

## 1 Introduction: theorizing power and the self

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Relations of power and the experience of people as subjects were two horizons of cultural theory in the late-twentieth century; they remain so in the twenty-first. But precisely how do these two sides of our human reality touch, mark, even remake one another? Where is the common ground between them? Our intellectual heritage from critical theory, all too often, has led us to focus upon the political structures and the economic circumstances in which people abide while disregarding the motivations, emotions, and meanings that modulate or vitalize these structures and circumstances. Our heritage from psychology and psychological anthropology all too often has led us to mistake the cross-cultural vicissitudes of people's sentiments and behaviors for reflections of a Western form of self. Not only have these two rich traditions frequently ignored each other's province; each has tended to define itself in opposition to the other. Until recently, many critical theorists were apt to denounce the very attempt to craft psychological models as essentializing – especially models emphasizing psychic universals of deep motivation or affect.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, many psychological anthropologists were apt to dismiss the study of power as derivative of a moral rather than an intellectual agenda.<sup>2</sup>

It grows ever more obvious that unmasking contemporary power relations and generating truly useful psychological models must lie at the confluence of these two heritages. As Fanon argued long ago (1967), one of the most crushing abilities of political oppression is to effect psychological forms of alienation in which people lose loyalty to themselves – to their profoundest feelings and to their love of self. Political perspectives that do not bring psychological theorizing into their purview must then be incomplete. Conversely, psychological theorizing that ignores power relations is liable to take human oppression for human nature. This liability has been evident since the dawn of modern Western psychological theory in ideas like Freud's "penis envy." It remains equally evident in evolutionary psychologists' recent insistence that natural selection favors females who are "slow to arouse sexually" and who are light-skinned (Ellis and Symons 1997:197–198; van den Berghe and Frost 1986).<sup>3</sup>

Earlier in this century there were noteworthy attempts to mediate this intellectual divide. Herbert Marcuse, a member of the post-Marxist Frankfurt

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School, undertook a critical reading of Freud (1955).<sup>4</sup> For Marcuse, external power relations were internalized as cultural “performance principles,” socially prescribed activities that channel human energy, demand renunciations, and universally disguise themselves as necessitated by the specter of scarcity (Marcuse 1955:35–40).<sup>5</sup> The result was “surplus repression” – gratuitous inhibitions that barred the unfolding of truly human capacities for love and for enjoyment.<sup>6</sup>

In anthropology, the culture and personality school took up the issue of power in studies of the psychologically coercive/permissive sides of culture. Their intent was to use ethnography to reformulate theories of the self – thereby broadening psychology’s and anthropology’s foundations as sciences. Margaret Mead, for example, offered a cultural relativist critique of Freud. Freud leaned towards the idea that conflict between the human body and the body politic was fundamental to the nature of society (1961:141–143). In *Coming of Age in Samoa*, Mead vindicated the utopian potentialities of human society that Freud disparaged. In Freud’s vision, much human unhappiness derived from civilization’s unrelenting demands upon the energies of the person, demands imprinted in the form of a punitive conscience, internalized through the agency of parental figures, and evident in sexual repression (1961). Mead countered that a culture could be created – in Samoa indeed had been created – which did not exploit but accommodated human needs.<sup>7</sup>

On the one rim of this power/self divide, then, we find continental philosophy on being and action oriented toward uncovering existential verities of the human condition. On the other rim we find American anthropology in the wake of Boas, seeking to use ethnography to gain purchase on Western personality theory. From these extraordinarily different vantage points began to emerge what is at least retrospectively a common ground. Alas, for decades to follow, mainstream psychological anthropologists obdurately insisted on conceptualizing emotional or cognitive schemata in synchronic/static terms – betraying lingering desires to unearth an ostensibly de-historicized and de-politicized human “nature” that was immune to the influences of power. Other anthropologists – in the tradition of Mead, Benedict, and Malinowski – continued to use ethnography to critique Western theory, but frequently abandoned the aims of these (often unacknowledged) predecessors. While earlier anthropologists had used ethnographic critique in the service of developing more comprehensive psychological models, these ethnographic deconstructionists were apt to insist that anthropology could at best aspire to a particularistic cultural relativism (cf. Strauss 2000). In the same spirit, many scholars who authored fashionable and intriguing studies of personhood or subjectivity in various cultures and historical periods seemed unwilling to acknowledge that their work had implications for psychological and anthropological theory.

