedom, and a sense of dignity
and autonomy (Murphy 1998, p.513).

Accordingly, Scott reports that upon realising the inequality of the prevalent power relations, subalterns manage their behaviour to their own advantage, which actually equates to an everyday form of resistance.

Following subaltern studies, the next section presents individual stories of public servants who have suffered from NPM reforms. These stories will be analysed based on Scott’s analytical framework of everyday forms of resistance.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

Using the real life experiences of public servants, this section works to provide an empirically-grounded understanding of the process of public servant resistance in the face of institutional reforms influenced by NPM. Following subaltern studies methodologies, the individual stories of public servants and other available documents related to individual public servant resistance have been employed as sources for this study. However, obtaining the information used proved to be a reasonably difficult task as much of it is highly sensitive. Official letters requesting access to it were sent to the ministry secretaries and the heads of other organisations yet since many of the documents pertained to officers still currently employed in the public service, issuing them to a third party was considered controversial. A number of the officers had also been terminated, which likewise made officials reluctant to release the applicable paperwork. This was despite the fact that it was made clear that all documents would be kept anonymous and used purely for academic research purposes. Furthermore, even after approval it still took considerable time for them to be issued.

Eventually, 22 cases were collected and analysed from different government
organizations, the judiciary and semi-judiciary institutions. These cases take different formats, including disciplinary inquiry reports, petitions, appeals and court cases. Table 4.1 provides an analysis of institutional sources and the formats of these cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTITUTIONS</th>
<th>FORMATS</th>
<th>Disciplinary inquiry reports</th>
<th>Petitions</th>
<th>Appeals</th>
<th>Court cases</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Public Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Services</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provincial Public service commission- Western Province in Sri Lanka</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Right Commission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrar of Supreme Court</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee on Public Petition and Ombudsman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4.1:** Analysis of institutional sources and formats of cases

4.1.1 Different Categories of Resistance

The style of resistance used by the individual public servants in these cases
varies considerably. Table 4.2 presents an analysis of the different strategies. Although some cases represent a combination of a few strategies, Table 4.2 is based on the predominant strategy of each case.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of Resistance</th>
<th>No. of Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Property damage</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticizing government policies/ reforms and blaming higher officers</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ill-treating the public</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issuing contradictory instructions</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking legal action</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refusing to follow instructions</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabotaging a program</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Different strategies of everyday forms of resistance by case

Although all the methods used can be categorized as ‘everyday forms of individual resistance’, the strategies and attributes employed, such as covertness and risk taking, take different forms in each case. Some strategies, such as ill-treating the public or criticising government policies and higher officers, appear to be employed in many cases because they are comparatively safe ways of demonstrating their unhappiness. On the other hand, strategies such as issuing contradictory instructions or refusing to follow instructions change the nature of the resistance from hidden to visible, thus attracting a higher risk. In many cases, those resisting begin by using covert actions and then progress to more overt actions later in order to convey a stronger message to the target persons, and hopefully achieve the intentions of the resistance.

4.1.2 Relevant NPM Elements
The relationship between NPM induced institutional changes and everyday forms of resistance has been identified by analysing the institutional change that best correlates to the particular resistance behaviour employed by the public servant in each case. Table 4.3 illustrates the elements of NPM that are most obviously associated with each act of resistance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NPM ELEMENTS</th>
<th>NO. OF CASES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decentralization</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes to seniority based promotion system (proposed)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Productivity improvement</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing more autonomous units</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training and capacity building</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outsourcing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminating the service of casual employees (staff reduction)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: NPM elements associated with institutional reforms by case

Appendix: 1 presents an overview of the relation of NPM elements which are associated with institutional reforms and subsequent resistant activities in the cases.

It seems that productivity improvement programs implemented under the NPM reforms were highly resisted by the individual public servants. Productivity improvement programs were used to make incremental changes in the working culture, specifically to enhance the efficiency of the officers. However, it was clearly difficult to introduce the performance related pay and promotion system directly due to the nature of the prevailing working culture in the public service.
Therefore, these productivity improvement programs aimed at creating a new working environment in order to facilitate such dramatic changes. Additionally, the table demonstrates that how public servants are affected by the above NPM elements appears mainly based on where they rank in the power hierarchy.

In order to gain a detailed picture of how the elements of the NPM reforms affect public servants and to discover how they react to them, four individual stories are analysed and presented.

