Abstract

We examine the historical phenomenon of truces, as these occurred during a period of severe warfare during World War I, around Christmas 1914. These were processes of resistance that could not have been planned (otherwise they would obviously have been thwarted by authority) and that occurred in a setting with continuously changing conditions. Our purpose in making this analysis is to identify the micro-foundations and behaviours of enacting resistance and forming a truce under conditions where planning and executing cannot be assumed to be orderly and linear. We discuss the battlefield context of intense competition and mutual suffering as an organizational setting, in order to provide a more precise explanation of how rules and structures can be (at least) temporarily suspended in the workplace. We rethink the construct of resistance as an act of improvisation; we do so by developing a framework that explains how resistance can emerge and be quashed in workplace settings that might appear at first sight to be immune. Therefore, we combine two themes that have largely been separated in theory: resistance and improvisation. Doing so opens new ground in three ways. First, we contribute to literature about resistance by explaining how it was constructed as action suspending rules and structures in hostile contexts. Second, we show the political-motivational dimension of improvisation. Third, we extend the notion of truces as not an end in itself (a temporary settlement) but as an avenue to achieve a real objective (e.g. to change the course of history for the better).

Introduction

Organizations have undergone several changes over the last decades that have been accompanied by new mechanisms of control and supervision, higher demands on service levels and hours, as well as increased pressure to maintain profitability (Spiezia, 2016). Workers respond to increasing pressure in different ways, including resistance (Mumby et al., 2017). Scholars have commented on this turn to resistance in both labour process theory (see Thompson, 2016) and Foucauldian analysis (MacKenzie, 2018). In addition, the *Journal of Resistance Studies* was founded in 2015 and the *SAGE Handbook of Resistance* published (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016). Resistance has become a topic of increasing relevance in the field of organization studies.

Resistance is 'a socially constructed category emerging out of the multiple interpretations of both workplace actors and academic researchers' (Prasad & Prasad, 1998, p. 251). Resistance, accordingly, can be understood as an emergent process and be characterized by three ideal-typical actions (e.g. Martí & Fernández, 2013; Mumby et al., 2017). First, the process is initiated by the occurrence of a certain forceful event that, second, predicates planning and choosing optimal resources and third, leads ultimately to the process of resistance. Implicitly it is assumed that the course of actual resistance is planned and then executed, comparable with common representations of strategy (Courpasson et al., 2012). However, in some work settings oppressive

structures predominate to such an extent that the planning horizon is minimal and only spontaneous opportunities for resistance are afforded. Hence, we pose the following research question: Can organizational actors perform resistance without pre-planning and if so, how do they perform resistance in an oppressive system designed to thwart it?

As an empirical setting, we chose an extreme case. It is one drawn from the context of World War I, where after the first few months of 1914 alone, over one million casualties resulted (Jürgs, 2005, p. 59). Nevertheless, the occurrence of many truces has been documented. The most famous and most widespread was Christmas 1914, where hostilities were suspended between the trenches, carols sung, souvenirs exchanged and football played (Austin, n.d.; Brown, 2004). The shift from opposing teams fighting until death to playing football suggests a case of resistance that momentarily suspended the oppressive systems of military combat. The case has been described as 'extraordinary' by various participants (see Weintraub, 2001, pp. 162, 166), and has been stated as having a positive impact on participants' subsequent life: one participant, for instance, 'wouldn't have missed that unique and weird Christmas Day for anything' (Bairnsfather, 1916, p. 69).

In what follows, we first outline theoretical foundations by reviewing the notion of resistance and then develop the theoretical concept of improvisation in order to understand how, in general, actors behave in unplanned situations. Second, based on a

brief presentation of the empirical setting we outline the processes of data collection and analysis. Third, we present the case in three temporal phases (the first months before Christmas, Christmas and the following months), in which we present the historical course and elaborate the empirical analysis to reveal a framework that explains how resistance, based on improvisation, emerged and was quashed. Against this backdrop, we show the interplay of facilitating conditions, catalysing situations and micro-behaviours (consisting of mutual extensions and validations) and suggest combining two themes in literature that have been largely separated in theory: resistance and improvisation.

We contribute to organization studies in three significant ways. First, we elaborate the potential of expressing resistance through improvisation to understand how resistance is enacted in contexts that impede simultaneous planning and executing. Second, we show that improvisation is not only a reaction to an event but can also be a political-motivational expression of the actor. Third, we extend the notion of truces, a temporary settlement among competing interests (Wiedemann et al., 2018; Zbaracki & Bergen, 2010), not as an end it itself but as an means to achieve a further objective (in this case an interruption to merciless slaughter).

Theoretical background

Resistance

Prior research has developed four main perspectives to explain how resistance is constructed. First, the traditional individualist view, based on the actor's psychological disposition. In this line of thought, resistance comprises the 'thoughts and actions used to protect individuals', groups' and organizations' usual way of dealing with reality' (Argyris, 1985, p. 5). Change from the familiar to the unfamiliar is seen to cause resistance that can be aggressive (Coghlan, 1993), represented by fear, frustration, personal uncertainty or mistrust (Dent & Goldberg, 1999). A second view is that resistance stems from the social context (Burnes, 2015) because individual and group behaviour is the result of a complex field of forces (e.g. structural elements, roles, norms) that surrounds individuals or groups (Burnes, 2007). Third, there is a view that resistance lies within both the individual and the context (Oreg, 2006). Burnes argues that resistance emerges 'from the interplay' (2015, p. 103). Fourth, we can argue, with Foucault (1979) that because power relations are so pervasive, resistance is normal as the dialectical other to those disciplines that enforce power's sway. Accordingly, resistance may be seen as an emerging construct based on the interplay between individuals and contexts, especially in terms of the dynamics of discipline based on power/knowledge relations. Against this backdrop an informal, voluntary and

collaborative truce between opposing combatants signifies a breakdown, a reversal of normal discipline.