Running in tandem with these divisive intellectual postures were efforts to develop the fertile space between the intellectual horizons of power and the self.

In this first chapter we begin by mapping this space. We then retrace fruitful twentieth-century efforts to cultivate it, which came from many disciplinary directions and out of which twenty-first century culture theory must grow. We also review the recent groundswell of interest in psychological anthropology in reaping this harvest – those works that are kindred to our own. In short, we aim to give this book, figuratively speaking, its homeland, its ancestors, and its family.

### **Mapping power and the self**

To begin we offer a few words of definition concerning selfhood and power. *Self* we take to be as an encompassing domain term that includes within it virtually all aspects of personhood and subjectivity. The self is constituted by acts of identification with internal elements of experience and with persons, groups, and representations in the cultural world (Mageo 1998:3–36). As such, it is irrevocably implicated in power relations. *Identity* we take to be the sense of self that derives from acts of identification (Mageo 1998:38–39). In other words, one may identify with one’s emotions, as women in Western societies were once encouraged to do (Lutz 1990), or with one’s problem-solving capacity, as men were encouraged to do (Tannen 1991:49–50, 51–53). Both of these kinds of identification are with facets of the subjective inner self. Alternatively, one can identify with one’s family, clan, lineage, or village – as people do in many of those societies anthropologists have traditionally studied. This is to construct identity through the relations of one’s social self (e.g. Strathern 1990). In some societies people are encouraged initially to form subjective identifications, in others social identifications, but in the end both are ingredients in identity everywhere (Mageo 1998). Furthermore, while in any given culture certain experiences are likely to be hallmarked as definitive of personhood, the individual’s personal identifications tend to shift continually, as in Stuart Hall’s notion of “contextual suturing.”

Hall (1996:3–6) emphasizes that identities are points of temporary attachment that “suture” an actor to a variety of subject-positions in the divergent social locations of his or her life. These subject-positions and social locations exist only within a specific cultural and historical context, which provokes situational ego-investments and fosters situational strategies. Subject-positions, furthermore, are galvanized by fields of cultural value and power that are embraced or resisted through the work of subjectivity – that is, by bringing one’s own feelings and experience to bear on preexistent values and powers. This view is consonant in various ways with those taken by this book’s authors.

*Power* can be conceived as socioeconomic and as entailing physical coercion or, alternatively, as an epistemic constraint of cultural assumption. The idea of power as socioeconomic or physical coercion easily associates with Max Weber’s definition of power as individuals’ ability to carry out their own will

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despite resistance – to exert *agency* over and against the will of others who oppose it (1958). By contrast, Foucauldian perspectives emphasize power as an epistemic function – the constraints of supposition and category that underpin our very form of knowledge and that shape the experience of being a subject. Unlike Weber, Foucault is interested in tracing how knowledge and subjectivity operate as power in an a priori sense – the power of epistemic assumption *within* which action takes place.<sup>8</sup>

Folk conceptions have long blended power-as-episteme and power-as-agency into one another, for example: (1) in the idea of gods and spirits influenced by magic, ritual, prayer, or (2) in notions of charisma or mana. Gods and spirits can be seen as personified versions of epistemic power subjected to human agency by religious practice. Thus ethics are one manifestation of an episteme and may be personified in a god to whom people may pray for justice. Prayer, then, is a method of exerting agency through the evocation of an episteme. Mana and charisma can be seen as epistemic manifestations invested in an individual's personality and body, resulting in enhanced agency. Mana is typically translated as efficacy, although it especially denotes an efficacy manifest in fertility (Firth 1949; Shore 1989:142). Chiefs who have mana are usually taken to personify epistemic values (to be noble, virile, and so forth), but correspondingly their hands and other body parts are believed to have the power to inflict or cure sickness. Obviously our discourse in this volume is intended to be philosophical/scientific rather than religious but, as in these folk models of power, we reject any essentialized dichotomy between social power and agency on the one hand, and epistemic power and experience on the other. Together, these “powers” constitute a continuum in which the poles are always shading into one another. Together they chart the domain of power in relation to self, as well as situating these essays and the theoretical frameworks on which they draw in a common field of inquiry.