4.2 Individual Stories

In this section, four individual public servants’ stories are presented to analyse the nature of their resistance and its relation to NPM reforms. These four stories represent different organizations, different positions in the power hierarchy, different elements of NPM reforms and different genders. They include an officer in public management service, the area manager of a government owned company, an agricultural instructor, and a computer programmer.

Each case of individual resistance is unorganized, unsystematic and mainly dependent on the personal attribute of the different individuals. These qualities are dramatically different from the traditionally accepted form of resistance, which is considered as ‘open, organized resistance’. Following Scott’s framework, these stories are analysed based on the following perspectives:

- Motivations for resistance;
- The result it may achieve;
- The disguises it wears; and
- The complicity it requires;
- Its limitations
4.2.1 Story 1: Ranaweera, an officer in public management service

Ranaweera had been working as a clerical officer in the accounts branch of a divisional secretariat office when, in 2000, he was promoted to a Grade I officer in the public management service. As part of the on-going NPM reforms, productivity improvement competitions were introduced to select the most productive government departments and to award benefits to them. These benefits included certificates, price awards and scholarships for the best performing officers. Accordingly, Ranaweera’s divisional secretariat office also undertook internal reforms in order to contest this competition. As a result, Ranaweera was initially transferred to the division of economic development and planning. However a few months later, he was transferred to the district register division on the grounds that his performance was not up the expected standard. Disappointed with his re-assignment, Ranaweera became critical of the internal institutional changes. Subsequently, his behaviour in the office began to change and it was reported that he was not performing his duties as required. Before analysing Ranaweera’s different resistance strategies, it is important to examine how the NPM institutional reforms drove him to resist.

Motivation for Resistance: Ideological Disagreement or Personal Disadvantages

It is important to identify whether Ranaweera had an ideological stance against NPM reforms. The starting point of his resistance is was his transfer to the district registrar division due to his poor performance at the economic development and planning division. Prior to this, he had accepted the position offered to him in the economic development and planning division, which occurred due to the reform process. This implies that Ranaweera did not have any oppositional ideology against the NPM reforms in principle. On the other hand, the meaning of his ‘poor performance’ in the economic development and planning division is problematic. If he intentionally performed poorly in order to resist the reforms, then it would be possible to define his behaviour as an

1 This story was taken from a disciplinary inquiry report of the Ministry of Public Administration.
ideological opposition to NPM. Unfortunately, there is not sufficient evidence to
determine the reasons for his poor performance and therefore it is difficult to
come to a conclusion as to whether Ranaweera was ideologically opposed to
the NPM reforms.

What is obvious though is that Ranaweera harboured grievances against the
consequences of the reforms because they created a disadvantageous
situation for him in his place of employment. His resistant behaviour started
after he was transferred to a position he did not like, which may signify that
feelings of unhappiness and dissatisfaction with changes made due to NPM
reforms motivate public servants to resist. As such, Ranaweera’s resistance
(which is discussed in more detail below) was not a direct attack on the NPM
reforms themselves but rather on the consequences of the reforms. This
indirect form of resistance can be better understood by analysing the strategies
of resistance that he adopted.

**Strategies of Everyday Resistance**

**Part 1: Hidden individual resistance**

Initially Ranaweera’s resistance took the shape of everyday forms of covert
resistance. He criticized the head of his department with his colleagues when
the man was absent. His criticisms extended to government development
programs and reforms, especially productivity improvement competitions. Over
time though, his resistance strategies changed. Ranaweera began to treat the
public harshly and practiced poor customer service, purposely delaying work.
However, these hidden actions went unnoticed by the head of his department,
who initially made the decision to transfer Ranaweera. Therefore, an analysis
of the interplay between recognition of resistance and the resistance itself is
important to ascertain the true impact, and consequentially the effectiveness, of
the resistant behaviour.²

² Although these hidden forms of resistance were not recognized by Ranaweera’s head of
department at the time, they were revealed and brought against him later during his disciplinary
The Problem of Recognition

There has been continuous debate among scholars as to whether resistance requires recognition by others. It is argued that the main difference between everyday resistance and more conventional forms of organized resistance lies in the way of illustrating the act of resistance itself. Some scholars argue that visibility is a necessary quality of resistance (Hollander & Einwohner 2004, p.541). This means that behaviour should be recognised by others in order to be considered as resistance. However, Scott asserts that resistance need not to be recognised as such (Scott 1986, p. xvii). Everyday forms of resistance, according to Scott, include many activities that are observable but not necessarily recognised as resistance by power-holders. When considering recognition by others, the term ‘others’ includes mainly two groups of people: targets and other observers. Those to whom the act is directed are considered targets. Other observers may include colleagues, general public, members of the media, and researchers (Hollander & Einwohner 2004, p.541). Although everyday forms of resistance, as described by Scott, may not be recognised by targets they can still be apparent to other observers.