Scholars have described resistance as being usually either individually mundane or, where collective, unsuccessful (Martí & Fernández, 2013). The reasons may be that individuals tend to act compliantly when subject to oppressive systems (Willmott, 1993) or because actors respect the boundaries preventing conflicts by defining deviance (Allen, 2008; Burawoy, 1979). Consequently, resistance is usually represented as subtle, covert and difficult to observe (Scott, 1985), often distinguished in terms of passive rather than active elements. Passive resistance might entail playing dumb or avoiding work (Crowley, 2012; Fleming & Spicer, 2007). Where resistance is more active it might include simulation of productivity (Ybema & Horvers, 2017), working to rule (Alcadipani et al., 2018), machine sabotage (Dubois, 1979), gossip (Alfano & Robinson, 2017), irony (Rhodes & Badham, 2018) or criticism of absent superiors (Hodson, 2001; Scott, 1990). Forms of collective resistance, ranging from undercover organized activities, such as publishing newspapers in ghettos or mounting unofficial educational programs (Martí & Fernández, 2013), through to insurrections, defined as 'collective, owned and publicly declared forms of resistance that aim to challenge, or unsettle existing social relations, forms of organizing and/or institutions' (Mumby et al., 2017, p. 1170), are increasingly acknowledged (Courpasson & Martí, 2019). The main forms of resistance can be differentiated as individual infrapolitics, collective infrapolitics and

insubordination and insurrection (Mumby et al., 2017), with the focus in organization theory more usually being on individually imaginative forms of resistance. Such resistance typically occurs in the context of organizational work performances that normally comprise both resistant and compliant behaviours (Ybema & Horvers, 2017). Consequently, it is worth examining how resistance may be performed in *compliant* ways that decrease the significance of its being discovered and thwarted before its execution.

Improvisation

Improvisation, the 'conception of action as it unfolds, by an organization and/or its members, drawing on available material, cognitive, affective and social resources' (Cunha et al., 1999, p. 302), is not new to organization theory. It is based on two dimensions: temporality and bricolage. The temporal dimension describes the conception of action converging with execution (Moorman & Miner, 1998b). Three major characteristics are evident. First, improvisation is deliberate, an intentional effort (Miner et al., 2001). Second, improvisation is extemporaneous, which means unplanned, even though it is purposefully triggered and built upon existing structures and plans (Weick, 1993). As such improvisation does not exist in opposition with structure; rather it uses the existing structures. It can be planned, as a specific type of secret real-time planning, discovery of which would amount to its neutralization. The third characteristic

is that improvisation occurs during action (Miner et al., 2001), which means that actors do not think of the optimal solution in advance but instead develop it while acting. Consequently, in contrast to traditional planning, in which various means are related to the future achievement of specific ends, the appropriateness of actions undertaken can only be made in hindsight rather than foresight (Cunha et al., 1999). The bricolage (second) dimension means that actors cannot *ex ante* select issue-optimal resources but instead have to fall back upon available resources (Weick, 1993) whether material, cognitive, affective or social (Cunha et al., 1999). In contrast to creativity, improvisation is defined by the use of limited available (rather than the adequate) resources (Amabile, 1998).

Prior research has observed that improvisation occurs as a reaction to events that require fast reaction and lack a course of pre-planned action (Crossan & Sorrenti, 1997; Cunha et al., 1999; Hatch, 1997; Moorman & Miner, 1995, 1998a, 1998b; Weick, 1993, 1999). In cases drawn from war settings (Brady, 2011; Smith, 2008) as well as from organizations more generally, improvisation is seen as a reaction to threats, opportunities or events that arise suddenly (Miner et al., 2001). Individuals are seen to improvise in reaction to some event that impinges on their consciousness. Hence, improvisation involves agency that sometimes might pursue actions orthogonal to those organizationally defined as normalcy (Mainemelis, 2010). Organizational authorities may see such agency as either positive or negative. When individuals improvise out of

sight of the organization's gaze (Cunha et al., 2014) it is usually assumed to be deviant action; however, such judgments are temporally dynamic. When the formal rules or orders of an organization are violated, the deviance that occurs may at different times be defined as more or less productive for the organization (Courpasson et al., 2012; Mainemelis, 2010).

Summarizing the theoretical dissent in integrating resistance and improvisation

While the notion of resistance assumes a sequence of planning and execution, it is the core of improvisation that both converge in a simultaneous process. In addition, resistance would ideally draw on adequate resources, while improvisation is performed with available resources. However, both concepts put the actor(s) in the centre and acknowledge actors' interplay with surrounding conditions and resources, on which basis resistance, as well as improvisation, may be facilitated or constructed. Regarding organizational settings, where there are more political-motivational dimensions to resistance it means that actors may blend resistant and compliant behaviour in their work performances.

For improvised modes of action and less structured contexts, interaction seems to be crucial (Gomes et al., 2003) because it facilitates coordination and the construction

of an intersubjective order (Bigley & Roberts, 2001; Weick & Roberts, 1993). Moreover, improvisation is unlikely to occur if actors do not perceive deviation from scripted behaviours (e.g. routines, rules) as possible or desirable (Kamoche & Cunha, 2001). The relevance of the perception and interpretation of the respective situation is emphasized because actors purposefully and politically use situations to adhere or oppose vested interests and improvise accordingly (Wiedemann et al., 2018). With regard to truces, when actions are being shaped, imputations of agents' motivations are crucial (Cacciatori, 2012; Nelson & Winter, 1982; Zbaracki & Bergen, 2010) if only because the politics of vocabularies of motive and their social ascription are central to the meanings being made (Blum & McHugh, 1971; Mills, 1940).