Both social and epistemic uses of the word “power” can be found in Marx's nineteenth-century writings, the first well developed and the second incipient. For Marx, social power in the form of capital is dictated by who owns the means of production. But power also takes the form of ideology, the classic example of which is religion – the opium of the people. Twentieth-century critical theory sought to articulate these infrastructural and superstructural forms of power. Fully tracing the development of this twentieth-century problematic is a work that would require volumes, but it will be useful to briefly situate the major critical theorists drawn upon by the authors herein within its scope.

### Twentieth-century articulations between power and the self

For contemporary anthropologists, one of the most influential early ideas that articulated agentive and epistemic power was Gramsci's notion of hegemony

([1948–1951]1992). Hegemony is what one might call “a naturalized ideology”: that is, an ideology that presents itself not as a philosophy with which one might or might not agree, nor as a moral system that describes how things should be, but rather as the way the world *is*. Gramsci’s idea that domination is as much a matter of worldview as it is of capital opened new questions. How did these structures of domination get inside people’s heads? How were they naturalized? Early answers can be found in Vygotsky’s activity theory ([1931]1992): interior worlds replay the culturally scripted social relations in which the child develops. Outer speech is interiorized and becomes conversation within the person, which then mediates between desire and the world. We tend to take what originates within us just as we take our bodies – as givens of the natural world.

Over the last several decades Foucault’s considerations of how structures of domination are naturalized have pervaded anthropological studies. For Foucault, hegemony is constituted through discourse. Though discourses in the Foucauldian model tend to reflect the episteme of a specific historical-cultural world, they are “within” as well as without – a language of the self as well as for it. What enters into this language and what remains unspoken shape human awareness. Three internal agencies that are separate in Freud’s model of the self – superego (conscience), ego (conscious awareness), and id (impulse) – are all implicitly constructed through discourse for Foucault. (1) Discourse operates as a form of surveillance, resembling Freud’s superego – the internal, repressive presence of “civilization” that spawns “discontents.” (2) Foucault’s discourse also produces knowledge, resembling Freud’s ego. Unlike this Freudian ego, however, discourse generates the very categories of knowledge and forms of facticity. In Victorian discourse, for example, sex became a new subject of knowledge and kind of fact (1990). (3) Discourse itself re-encodes, even recreates the domain of impulse. Nineteenth-century Victorian discourse incited a recognition and realization of sexuality in more personalized forms.

If Foucault cast light on the nature of hegemony, agency was bracketed in his work: those with social position and those without it were likewise compelled by discourses and the epistemes that authorized them. The issue of resistance was nonetheless pivotal for Foucault. Resistance was putatively the omnipresent “compatriot of power” (1980:142), but epistemes and resistances alike were ghostly entities – seemingly self-propelled. Indeed, it was unclear who was resisting just as it was irrelevant who was speaking. Here we had power forming the subject, but the subject rarely appeared as an agent.

Raymond Williams’s notion of “counterhegemonic” discourse began to fill out the conceptual space highlighted by Foucault’s idea of resistance (1977). Following Williams, scholars in Cultural Studies investigated discourses that, while sharing the basic terminology and presuppositions of dominant discourses, defined themselves in reaction to hegemony. Cultural theorists also began

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drawing heavily on Bakhtin's idea of heteroglossia ([1975]1981) at least in part because it complicated the hegemonic domination depicted so compellingly in Foucault's model of discourse. From a Bakhtinian viewpoint, hegemonies were never in any sense complete: there was always a multitude of discordant, contradictory "voices" within society and within the self. Bakhtin's voices engaged in and enlisted discourses but they were personified and dialogic rather than ghostly. Feminist and postcolonial theorists gave substance to these voices – showing us that they were embodied in people who had a particular social place, who featured certain forms of selfhood, and who were framed by a politics of knowledge.