Scott believes that covertness is an important characteristic of everyday forms of resistance. He justifies his stance by arguing that if visibility of the act might jeopardize the condition of the resister, he would purposefully conceal the act: ‘Those who employ everyday forms of resistance avoid calling attention to themselves. Such techniques are relatively safe, however they often promise vital material gains’ (Scott 1989, p. 35). However, Ranaweera’s story illustrates a more complex interaction between recognition and resistance than the explanation of Scott allows. Since Ranaweera was unable to influence his target through covert resistant acts, he gradually changed the nature of his everyday forms of resistance to make them more visible.

Part 2: Open individual resistance inquiry.
Making his resistance visible, Ranaweera frequently reported to work late and harshly criticized the shortcomings of the office during internal meetings. These actions conveyed his message to his target and consequently, he was warned by the head of his department. The final incident that resulted in disciplinary action against Ranaweera, was one that revealed his clear intention to resist the on-going reform program and especially productivity improvement competition. Ranaweera accidentally answered a telephone call made to his office by the Productivity Improvement Bureau to inform them of the date and time when judges would be coming to perform an assessment. However, he did not pass this message on to either those who were responsible for productivity improvement competition in the office, or his department head. Consequently, when judges came, nothing had been prepared to present to the judges. Time, money and labour that had been spent for productivity improvement competition by this office as a part of the NPM reform package were wasted. As well, Ranaweera complained to the judges about the way the internal changes were being conducted in the office. Thus contrary to Scott’s argument, Ranaweera had to shift his strategies from covert to overt resistance in order to make an effective impact.

4.2.2 Story 2: Amarawardena, an agricultural instructor

Amarawardena had been working as an agricultural instructor in an agricultural training centre under the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Services. He joined to the Agricultural Training Centre in 1976 and was promoted to an agricultural instructor in 1994. As a consequence of the NPM reforms, a training and capacity building program connected to productivity improvement was conducted in order to enhance the required skills of officers across the different ministerial departments. Although Amarawardena requested several times to attend these programs from his superiors, he was not granted the opportunity. Amarawardena was informed that there were more

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3 This story was taken from a disciplinary inquiry report of the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Services.
senior officers in the department that would attend the training before him. In this case it is important to understand the way in which Amarawardena, being disappointed with this situation, expressed his anger as an officer at the lower level of the power hierarchy.

As Scott remarks, the control of anger and aggression is, for quite obvious reasons, a prominent part of the daily lives of the subaltern/subordinate group (Scott 1989, p.53). ‘Much of ordinary politics of subordinate groups, historically has been a politics of dissimulation in which both the symbols and practices of resistance have been veiled’ (Scott 1989, p.53). Scott argues that these people tend to use gossip, negative nicknames and character assassination in the place of direct insults. Similarly, they prefer to use sabotage, arson, and nocturnal threats by masked men in place of direct physical assault (Scott 1989, p.53). In line with this, it seems that Amarawardena’s comparatively lower position in the power hierarchy significantly affected his resistance behaviour.

A national level agricultural exhibition was organized in order publicly promote the on-going development and reforms programs in the ministry. Amarawardena’s training centre was assigned to provide agricultural products for this exhibition. He perceived this exhibition as an opportunity to express his anger against the reforms programs. Although the NPM reforms did not directly negatively impact upon him, his inability to benefit from the positive aspects of the reforms made him feel marginalized. Consequently, Amarawardena started his everyday forms of resistance secretly by harming agricultural products that were being grown by his department. He was able to carry out these activities by causing minor damages over an extended period of time without being noticed by others. It seems that Amarawardena’s style of resistance holds more similarities with Scott’s definition of everyday forms of resistance. However, his behaviour was eventually noticed by some security officials who reported against him. Amarawardena represents a lower level of the power hierarchy, but he was unable to gain the support of some workers who were also at his same level. Conversely, he was also betrayed by members of his same class. His story provides insight into how class consciousness influences everyday
forms of individual resistance.