Research setting and processes

The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria in 1914 in Serbia, by Serbian nationalists allied with Russia, led to heated debates regarding the relationship between Russia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the Balkans, culminating in the July Crisis, a month of diplomatic manoeuvring during which the military were increasingly mobilized. Germany, aware of the French-Russian Alliance, feared a two-front war in case it was called to support Austro-Hungary against Russia. Therefore, the idea of two successive wars, the so-called Schlieffen Plan, was developed, which proposed a rapid attack on France via Belgium and then, after a quick victory, a movement to the eastern

front to fight Russia. Instead of a quick victory, however, the opposing forces started to dig in and began a prolonged engagement fought as trench warfare in which millions of lives were extinguished with little territory being gained or lost. While trench warfare had been honed in previous conflicts, such as the Maori resistance to imperial incursion by the British (Cowan, 1922), the American Civil War (Hagerman, 1992) and the Crimean War (Tate, 2018), it reached its apotheosis in the First World War (Gilbert, 2004), the empirical core of our study.

Data collection

The 100th anniversary of the First World War, beginning in 2014, saw the truce become better known as a result of discussion in disciplines such as history (e.g. Adams, 2015); however, it has not yet been considered by organization theorists. Correcting this oversight, we started our data collection by identifying the richest sources and publicly accessible archives, museums, libraries and databases. We identified the Flanders Fields Museum (Ieper), Imperial War Museum (London), Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv and the Kriegsarchiv (both in Munich) and the following online databases: The First World War in Adam Matthew (from SAGE), EuroDocs and The World War I Document Archive in the Harold B. Lee Library from Brigham Young University, the Europeana Collections from the European Union, as well as JSTOR and EBSCO. In the beginning, we familiarized ourselves with historical events of truces and in particular during World

War I, however the universe of sources providing archival records is almost limitless. Therefore, we focused our study to the most well-known (due to its extent and publicly available sources), the 1914 Christmas Truce, which happened geographically on the Western Front and temporally at the end of 1914 and beginning of 1915. Most of the sources were in English or German; for the latter, the native German author in the team, reviewed sources. For those few in French we used either existing translations or translated them.

The primary sources included the autobiography of Bairnsfather (1916) as well as four types of archival records. First, official documentation, with roughly 75 war diaries and a few governmental publications. As a source of evidence, the government publications must be handled with care because they are likely to have been produced/manipulated for propaganda reasons in order to play down cases of fraternization. Nevertheless, we collected reports from the Army War Diaries held by the Public Record Office that were useful for comparing official descriptions with those in private papers as well as analysing how the incident was justified and reported to the authorities. Second, from over 100 archived private papers (letters and diaries) from soldiers, we collected and analysed 19 of those online and publicly available. Third, there are archival audio records of interviews with contemporary witnesses, conducted mostly between 1975 and 1992 by journalists and historians, most of which are available from the British Imperial War Museum. We analysed these, comprising more than 5,000

minutes (89 hours) of material. Finally, there are over 80 reports, published in newspapers (some of them reprints of letters and pictures that soldiers sent home) which we analysed. Relying on these publicly available primary sources affords two advantages: the data is easily externally reviewed and it has not been constructed as an artefact of our research (Yin, 1995).

In addition to these primary sources, we draw on secondary sources. There are more than 120 books, many academic articles, a genre of war poetry as well as movies that interpret, represent and reflect these historical documents. In particular, as we explored the case, we reviewed 13 books that appeared recurrently as sources heavily cited. To control for artistic freedom, we excluded poetry and movies. Table 1 gives an overview of the reviewed sources and collected data.

Insert Table 1 about here

Data analysis

Based on our research question, the unit of analysis are the groups of opposing soldiers at the Western Front, where soldiers drawn from the Empires of Britain and France fought those of Germany. To gain an initial overview of the unit of analysis and the

social processes, we began data analysis by examining secondary sources that compiled and presented data culled from many primary sources. These represented multiple sources, which we compared with each other and established contradictions in accounts (for example, the score in a report of a football match). This initial examination was a good starting point from which to identify also further sources of data.

In a second step, we examined primary sources for a finer grained sense of the case. Three phases emerged from consideration of these sources that gave a general temporal structure to events. The initial phase comprised the first months of the war leading to Christmas. Second, the main period of the truce around Christmas, sometimes going into the year of 1915. Third, following the truce, the weeks and months until the restoration of the initial status quo. Based on this temporal structure we discovered that the empirical actions were related to facilitating conditions/resources, catalysing situations and an interplay of micro-behaviours (consisting of extension and validation actions) that increased in intensity, culminating in phase two and then asserted until the restoration of the initial status quo in phase three.

Reviewing the audio records, we first noted keywords to identify sequences about the case or that were relevant for this study. If, in addition to the audio file, some information was provided, we cross-checked it with our keywords. In a second round, we focused on the parts identified as salient and carefully coded them based on the topics

dealt with. In addition, we also examined private papers and newspaper articles. During this examination, we started to categorize the data regarding conditions, soldiers, structures, events, processes, differences between front sections, differences between the truces in different years, military and political actions. While examining and categorizing, new sources were added, based on their specific content, incorporated into an already identified micro event or were coded as a new category until we reached a stable and coherent interpretation, indicative of conceptual saturation.