Bourdieu's praxis theory (1992) also promised to supplement the deficiencies in Foucault's models of power and the self. If one considers "symbolic capital" as a kind of individual or in-group prerogative, *à la* Bourdieu, then epistemic power can be seen as symbolic capital writ large – enlarged in breadth and depth to encompass the very conditions of shared social being. Epistemic power is like a panopticon that oversees the most basic preconditions of subjectivity itself. But symbolic capital can also be seen as Foucauldian epistemes-writ-small, in fields of interaction where people exert social force on one another. Then epistemes become the unconscious orienting practices that play out in daily cultural life. As habitus, epistemes also code strategies for cultural games that can be played to advantage by actual people, especially those who are in privileged positions to begin with, and to a lesser extent those who would resist them (Bourdieu 1992:16–22). Further, in the form of symbolic capital epistemic power reappears as points that can be amassed like money in a game or like money in a fluctuating stock market and that can be drawn upon in future moves. In praxis theory, epistemes, while still tacit, became potential modes of practical domination rather than merely the invisible givens of consciousness and social life.

As resistance was central to conceptualizing power for Foucault, so was embodiment for Bourdieu. Bourdieu explored embodiment through his idea of "hexis," which in some ways seemed the physical instantiation of habitus. Yet it was unclear in his notion of hexis how bodily experience was an agentive mode of personhood. Hexis bore down like an imprinting stamp upon the body – shaping the movement styles, tastes, and bodily mannerisms of cultural groups and of gendered groups within cultures (1992:82, 87, 93–94). While Bourdieu's hexis helped to bridge the conceptual distance between epistemes and embodiment, it left obscure our ability to resist power relations as bodies.

The body is never mere corporeality. Everywhere the body encodes those aspects of the experiencing subject that are hypocognized in cultural ideologies and overlaid by dogma (e.g., Kleinman 1980, 1985; Martin 1987, 1995; Haraway 1993). Aspects of self that are impersonated by the body, figuratively speaking, are also those most likely to be excluded/repressed in epistemes.

As such the body is a likely nexus of personal resistance and of agency. Just as with Foucault's model of resistance, the conceptual space highlighted by Bourdieu's bodily hexis was incompletely filled in. Bourdieu's concept of practice accounted well for the person as exercising self-interested agency but not for the person as experiencing or resistant subject.<sup>9</sup> In this lack of attention to subjectivity, to feeling, to personal meaning, Bourdieu left untheorized our most private struggles, personal conflicts, and the small triumphs that remain so emotionally and intellectually sustaining.

Can psychological anthropology help traverse the conceptual distance between habitus and active agency on the one side, and affect and embodiment on the other? Let us begin our crossing by asking: has there been a model of the body as invested with agency or of the body as resisting power relations? In Freud's work, the id was an unconscious and instinctual dimension of our humanity and was a radical Other within the self. The id was the not-me that resisted civilization and was discontent almost in principle even if it was also, paradoxically, the very root of human happiness. From a more current perspective, the id could be rewritten, not as an inevitably alienated-dissociated part of self, but as a potential mode of affective and embodied agency that can be brought within the compass of conscious identification and intentionality. For decades now, feminists have explored a similar view in their models of emotion (Lutz, chapter 9). The core reactions of the affective/embodied self can become as mad, as hysterical, as destructive as any other part of the us; this potentiality has been documented by Freud, the psychoanalysts who succeeded him, and many others. Nevertheless, these reactions, deep within the self, are a vital source of human resistance to power relations. For present purposes, this affective/embodied form of agency may be roughly termed "psychic power." Psychic power is crucial to what Scheper-Hughes has called a "critical psychological anthropology" (1992a:221).

