Editorial

Rhetoric and the workings of Power; ethnographic explorations of the social contract in crisis.

Elisabeth Kirtsoglou – University of Durham

"... since you know as well as we do that right, as the world goes, is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must."

[431 BC, History of the Peloponnesian war by Thucydides Chapter XVII - Sixteenth year of the war - The Melian conference - Fate of Melos]

Rhetoric, Agency and the workings of Power.

As social, cultural and political subjects we are all constituted in power. Power is not something external to the subject, but rather a context and an idiom of subjectivity. It is creative and generative as Foucault would argue, and also relational in so far as it is manifested in relationships (Wolf 1999; Etzioni 1993; Kritzman 1988; Foucault 1977). It has long been argued that resistance itself is "never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (Foucault 1990: 95; cf. also Abu-Lughod 1990; Mitchell 1990; Reed-Danahay 1993; Williams 2008). In a recent article on autonomy and the French alterglobalisation movement, Williams –building on Moore's (1999) argument- claims that "[r]esistance… emerges not from an originary site but from oppositional practices, which… are always relational and dynamic" (2008 80-81).

The present collection of articles focuses on such 'relational and dynamic'—mostly discursive—practices seeking to examine the connections between power, identity, history and agency. Imbued with historicity and inspired from local narrative, the contributions in this special issue do not conflate power as a concept and a context with Western Powers as political formations. They rather attempt to deconstruct *relations*

of power, to examine the results of the excess of power inherent in modern political processes and to recover agency by taking local commentary seriously.

The decision to promote 'local commentary' into a key analytical tool is both theoretical and political. I shall begin by providing a brief outline of the theoretical importance of local narrative and I will then proceed to explain why the editors of this volume consider 'taking local commentary seriously' as being a politically significant analytical choice.

I have argued elsewhere that "[i]ndigenous commentary… is the very discursive field where political identity is constituted, not simply against abstract ideologies, but in the context of relations between persons and between collectivities" (Kirtsoglou 2006: 82). To put it in simpler terms, what everyday people *say* about politics and their *arguments* compose distinct political cosmologies, which can be seen as symbolic spaces where the actors make sense of history and participate in history making (ibid). Narrative as a means of making sense of history is not of course a novel idea. In a recent paper Carrithers explores Fischer Rosenthal's (1995) term 'orientation work', claiming that people –especially in times of upheaval and uncertainty- tend to devise interpretations of particular historical events that aim to persuade both themselves and others (Carrithers 2006: 195). The narrativisation of history that unfolds before oneself is then an attempt to situate the subject in a '*trajectory*', "by finding a larger story, a larger plot line" that serves a context where causal relations between events can be safely established (ibid). At the same time, 'imbued with historicity and cultural meaning', narrative "pertains both to the creativity of the actor and the authoring of personal and shared history" (Kirtsoglou 2004: 98). The identity and history making properties of narrative have also long been recognised by theorists (cf. Ricoeur 1983, 1988; Somers and Gibson 1994; McNay 2000). What is important to elucidate here is the connection commentary, narrative, rhetoric and agency. I take the first two terms to be relative and dependent on each other in a structured-structuring fashion. Commentary is a constitutive part of narrative; it generates narrative, it is generated by it and it is always finally contextualised in it. The relationship between commentary/narrative on the one hand and rhetoric on the other relies in the persuasive character of the former. In other words, what people *say* about politics (among other things) encapsulates a series of *arguments* that aim –as part of narrative- to

persuade the self and others, to make sense of history and to *author* history by attempting to offer an account of it. The difference between rhetoric and commentary/narrative, is that the former can include embodied practices, while the latter is generally understood as being composed of discursive practices only. Rhetoric is then a more inclusive –so to speak- term for what the papers in this volume are set to explore, namely the embodied and discursive workings of power.

Since Foucault it has become common knowledge that where there is power there is resistance, but this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power (Foucault 1990: 95). By concentrating on local rhetoric, the authors in this collection seek to enrich anthropological knowledge of power and resistance. In order however to steer away from negative conceptualisations of the power-resistance continuum I propose that we take a closer look at rhetoric and its relationship with agency. Rhetoric, Carrithers claims, has a cultural and distinctly human character (2005: 578). It "conveys cultural matter", but also "it demonstrates specific traits of humans in distinction to other species" since it is involved in the pedagogy of the young and thus "marks us off sharply from other social primates, who simply do not possess or teach particular styles of social acting" (ibid: 579). If we take rhetoric as encompassing all kinds of practical and discursive acts of persuasion, then I believe that we can fruitfully combine three distinct concepts in our present analysis: rhetoric, habitus and social imaginary. These three concepts stretch undoubtedly in distinct theoretical trajectories, which can nevertheless be seen as overlapping significantly, especially in relation to how we can understand agency vis-à-vis power and structure.

The social imaginary is a concept theorised by Castoriadis who is greatly preoccupied with what he calls *vis formandi*, the power of creation. In his astute reading of Sophocles' play Antigone, Castoriadis singles out the verses 332-363 and particularly the phrase "*ouden anthropou deinoteron*", meaning 'nothing is more terrifying, formidable, amazing, achievement capable than *anthropos* [man (sic]' (Castoriadis 2007: 15). One of the main characteristics that make *anthropos* such a formidable being – according to Sophocles- is the fact that s/he is 'self taught', i.e., not just capable of *being taught* (by someone else), but capable of *teaching oneself* and by consequence of

engaging in self-creation. *Anthropos* –Castoriadis argues- "creates himself as creator, in a circle, whose apparently vicious logic reveals its ontological primacy" (ibid: 16).