**Lack of Class Consciousness**

Open and organized resistance targeted at the politically sensitive elements of NPM reforms such as privatization and staff reduction, represent common benefits and hence attract a style of resistance informed by class consciousness. However, whether everyday forms of individual resistance can initiate class consciousness is debatable. Class consciousness influences the two distinct styles of resistance (everyday versus open and organized) very differently for two reasons.

(a) **Lack of cooperation**

Scott believes that without a fairly high level of tacit cooperation amongst individual resisters, it is difficult to sustain everyday day forms of resistance. ‘Some level of cooperation is generally evident in every day form of resistance’ (Scott 1989, p.36). Although there seems to be some form of cooperation among the public servants it does not necessarily follow that such cooperation assists or protects their individual behaviour, which is highly personal. Amarawardena’s story illustrates that lack of cooperation not only shapes individual resistance but may also ultimately jeopardize it. This lack of cooperation is a result of a lack of class consciousness in individual resistance due to its highly personalised nature.

(b) **Personal benefits**

Scott argues that ‘most forms of everyday resistance are deployed precisely to thwart some appropriation by superior class...if the resistance succeeded, the material benefits of the resisters would be assured” (Scott 1989, p.36). However, whether everyday forms of resistance by public servants always focus on gaining personnel and material benefits is problematic. Amarawardena’s
story does not demonstrate that he intended to achieve any material benefits. His sole purpose was to damage the exhibition (which was a part of the reform process) because he felt marginalized by the reforms and considered that they had injured his dignity. The implication of this is that resisters do not necessarily resist only for material benefit but also in an effort to regain highly personalized, less tangible needs, such as dignity.

4.2.3 Story 3: Malkanthi, a computer programmer

Malkanthi was employed as a computer programmer in a regional branch of the Ministry of Rural Development from 1997. She was assigned to the economic development and project unit of the office in 2003. This department was established as a part of the NPM reforms in order to accelerate development projects. Therefore, it was given more autonomy regarding financial and administrative matters. In addition to the public servants, the department was also comprised of officers (on a contract basis) who had been working in private sector. With an established strategic plan, the department carried out specific tasks within a specific timeframe. This new working environment was not familiar to Malkanthi and it required her to report to work on some holidays, including Saturdays. Although she wanted to refuse this requirement on family grounds, it was mandatory for many employees in this department to attend work when needed. This situation disappointed her and consequently she began everyday forms of individual resistance including misplacing files, working slowly and taking too much time for breaks. As a result, her duties were gradually transferred to other computer programmers. In her petition to the Ombudsman, she mentioned that her computer also was taken away from her and she was left sitting on a chair in front of an empty desk for the whole day. Furthermore, in her petition she stated that the accusations made against her by the head of the department were unfounded and unfair. The debatable issue here regarding everyday forms of individual resistance is whether the actor must be aware that he or she is resisting.

4 This story was taken from a petition to the Ombudsman.

5 These accusations were detailed in a warning letter issued her by the head of the unit.
The issue of consciousness has been central to the debate on resistance. There is a general agreement that open, organized resistance represents its intent clearly. Regarding everyday forms of resistance, some scholars argue that the actor’s intention is not an issue in understanding resistance. Rather, they are more concerned about the outcome of the act (Hollander & Einwohner 2004, p.542). This implies that one can conclude that a particular act is resistance simply by analysing the result of the act, although the actor may not be conscious of his or her action. Arguably therefore, in this story Malkanthi’s behaviour could be interpreted as resistance despite the fact that she was not conscious of her actions as being resistant acts.

The dominant assumption is that the actor’s awareness is key to recognising a behaviour as resistance. Scott argues that intent is a better indicator of resistance than outcome, because acts of resistance do not always achieve the desired effect (1986, p.20). However, identifying intent is difficult in some cases. When the actor is in a marginalised position and certain behaviour may intensify his or her vulnerability, resistance may occur privately. Since revealing the intention may jeopardize their condition, the actor is likely to hide the real intention of their behaviour. Scott, through his concept of the ‘hidden transcript’, argues that we can reasonably infer intent from action, even in those that appear to be purely self-indulgent acts rather than acts of resistance (1985 cited in Hollander & Einwohner 2004, p.542). When considering the Malkanthi’s petition with other relevant documentation such as the warning letter, and the follow-up response from her department head to the Ombudsman, which was based on some other employee testimonies, it is possible to infer the intend of Malkanthi’s actions. Although she did not intend to resist the NPM reforms specifically, her refusal to accept the excessive work generated by these reforms resulted in resistant behaviour.