The implicit tension between epistemic and psychic power, we suspect, is one reason that psychological anthropology has trouble finding a center today amid an emphasis on universal motivations or cognitive structures, on one hand, and critical analyses that consider affect and identity on the other. This academic power struggle, so to speak, is not new but it persists. Like the layer-cake model of action bequeathed to anthropology from Parsons and Kroeber, these disagreements inappropriately stratify social life into discrete realms of the cultural or symbolic, the social or politico-economic, and the psychological.<sup>10</sup> By making the self the focus of analysis, and by considering agency *and* experience as dynamic and relational, the essays in this volume engage rather than undercut our sensitivity to articulations between such levels and to the nuances of psychic motivation. As such they create new ways for theorizing power and the self. In the process this book sheds light on some of the cardinal issues and tensions in contemporary anthropology.

### **Critical psychological anthropology: twenty-first century directions**

Drawing lucid theoretical insights from original empirical research, the authors in this volume offer fresh approaches to opening the territory between the horizons of power and the self. The chapters wed a sweeping knowledge of relevant cultural theory with voices that emerge from case studies – studies that evince deep knowledge of and sympathy with their subjects. Together, we mean to fashion critical perspectives that encompass subjectivity and psychological models that comprehend power relations as an ever-present dimension of human psychology. We build on the existential and critical insights that cultural realities are created and recreated by human choices at the same time that human beings are shaped by political ideologies incorporated as modes of thinking, feeling, relating, performing, and embodiment. In line with the best work of the culture and personality school, and along with others in critical psychological anthropology, we use ethnopsychological studies of folk models to critique Western theory (see particularly Lutz 1988; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Scheper-Hughes 1992b).

*Power and the Self* is part of a larger effort in contemporary psychological anthropology to craft new theories by coupling local cognitive structures with broader conceptualizations of motivation, affect, and identity via the operation of epistemic and symbolic power (see for example Lave and Wenger 1991, Quinn and Strauss 1997, Holland *et al.* 1998, Mageo 1998).<sup>11</sup> Conversely, we combine critical theory and an advocacy for our subjects' human interests with theory-making about the self. These chapters trace the experiential journeys through which people achieve embodied, emotive, and strategic forms of agency within fields of social and epistemic power. They illustrate that forms of agency are intimately bound-up with the human capacity to innovate upon if not to reimagine existing schemata; these innovations and reimaginings are integral to the activity of self-making.

Ethnographic revelations emerge from these juxtapositions of power and the self, both in individual cases and in their relationship to each other. Our point is to use ethnography to discover non-essentializing ways of mapping structures and practices of power as they interact with cognitive and emotional schemata and with human experience. Doing so presents inherent problems because power and the self can each produce distortive knowledge about the world. Recent critiques of scientific inquiry expand upon Gramsci's idea of hegemony by demonstrating *à la* Foucault that power relations influence the questions asked, the manner in which questions are posed, and what counts as evidence in answer.<sup>12</sup> Psychological anthropologists have long argued that our sense of self is indelibly colored by the psychological economies in which we develop.<sup>13</sup> Working at objectivity in cultural terrain is like assuming an ongoing counter-transference on the part of the investigator, who must forever



deconstruct the phenomena she observes but also her position as observer, shaded as it inevitably is by power relations and culturally specific psychological orientations.

*Part I – Power differentials in the US*

Part I begins in the cultural territory from which its authors originate. Here we focus on institutionalized forms of social power in the US, the epistemes that sanction them, and the personal dramas through which people exert agency within the confines of institutions and epistemes. American studies of the self are apt to envision power as at odds with individuals. Indeed, from Emerson's "Self Reliance" to Lucas's "Star Wars," Americans have tended to valorize the individual. In contrast, listen to an early Chinese philosopher of the state, Mo Tzu (479–438 BC).