In an ultimate step, data was summarized, structured and, if appropriate, displayed in tables. Based on this we wrote a 12-page long case compendium and began interpretation with a time series analysis (Yin, 1995) that allowed us to identify common patterns that we could cross-check with rival explanations. Finally, we carved out the distinct details and identified the need to combine the two literatures of resistance and improvisation to theorize the case.

Historical actions and their analysis

Phase I – The first months

In the early stages of the war, the German invasion gained massive territory as initially planned, with Belgium rapidly falling into German hands. Consequently, the alliance protocols triggered Britain's participation in the conflict, involving many thousands of

conscripts being sent to the Western Front. At the same time German movement increasingly slowed, because the resistance from the armed forces was greater than expected, causing hundreds of thousands of casualties. In order to outflank their opponent, the ‘Race to the Sea’ started with the consequence of extensively lengthening the front. Within the first four months one million people died (Jürgs, 2005, p. 59). The war machinery was running at full speed. However, personal records show increasingly less enthusiasm about the war and describe the fear of being the next to easily catch one of the deadly bullets (Laurentin & Grégoire, 1965) as well as feelings and motives represented as a ‘cry for sanity’ (Brown, 2004, p. C01). Another example comes from lieutenant Wilfred Ewart (1934), who wrote in his private diary (however, not in the official documentation of the regiment), about his fear but also increasing hope. The latter, he thought, was manifested as an irresistible striving for expressions of humanity in the midst of barbarism. Based on these records we see evidence that some individuals began to lose widespread enthusiasm for fighting and were becoming aware of the cruelties involved, framing the war as merciless slaughter.

Historically, the next major step was Germany’s attempt to break through the front that failed at the First Battle of Ypres, which marked the cessation of forward movement for both sides of the conflict. Again with huge losses on both sides, further catalysing fear, motives and framing of the situation (Bell, 1930). In order to protect troops from massive machine gun and artillery fire, trenches were built and resulted in

the 475 miles long Western Front (Woodward, 2011). Usually trenches were in close proximity, sometimes only 100 to 10 metres apart from each other (Hamilton, 2004, p. 8). The area in-between was referred to as No Man's Land, first documented as such in a short story by a soldier (Swinton, 1914, p. 243). The circumstance of trenches being built in such a close proximity constituted a facilitating condition for further development because it allowed mutual observation and study. Counterfactually, the record demonstrates that truces between Belgian and German soldiers were very rare, because the river Yser divided them.

During November and December in 1914, aggression on both sides began slowly to decrease and the first informal accommodations began to emerge and cease fire was exercised – for instance, in the form of ceasefires on both sides on occasions when soldiers were relieving themselves or during mealtimes, which were indicated with a plank of wood (Jürgs, 2005, p. 58). Another case reported by a Catholic field chaplain (1915) stated that the fighting completely ceased in some areas (Mulhouse and Belfort). Again, the proximity of the trenches was a facilitating condition for identifying behaviour in need of protection (relieving oneself). In deviating from scripted behaviours (Kamoche & Cunha, 2001) the motives of humanity and dignity became not only informally and mutually validated but also institutionalized, by synthesizing liminal states of war and non-war.

A further example of the decrease in aggression and emerging interaction are the witnesses to occasions with ‘a great deal of shouting’ across the trenches (Boyle, 2015, p. 30); additionally, there were reports of a small concert taking place in honour of a captain’s birthday, where Germans sent opposing troops an invitation in the form of a chocolate cake and a detailed proposal for how they intended to cease fire (Daily Express correspondent as cited in Weintraub, 2001, pp. 14–15). At another location a dog was used as a courier to communicate and organize the exchange of newspapers, postcards and cognac (Barluet, 1988). The increasing interaction was facilitated through many Germans speaking English, due to having previously worked in Britain (Ray, 2018), a facility that allowed for mutual communication and socializing. Socializing afforded opportunity for the construction of intersubjective order, building collective heed and coordination in the face of ambiguity (Bigley & Roberts, 2001; Weick & Roberts, 1993). An emergent, mutually constructed subjective order was critical for the process because the truce rested on cues sent directly to the enemy and on the feedback/validation received. The order produced had similarities with that which Weick (1979) qualified as the double interact. Intense interaction has been indicated as instrumental for more improvised modes of action to unfold (Gomes et al., 2003). Men on both sides therefore could bracket reality in a collectively discriminating way (in terms of feelings of uselessness, desperation and detachment from the war), bringing attention to ‘a few stylized dimensions of reality’ (Giorgi et al., 2017, p. 6).

Phase II – Around Christmas

Coming closer to Christmas, the importance of Christmas to the soldiers' morale was apparently clear to the governments, as they made great efforts to prepare for the season. Emperor William II sent small gift boxes and table top Christmas trees with clamped candles to the front, while British soldiers received over two million Christmas cards from King George V and Christmas gift boxes from his daughter Princess Mary, with cigarettes and tobacco, along with chocolate and plum puddings (Ashurst, 1987; Shortell & Paddock, 2011). Although sent by the authorities, these material affordances facilitated a Christmas atmosphere, the Germans placed small Christmas trees lit by the candles on their parapets that were visible from across the trenches (Vize-Feldwebel Lange of XIX Corps as cited in Cooper, 1982). Another example is the detailed record of Bairnsfather (1916), who wrote that there was a feeling of quiet and the spirit of Christmas was apparent. He continues that 'There was a kind of an invisible, intangible feeling extending across the frozen swamp between the two lines, which said 'This is Christmas Eve for both of us–*something* in common' (Bairnsfather, 1916, p. 70). We see in this evidence that soldiers not only used material affordances but also drew on common cultural resources in order to enact the tradition of Christmas as one of humanity, peace, love and understanding, a motive that all soldiers could embrace far more easily than the officers' official code (Shortell & Paddock, 2011). It involved cultural invocations of domesticity, family and emotion embedded in a shared tradition

of Christianity (Perry, 2010). Britons and Germans shared Christmas rituals as well as common imagery: the fir tree with candles, a Santa Claus with reindeer, yule logs and glittering frost (Terraine, 1979). These rituals provided a common ground for both camps which catalysed individual actions (singing, recovering their own soldiers) at first and later, mutual action (showing family pictures, exchanging presents and playing together).