4.2.4 Story 4: Dharmasena, an area manager

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6 This story was taken from a complaint to the Human Right Commission.
Dharmasena had been working as an area manager in the state fertilizer company, which is fully government owned and operated under the Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Services. He was in charge of a province that consisted of a number of smaller districts. As an area manager, Dharmasena had a high level of financial and administrative authority, including the distribution and selling of fertilizer. However, as a result of the NPM reforms, many operations of the ministry were decentralized, such as the state fertilizer company. Therefore, more financial authority and decision-making powers were given to the district and sub-district level offices. This decentralization process highly affected Dharmasena's work because he had to share his authority with other officers. Worse, he disagreed with these other officers over certain issues. Being disappointed with the changes initiated by the NPM reforms, Dharmasena used everyday forms of resistance to interfere into the activities of the sub-districts.

Dharmasena advised one sub-officer to issue fertilizer on a cash basis, which directly contradicted company protocol and thus the sub-officer refused to carry out the directive. Thereafter, Dharmasena contacted another officer in the same branch and also advised him to issue the fertilizer on a cash basis. This second officer followed his instructions and in the following two days sold more than 300,000 rupees worth of fertilizer. The very next day, an armed gang stole the money from the office. An inquiry revealed that Dharmasena’s interference in operational protocol in the sub-district had caused a major blunder.

Interestingly, Dharmasena’s acts of resistance were targeted at subordinate officers who had gained higher authority due the reform, rather than at the higher officers who implemented the decentralization reforms in the first place. Why did Dharmasena turn on his subordinates? What influenced his behaviour? These are important questions to ask in order to understand his individual style of resistance. In comparison to the other cases, Dharmasena held a relatively higher position in the power hierarchy. Although he wanted to express his disappointment with the reforms, it seems that this higher position arguably prevented him from directly challenging his superiors.
Nature of resistance by privileged persons

Everyday forms of resistance are not only a weapon of the marginalised, but can also be employed by elites. As Scott argues, ‘everyday forms of resistance are not a peasant monopoly. Anyone who analyzes the measures taken by land owners in the face of an announced land reform to evade its application to their holdings by dispersing titles, bribing officials, changing cropping patterns will recognize the pattern’ (Scott 1989, p.52). Scott contends that everyday forms of resistance by elites are directed to those responsible for challenging the privileges enjoyed by them (higher authorities), just the same as in the case of subaltern/subordinate resisters. However, Dharmasena’s story illustrates that the act of resistance by privileged persons could be directed at the lower levels, rather than being directly targeted at a higher authority. Therefore, it seems that the nature of everyday forms of public servant resistance is significantly influenced by the station of the individual in the overarching power hierarchy.
5. CONCLUSION

As a new style of management, NPM has dominated the public administration domain especially over the last two decades. Its impact on and success in developing countries is considerably different than in Western, developed countries where it originated. The factors behind these alternate impacts are debatable. Sri Lanka, as one developing country that dedicated itself to adopting NPM principles for its administrative reforms after the 1990s, has not been able to achieve expected results as proponents of NPM reforms promise. The prevailing literature regarding the Sri Lankan NPM experience identifies a lack of public servant support as one of the main impediments that has hindered its expected results. While studies on the impact of public servants resistance on NPM reforms are rare, those who identified its importance tend to primarily focus on open and organised resistance which has obvious political involvement. However, studies that focus on unorganised and everyday forms of individual resistance by public servants against NPM reforms are very rare, not only in literature the on developing countries but also on developed countries. This study, based on individual stories of public servants in Sri Lanka, attempts to address to this research gap.

An analysis of the cases in this research reveals that the implementation of administrative reforms based on NPM principles creates opportunities for everyday forms of public servant resistance. In turn, this everyday resistance makes a considerable impact on the successful implementation of such administrative reforms. Yet this relationship is not as obvious as when open and organised resistance is employed as a tactic. Open and organised resistance, which mainly targets the politically sensitive elements of NPM such as privatization and staff reduction, takes an obviously ideological stance against the reforms. However, it is difficult to identify such a clear ideological opposition among those who were involved in everyday forms of resistance. Rather, it seems that personnel who felt their personal situation and sense of being were negatively affected as a result of the NPM reforms were motivated to resist. Therefore, there is an indirect impact upon reforms since everyday
forms of resistance are not targeted directly at the reforms themselves but rather at their consequences.