In the beginning . . . [p]eople existed as individuals. . . . [There were] a thousand concepts of right for a thousand men, and so on until there were a countless number of concepts of right for a countless number of men. All of them considered their own concepts . . . as correct and other people's concepts as wrong. And there was strife among the strong and quarrels among the weak. Thereupon Heaven wished to unify all concepts of right in the world. The worthy was therefore selected and made an emperor (quoted in Chan 1963:230).

Here individuality is a suspect renegade force at odds with heavenly order.<sup>14</sup> When people identify primarily with their groups, individualism is perceived as the source of social discord, as in Mo Tzu's origin story. Alternatively, inasmuch as people identify with individualism they dissociate group needs, which reappear in projected form as autonomous demonized powers: organized crime, communism, big government, and evil empires. This does not negate American studies' view that the state jeopardizes individuals' human needs and legitimate interests. Rather, it is a necessary realization that all vantagepoints, including those in this volume, are culturally positioned. In a Foucauldian sense, the American conceptualization of "the individual versus social power" is a site for the production of knowledge.

Chapter 2, Scheper-Hughes's "The Genocidal Continuum," argues war crimes like genocide dramatically illustrate a failure to regard others as human, but this failure also underlies many peace-time practices. Through their treatment in insane asylums or retirement homes, for example, inmates may be reduced to the status of objects out of place that need to be severed from society like the mad in Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1965). Hsu (1961) has argued that Americans take self-reliance as a basic marker of personhood; correspondingly, socially dependent categories of people are in jeopardy of being treated as non-persons. Scheper-Hughes concludes with her own radical version of participant-observation: a visit to her beloved aged parents who are

institutionalized in a state-run “home.” There she confronts the questions: what can affective/embodied resistance mean when one must rely on agents of the state to perform even one’s most intimate bodily functions? How can we survive in any meaningful sense as human subjects within contracting structures of social and epistemic power?

In Lachicotte’s chapter (“Intimate Powers, Public Selves”) our focus shifts to the late modern relatives of the inmates of earlier insane asylums – psychiatric outpatients. Here the state-as-institution is a Kafkaesque field in which it is nonetheless possible to exercise a degree of agency. Exploring the case of Roger – who is variously pronounced “obsessive-compulsive,” “bipolar,” “schizoid,” “borderline,” and so forth – Lachicotte considers the incipient heteroglossic character of psychiatric discourse. Although constituted to control people like Roger, psychiatric discourse turns out to be a source of symbolic capital that he can appropriate for his own ends. Lachicotte uses Bakhtin’s view of the heteroglossic nature of discourses like Roger’s to develop the concept of a “space of authoring” within which agency and resistance are possible. Drawing on Vygotsky for perspective on Roger’s discursive practice, Lachicotte emphasizes the recursive rather than oppositional relationship between the social as the outward repetition of psychic life, and subjectivity as the interiorization of the social. The kind of psychic distance that Obeyesekere (1981, 1990) previously dichotomized as the difference between private identity symbols and public ones is here made a continuum – or better, it turns dialogic. This dialog crisscrosses the boundary between the ostensible self and the omnipresent social other. As such, social and personal life do not disappear one into the other; rather, as Lachicotte puts it, they subsist as “two mediations of human existence.”

To extend this idiom, there are ways that a dialogic notion of identity can be used to comprehend human existence in ever-widening circles that spiral out from what Gilles Deleuze would call “pleats” or “folds” – those changing relationships that constitute membranes between the self and a world of external powers (1993). Analysis can move in widening arcs that touch progressively on interiorized motivational structures as well as the wider social and epistemic forces that interact with them and form their context. Here identity is constituted at the boundary between internalized and externalized forces – operating in that zone of contact between social and epistemic power, and the motivational responses that engage these as either accommodation or resistance. The pleats or folds of the self shift accordingly, sometimes pushing the envelope of subjectivity as resistance against established dogma and sometimes retreating inward in defense.

### *Part II – Transnational psychologies*

Transnationalism is an important late-modern venue for critical theorization of power, yet the psychologies that derive from transnational experience are little