According to Weintraub (2001, p. xviii) the Christmas Truce most likely began near Ploegsteert Wood in Belgium. The truce unfolded differently in different areas of the front. However, there is a common pattern. One camp started singing Christmas carols (most often the Germans), a relaxation of the usual warfare behaviour (Bairnsfather, 1916). When the other side started singing their own carols (Ray, 2018), their opposition applauded and shouted 'encore' (Armes, 1914) or lifted papers showing 'Merry Christmas' or 'You no fight, we no fight' (Weintraub, 2001). These signs validated the initial behaviour and extended the repertoires of action in play. Historians have emphasized the important role of these songs, known from childhood, because the singing reminded the soldiers of the comforts of home (Weintraub, 2001, p. 34). A wave of nostalgia seemed to spur sentiments typically suppressed on the front, thus minimizing the fear of fraternizing (Terraine, 1979).

Other records report invitations to the other side to come over, either by shouting or with ‘no shooting’-signs (Armes, 1914). However, this extension of the repertoire was only cautiously validated because the Germans, in particular, were wary of risking their lives: there were worries on the German’s part that they might be being lured across to the enemy parapets as an ambush (Weintraub, 2001, pp. 27-28, 51). Consequently, they initially responded by saying that their opposite numbers should come over to them, instead (Bairnsfather, 1916). Eventually they agreed to meet halfway.

The usually rainy weather caused the ground in and around the trenches to be a quagmire, such that feet were permanently wet and mouldy, in a condition known as ‘trench rot’ (Chorba, 2018). Enduring such conditions saw the troops commonly frame the war as an even more useless and desperate event (Housman, 2002, p. 147; Jürgs, 2005, 36, 57, 214). The suddenness with which the muddy ground froze that December facilitated mobility in No Man’s Land; once there, in the mid-lines, opportunities to share trench tales of common hardships and discomfort arose. Topics of conversation included how to keep things dry and how to handle lice and rats (Jürgs, 2005, pp. 117–118; Stanley, 1990). Such topics were highly relevant problems at the time (Stanley, 1990) and sharing solutions to fulfil their basic needs and survive the prevalent conditions was useful. Such topics did not relate to sensitive military information, thus allowing soldiers from both sides to discuss them freely.

Following the initial contacts on Christmas Eve, at daylight on the next morning soldiers from both sides entered No Man's Land: the space was occupied by decaying corpses and the stench of death served as a potent reminder to the fraternizing troops of the likelihood of themselves soon becoming a corpse (Woodward, 2011). An agreement was made to recover and bury the dead (Acton, 1975), with some soldiers holding a burial ceremony (Weintraub, 2001, pp. 64–65). While in the beginning only their own soldiers' corpses were recovered, once they started intermingling, the opposing soldiers noticed that both sides' soldiers were subject to the same appalling conditions; solidarities were not entirely national. A 19-year-old lieutenant described the scene:

> *Awful, too awful to describe so I won't attempt it, but the joint burial service was most wonderful. […] The Germans formed up on one side, the English on the Other, the officers standing in front, every head bared. Yes, I think it was a sight one will never see again (Pelham-Burn, 1914).*

In addition to the recoveries, soldiers increasingly engaged in various forms of exchange. Souvenirs and food were swapped, enabled through the asymmetric situation of supply and demand: whereas the Germans had enough beer and loved the English plum and apple jam, the English were tired of it and happy to receive German beer (Weintraub, 2001, p. 94). Other records report mutual hair dressing (Jürgs, 2005, p. 75; Terraine, 1979, p. 17), whereas others engaged in scavenger hunts for buttons, bully beef or the Prussian *Pickelhaube* (Terraine, 1979, p. 15). These reports show the

development from actions performed by individuals to increased synchronization until actions were being mutually performed, finding its climax in the improvised kickabouts.

At the time, football was the national sport in Britain and for some was almost a working class religion (Adams, 2015). Captain J. L. Jack phrased it in his diary as follows: 'However tired the rascals may be for parades, they always have enough energy for football' (Terraine, 1964). *The Times* (1915a) published a report about a football match between Scots and Germans on January 1st, 1915. The official war history of the 133rd Saxon Regiment confirms that match as well as reports from the French 104th and 106th Infantry ("Il y a 60 ans sur le front: La leçon de noel", 1974). The German Oberstleutnant Niemann described the scene as follows:

> *At this soccer match our privates soon discovered that the Scots wore no underpants under their kilts so that their behinds became clearly visible any time their skirts moved in the wind. We had a lot of fun with that and in the beginning we just couldn't believe it. (Niemann 1969, as cited in Weintraub, 2001, p. 119)*

He also recalls that the match result was 3-2 in favour of Germany. Although some matches were later officially denied (Maurice, 1921), there are many testimonies from participants (*The Times*, 1915a; Mathews, 1915). The improvisational character of these football matches come clear by for instance the report of Ernie Williams:

> *They made up some goals and one fellow went in the goal and then it was just a general kickabout. I should think there were about a couple of hundred taking part. I had a go at the ball. […] Everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves. There was no sort of ill-will between us… There was no referee and no score, no tally at all. It was simply a mêlée […]. (Williams 1983, as cited in Weintraub, 2001, p. 122).*