The highly personal nature of everyday forms of resistance hides their real impact on reforms. Contrary to open and organised resistance, it is not clear whether class consciousness lends support to everyday forms of resistance. Since open and organised resistance provides common advantages for all activists, especially in terms of material benefits, such struggles easily spark class consciousness. Rather than material benefits, everyday forms of resistance focus more on achieving highly personalized needs, such as dignity. Due to this lack of class consciousness, it seems difficult to garner the cooperation of other members of the same class or category for this type of resistance. On the one hand, this motives the individual towards everyday forms of resistance. On the other, this lack of cooperation weakens the impact of resistance acts and eventually jeopardizes the resister.

It is difficult to determine whether the actors in the above cases achieved their intended results. First and foremost, it is hard to clearly recognise what their goals really were. Scott comments that consumption is considered as both the goal and the outcome of resistance and counter-resistance (Scott 1989, p.37). He came to this conclusion because his analysis of peasant resistance was mainly framed by the notion of class conflict. It is assumed that the class conflict is the struggle over the appropriation of work, property, production and taxes (Scott 1989, p.37). However, although the actors in the above cases were not involved in a class conflict, they were still involved in a struggle over the appropriation of work, dignity, authority and satisfaction that was taken away from them by the reforms. They can therefore still be described as being consciously involved in resistance in the hope of achieving some specific goal.

Additionally, it is important to identify how the intentions of their resistant activities are related to the NPM reforms. It is clear that stopping the whole reform process is beyond individual capacity. Hence, it is difficult to expect that these employees intended to stop or reverse the reforms through their isolated
actions. However, this does not mean that we can reject the argument that their behaviour was intended to make an impact on the reforms carried out in their offices. For example, in Ranaweera’s story, we can see how effectively he stopped the productivity assessment program (although temporarily).

Whether everyday forms of individual resistance provide enough safety to resist without jeopardizing resisters position and consequently, their very subsistence is problematic. In each of the above cases, the everyday forms of resistance performed by the individual public servants created apparently unanticipated consequences. The stories show that resistance eventually worsened their situation in the workplace. One important issue is whether these individuals expected the ultimate consequences of their behaviours. It is difficult to believe that they did not, because judging by the established working environment, customary power hierarchy and past experiences, the outcome of their resistance should have been relatively easy to predict.

Scott argues that the significant risk involved in an open confrontation may virtually preclude many forms of resistance (1989, p.37). This is the main justification for hidden forms of everyday resistance. He further asserts that ‘the relative safety- and it is only a relative safety- of everyday forms of resistance has much to do with the small scale of action’ (1989, p.37). Accordingly, those who are in an advantageous position tend to hide their resistance from higher authorities in order to safeguard their privileges. However, as seen in the above cases, although everyday forms of individual resistance begin as hidden resistance, they frequently gradually evolve into overt resistance. This especially occurs when hidden resistance is unable to achieve the desired objectives. Scott comments that ‘when the act of everyday resistance is meant to be noticed, then the resistors take special care to conceal them- selves, often behind a façade of public conformity’ (Scott 1989, p. 55). Although it may be true for peasants, it seems that this assumption is not applicable to the public service. If an individual public servant decides to achieve the desired outcome of their resistance, they must accept the significant risk involved in an open confrontation. This contradicts Scott’s argument that as the same results may
be achieved by everyday resistance, although more slowly and at a vastly reduced risk, then it is surely the more rational course (Scott 1989, p.35). This paradox demands a new interpretation of everyday forms of individual resistance that transform from covert to overt in order to achieve their objectives.

Overall, it seems clear that the micro-level, everyday forms of resistance performed by public servants has hindered, and continues to hinder, the successful implementation of NPM reforms in Sri Lanka. Further researches which aim to find a way of overcoming the (often very personal) negative consequences of NPM reforms are essential if it wishes to employ NPM reforms successfully. To do so will require a more nuanced understanding of the causes and consequences of the everyday forms of resistance undertaken by dissatisfied public servants.
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