The process of direct interaction and the conversations that ensued led to an emerging awareness that the opposing soldiers were also humans. Some became even friends ("One day of peace at the front", 1915c). While nationalist propaganda aimed to make the opposing soldiers an abstract enemy (Witkop & Wedd, 2002) or published supposed war crimes committed by the opponents (Brown, 2004), the interaction led ordinary people, sharing the misfortune of being conscripted, to think critically about reports in newspapers (Officer of the Westminster Rifles, 1914). Their enemies were men much the same as themselves, sharing the same awful fate decided by the counsels of remote elites, enduring conditions made opaque to those at home by ruthless media, rampant nationalism and deliberate propaganda. Recognizing that the enemy was not as evil as they were represented as being (Shortell & Paddock, 2011) but were also humans (*North Mail*, 1915b) reinforced the dynamics of the truce by validating its equability. Moreover, soldiers saw not only humans opposite them but were able to establish, differences between different types of German soldiers (e.g. Prussians, Bavarians,

Saxonians), which let Germany's opponents move beyond abstract stereotyping of the Hun.[1]

Although soldiers could freely walk around during the truce (Wedderburn-Maxwell, 1985), the opposing sides had established new structures (Kamoche & Cunha, 2001) around five simple rules that regulated the truce (cf. Boyle, 2015, p. 44). First, actions of the artillery were considered as irrelevant, because the infantry did not have any control over their actions. With regards to this rule, it is noteworthy, that both camps were obviously able to distinguish the origins of attacks. We see in this point proof that mutual interaction led to an in-depth shared understanding of warfare's actions. Second, if an order to fire was received, three rounds high in the air would first be fired to give the opposing side enough time to take cover. Third, since the German soldiers had to fire a certain amount of ammunition, it was regulated that the fire would be high, marked by a clear warning tone and preferably occurring between 5:00 pm and 6:00 pm. Fourth, it was agreed that during the truce neither side could improve or erect barbed wire to protect their trenches (cf. Terraine, 1979, p. 14; Weintraub, 2001, p. 61), which meant

[1] For instance, the British distinguished some Germans, such as Bavarians, as being more humane while others, such as Prussians, were stigmatized as cruel and inhumane.

that no act of war was tolerated. Ultimately, the truce would be declared broken if a shot were to be fired with the intention to kill. Both sides were thus able to differentiate the intentions behind shots.

In contrast to these reports, there are nevertheless also reports about front sections (e.g. Zonnebeck) in which fighting continued at Christmas in which soldiers were killed (Field as cited in Jürgs, 2005). Another example is provided by the writer Ernst Jünger (1920), who describes how the German troops sang carols but were then silenced 'by the enemy machine guns' or that on Christmas Day they lost a man 'by a flanking shot through the head'. These examples underline the importance of the micro-behaviour of mutual extension *and* validation to co-create a truce and reverse structures.

Phase III – The following months

The truce continued even after New Year's Eve (Terraine, 1979). Increasingly some officers, having noticed the intentions behind shots (warning or above the heads), tolerated the continuation of the truce (Jürgs, 2005, 136-137, 199). In addition, incorrect reports were deliberately circulated, for example when a lieutenant colonel purported that he had prohibited fraternization (Acton, 1975). Others consciously delayed notifications (Jürgs, 2005). These examples show that the truce was still working and soldiers once more improvised a new situation.

Nevertheless, the truce triggered important institutional responses. First, there were material changes designed to show that, institutionally, the truce was unacceptable as an act of rebellion, an insurrection, against military discipline and national interest by military elites on both sides. Therefore, all fraternization was discouraged, it was spread 'Schützengrabenfreundschaft verboten (friendship between the trenches forbidden)', a confidential memorandum was distributed: 'To finish this war quickly, we must keep up the fighting spirit and do all we can to discourage friendly intercourse. I am calling for particulars as to names of officers and units who took part in this Christmas gathering, with a view to disciplinary action' and inspections began to be carried out more regularly (Weintraub, 2001). Moreover, recoveries of corpses were prohibited, because they did not contribute to the war spirit by increasing hate against those who killed the fellow but instead increased the helplessness and despair of those still alive and their wish to end the war (Austin, n.d.; Jürgs, 2005, p. 213). Moreover, fear and the threat of severe punishment, including the death penalty was a common measure (Brown & Seaton, 1984). Additionally, troops resisting commands were moved to the Eastern Front to estrange soldiers from their (too) close opponent (Jürgs, 2005; Weintraub, 2001). These strategies were devised to impede the repetition of the event by stopping the building of common structures, motives and actions. Young soldiers, fresh from school, framed by national propaganda without much knowledge of the reality that awaited them, were most easily influenced not to fraternize by the authorities

(Brown & Seaton, 1984). Potential promotions were promised to those that complied and more senior soldiers, concerned about their military careers, reprioritized their actions (Weintraub, 2001).

Ultimately, a change in the technologies of warfare (Ferguson, 1999, pp. 290–303) changed the perception of the human in the opposite trenches. Individual men with guns whom one could see gave way to lethal mass killing perpetrated by tank; increasingly, as chemical warfare became an increasing part of repertoire, soldiers wearing a gas mask could not shout to their opponents from the trenches and validate the intent of the opponents' actions. Likewise, the bombing of British cities by German Zeppelins, daily violations of the Geneva convention as well as the destruction of the passenger ship Lusitania by a submarine, were all used to sharpen the abstraction of the enemy and to discuss the question of guilt regarding the war crimes (Witkop & Wedd, 2002).

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to examine if and how actors can perform resistance in oppressive systems that thwart resistance in order to enhance our understanding of how organizational members can suspend (at least temporarily) structures and rules in organizational settings. We chose the case of the 1914 Christmas Truce, which surprisingly lacks treatment by organization theorists, although the discipline has

explored the theme of Christmas (Hancock, 2016; Rosen, 1988), demonstrated a persistent fascination with resistance (Mumby et al., 2017) and examined the dynamics of truces in organizations (Wiedemann et al., 2018; Zbaracki & Bergen, 2010). As an organizational process a truce represents an extreme (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Pettigrew, 1990) and unconventional case (Bamberger & Pratt, 2010) with which to extend organizational theory (Hällgren et al., 2017) because deviation from the normal challenges taken-for-granted assumptions (Clegg et al., 2006) and promotes collection of rich information (Stinchcombe, 2005).

The case shows that organizational members can overcome their horizontal conflicts and mutually resist in order to bring political-motivational interests to the attention of the authorities. Soldiers increasingly noticed that their individual motives were shared by those individuals across the trenches, facilitated by certain conditions, such as the proximity of the trenches. Based on these common motives, soldiers engaged in individual actions that, in the beginning, were timid, as they involved grave danger but that became increasingly collective. Interactions permitted the stirrings of insurrection proper: men started exploring the possibility of temporarily suspending the war, challenging the roles, rules, structure and enforcements by authorities. Each step was fundamental in entailing the next, in line with the definition of improvisation; in the absence of plans, action was being constructed while it was being executed (Moorman & Miner, 1998b). The engagement with one action prepared the next. In other words,

the two warring armies resisted their respective commanders by *co-creating* their actions as they unfolded. The empirical data shows that fundamental to this process was the mutual and alternating validation of actions. Furthermore, the process of alternating validation was facilitated by certain conditions and catalysed through a few meaningful situations. Figure 1 provides an overview of how the 1914 Christmas Truce unfolded and quashed.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The setting of this empirical case makes clear that the resistance could not have been organized by planning and selecting optimal resources, because the planning horizon shrank and actions could not receive any formal support from the combatant organizations' systems, since they were anti-institutionally inimical to the code of warfare: fraternizing with the enemy. In particular the beginning of the war, resulting in over one million casualties (Jürgs, 2005, p. 59), demonstrated the unconditional nature of the respective military systems. The localized collective outbreak of peace was unplanned (Ashurst, 1987) because any possible plans and/or planners would have been neutralized if known of in advance by the authorities. In addition, we see further evidence that the event could not have been planned and was facilitated through certain

conditions, like the sudden freezing of the mud to make entering No Man's Land and playing football possible (Ashurst, 1987). Therefore, we see evidence that increasing exchanges validated extension of previous limits, resolving the shortcoming of being unable to plan to resist.

Additionally, the case showed that soldiers could not draw on adequate resources. In particular, material (communication tools) and symbolic resources (e.g. third parties, observers, media diffusion, public relations) for proceeding with a truce were absent. A planned football match would not have used bully beef tins instead of a ball. Yet, with less or even without planning and drawing on adequate resources, truces were formed in the midst of a hostile context. Weintraub's analysis (2001, e.g. pp. 29, 69, 77, 121, 136, 151), reaffirmed by Boyle (2015, p. 94), indicates the process as impromptu, stressing its improvised nature. We see evidence that the process was constructed while unfolding, using available resources and therefore constituting a case of bricolage (Cunha et al., 1999); as such, the entire operation can be understood as an improvisation. What was being improvised was an exercise of rebellion: an act of fraternization across the trenches against formal orders.

The case reveals that context-specific conditions and resources, such as the proximity of trenches, common language and the freezing of the mud facilitated improvisational micro-behaviour, which was empowered by catalysing

situations/events that influenced the path of how improvised micro-behaviours were performed. We showed the importance that co-creating those performances played, which is in accord with another recently deployed case by Knight and Tsoukas (2018), elaborating how social media can be instrumental for organizing collective resistance (also see Ghobadi & Clegg, 2015). The adage that these men on the Western Front made their own history, even if not always in circumstances of their choosing, rings true. Equally, as the relative absence of subsequent truces shows, some men are able to make more history on some occasions than do others, with material as well as cultural affordances being significant. Ultimately the case showed that, with time to react and introduce counter measures, the original structure and rules were reasserted. Such an interplay can be generalized to workplace settings to explain how resistant behaviour based on improvisation can suspend structures and rules and their reassertion. The resulting framework is shown in figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

In terms of theory, the central contribution of this paper is to suggest combining two literature streams that have been largely handled separately, resistance and improvisation, in order to explore processes of unplanned collective resistance. On the

one hand, it explains how resistance can be performed in the most hostile of settings designed to thwart resistance and how prevailing structures can be reversed. Resistance does not necessarily need a linear sequence of a forceful event, planning and execution. It can be enacted simultaneously while unfolding, through improvisation. Transferring these insights to organization studies advances our understanding in several ways.

Forms of resistance can blend (Maher, 2010) and contain compliant behaviours to various degrees (Ybema & Horvers, 2017) as the process of resistance unfolds, even without the actors' acknowledgement. Different expressions of resistance were involved in the improvisational process. For example, at its end, authorities labelled the truce as an episode of insurrection. Yet, in the beginning, it amounted to not much more than what Scott (2005) terms the 'primitive resistance' of infrapolitics, those acts, gestures and thoughts that are not quite political enough to be perceived as such (Scott, 1990, p. 183). Initially, it seemed not to be a recognizable form of political action, its practices being not overtly political either in terms of form or content. However, the infrapolitical process gained so much traction that fraternization became seen as a full-fledged case of insurrection, visible and threatening to the existing institutional order. In other words, the implication for research into workplace resistance is a shift from how resistance can be performed to those conditions that allow it to be thwarted.

We can deepen the texture of explanations of improvisation by introducing a political-motivational dimension. The existing literature mainly portrays improvisation as a functional, even if failed, reaction to some pressing event in order to *solve* a problem at hand (Cunha et al., 2003). In contrast, our study argues that improvisation can also question *existing solutions* as an expression of agency (with implicit political underpinnings). The case indicates that the resistive acts were motivated by no more pressing need than the sentiments of Christmas aligned with the availability of affordances with which to interrupt the war. The improvisation was political, an observation insufficiently tackled by the literature, because it challenged and changed the ordering of formal inter-organizational relations on the battlefield. Various motives, such as humanity, dignity, moral safety, social, cultural or basic needs might show why actors creatively respond through doing deviance in certain settings, showing their disregard for the norms through motivations that breach politically and authoritatively constraining frames. We extended the improvisation literature theoretically by presenting improvisation as a political act that eludes, evades or denies formal definitions of the situation. Knowing more about the emergence of improvisation in adverse settings is important, as it can constitute an ingredient of flexibility and adaptiveness. There is need to know more, therefore, about the presence of improvisation in resistance and of resistance in improvisation.

We can extend the notion of truces as collective and informal actions that emerged improvisationally from below rather than being negotiated from above. In complement to strategic or operational truces that have clear formal dimensions, truces can assume different expressions. Prior literature argued that mindful and reflective actors (Bucher & Langley, 2016; Dittrich et al., 2016) dynamically incorporate past experiences, projections of the future and/or situational evaluations of the present context (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). In these cases, truces might be embedded in structures as an organizational arrangement in order to reduce operational friction (Nelson & Winter, 1982; Wiedemann et al., 2018). This case, however, shows that truces can be also an expression of resistance to suspend structures that are envisaged by the organization.

Besides the extended reasoning for truces in organizations, we can contribute to the notion of truces with regards to the intended functional state: Scholars showed that actors who seek to maintain a temporary settlement of hostilities over time will implement formal structures to do so (Wiedemann et al., 2018). The case of the Christmas Truce is an instance of a temporary settlement that did not endure. They did not organize in order to form a truce; instead the truce was an informally improvised break from what was officially defined as their real objective: the death and defeat of the other side. Consequently, the truce was a means to a real end rather than the end in itself. The intended functional state of the truce was not the truce itself but a dynamic

objective in search for peace and safety. Hence, future research should examine how truces are used to assert interests in contrast to look at interests to form a truce.

Limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. First, the extremeness of the event is illuminating but may limit the transferability of the findings. Initial expectations about a short war, may have led men to imagine a community of 'religious beliefs and thoughts of home' (Hallifax, 2010, p. 109) for a moment, above and beyond the imagined communities represented in the reality of war (Anderson, 2006). In subsequent years, as the war became ever more pointless and terrible, such expectations were less tenable.

Second, the case is historical. We see our effort of theoretical extension as an exercise in disciplined imagination if only because no data could be collected based on direct observations or systematic interviewing, there is a possibility that the documentary accounts drawn on may be retrospective rationalizations. Nonetheless, they are accounts and accounts are the stuff of our social science (Silverman, 2015). In this respect, their historicity matters not.

Third, collective and unplanned resistance can occur in settings in which it garners legitimacy, as per the massive retreats from the front of Russian soldiers prior to the Bolshevik insurrection of 1917, when the ability of Russia's officers to command

obedience became negated by rumours and hopes of social transformation as well as an end to the war in the wake of the February Revolution, when Tsar Nicholas was forced to abdicate and a provisional government installed. The Eastern Front erupted in spontaneous 'trench bolshevism' (Wildman, 1970). From an institutional perspective, the resistance of the Christmas Truce was an expression of rebellion rather than being creative or productive of a more rational strategy, such as a permanent end of hostilities or the creation of a revolutionary order, however contrived. Future research could therefore analyse further cases of truces, such as occurred in the Bolshevik revolution (cf. Smith, 2015; Wade, 2016) and explore the extent to which validation plays a role in active processes of organization. Performing resistance based on improvisation, as provided in this paper, is not necessarily idiosyncratic. New forms of multimodal communication (Knight & Tsoukas, 2018) render collective and improvised resistance possible in circumstances very different from those of trench warfare. Unconstrained by the necessity for co-presence, other than virtually, there are opportunities for truce-forming that defy authorities' spatial control of territory, even if unsuccessful (Ghobadi & Clegg, 2015). Consequently, the context of our case is extreme but particularly revelatory about non-hierarchical channelling of resistance through social media, for instance.

Conclusion

By invoking the case of the 1914 Christmas Truce we studied how resistance can be an act of improvisation, in particular adverse circumstances. Specifically, we explored the way resistance can emerge as improvised political acts. We draw four main inferences for the understanding of enacting resistance based on improvisation. First, the significance of the co-creation of motives and actions. Second, instead of having (a considerable amount) of time to perform planning and subsequent execution, actors might engage in cycles of extending behaviour and validating step by step; in this way, co-constructing their resistance in adverse settings. Third, the relevance of facilitating conditions/resources and catalysing situations that influence the path of enacting improvisational micro-behaviour. Fourth, truces may be the means to something larger. Improvisation, as an expression of agency, creates potential friction in organizations. In this case it was obviously countered. The same is very likely in other cases that are present in contemporary workplaces, online communities and other sites where organization happens. Our work offers a theoretical extension of the concept of improvisation by explicitly connecting it with resistance in an interpretation that can easily be refined or contradicted by other authors as we have relied only on easily available public sources.

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