Rhetoric –and speech much before that- has not been *taught*, or *given* to man as a gift "nor is his political substance given or acquired once and for all" (Castoriadis 2007: 17). We have taught ourselves the power to persuade each other and indeed as Carrithers argues "we even exert ourselves rhetorically to teach ourselves to succeed by rhetoric in the micropolitics of everyday life" (2005: 579)[1].

Castoriadis' *vis formandi* (the power of creation), is –in my opinion- what Carrithers advocates to be the 'mark of distinctly human sociality', that is "the capacity to change and to create new cultures" (2005: 580; 1992). Rhetoric –as a term that encompasses narrative in the manner I have outlined above- strongly relates to *vis formandi*, in the sense that it allows social actors to make sense of history and to make history[2] by *devising* the practical and discursive tools necessary for both these actions.

If discursive and practical acts of persuasion relate so closely to the power of creation, or else to the "creativity of the subject and its capacity to produce original 'figurations'" (Kirtsoglou 2004: 38; McNay 2000: 20; Braidotti, 2002: 13), what are the implications of this relationship to our understanding of agency? Carrithers claims that "[t]rough the glass of rhetoric we can see that, in any moment of interaction, some act to persuade, others are the targets of persuasion" (2005: 578). Working further on this idea, Carrithers borrows Lienhardt's (1961) term agents and patients[3] and attempts to "recover the fundamentally *inter*active character of agency and rhetoric urging us to speak of "agency-cum-patiency" (ibid). The *inter*active –I would call it intersubjective- character of agency partly ensues from the inherent multiplicity and relational quality of subjectivity (Kirtsoglou 2004: 37, 38). It is nevertheless made absolutely clear in the instituting-instituted schema of Castoriadis. Once the power of creation –the *instituting* social imaginary- gives rise to new forms of being (be it language or institutions), these

---

[1] By implication, one could argue that rhetoric is distinctly human, not only because it is implicated in pedagogy (teaching the others by persuasion), but also and perhaps primarily because it is the par excellence tool of teaching oneself by persuading oneself about the content of what is being taught.

[2] More specifically, according to Carrithers rhetoric is "(1) the moving force in interaction, (2) the cultural and distinctly human character of that force, (3) the creation of new cultural forms in social life" (2005: 577).

[3] Lienhardt's original distinction between agents and patients sought to differentiate between initiators and objects of action.

crystallize and solidify into the *instituted social imaginary* (Castoriadis 2007: 72-73). And since this process is never final –otherwise there would not be any form of cultural and social change- the self can be envisaged as existing in a perpetual state of 'creating' *and* 'being created', creating *while* being created.

Rhetoric as a *par excellence* expression of the instituted-instituting social imaginary, involves –as it has been pointed out- discourse and practice. It is through its special relation to practice that rhetoric can be conceptualised in connection with Bourdieu's concept of habitus. This is the case because, like habitus, rhetoric relies on structured structures that function as structuring structures and employs historical effects which themselves create more history (Bourdieu 1990: 53). Practical rhetorical acts necessarily rely on habitus as instituted social imaginary. More often than not –as Bourdieu claims- this kind of practical knowledge lies indeed 'beyond the grasp of consciousness' (1977: 94). At the same time however, precisely because one is reflexively aware of his/her wish to persuade, practical rhetorical acts have the capacity to institute radically new history attesting to the existence of *vis formandi*. Radically new practical forms –or some of them- will of course eventually become themselves instituted social imaginary, "embodied history, internalized as second nature, and so forgotten as history". (Bourdieu 1990: 56)

My decision to engage in this rather theoretical discussion on the elective affinities between rhetoric, social imaginary and habitus has been motivated from the need to engender a positive analytical framework for the understanding of agency and the power-resistance continuum. Foucault has long argued that power is not a negative but a productive element (1977: 24, 194). However, Foucault's idea that resistance "is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power" (1990: 95) has been debated in special relation to its consequences in the theorization of agency (cf. Williams 2008; Zizek 1999; Sangren 1995; Moore 1994; McNay 1992; 2000 among others). According to McNay, "Foucault's consideration of how the dialectic of freedom and constraint is realized in the process of subject formation results, ultimately, in his thought vacillating between the moments of determinism and voluntarism" ultimately foreclosing an account of agency (2000: 9). These criticisms not withstanding, I believe that Foucault's theorisation of power as "co-extensive with society" and "interwoven with other relations, which

condition them and are conditioned by them" (1980: 142, 104) can be useful here so long us it is understood in the more general framework of agency I have delineated above. Power and resistance can therefore be understood neither as antithetical, all-pervasive terms, nor as succumbing to the control of some volitional/voluntaristic subject who manipulates them at will. Power and resistance can be rather regarded as indispensable constituents of the instituting-instituted imaginary. It follows then, that the relationship between power and agency is itself not one of opposition but to some extent of mutual formation. The various discursive and practical acts of resistance at once question and crystallise relations of power, deconstruct and reconstruct, challenge and reify them. Precisely because resistance is rhetorical, insofar as it needs to persuade oneself and others, it follows the same course of creating new forms of social action (on the basis of well known cultural material) and becoming itself history that systematically conceals its genesis.

In dialogue with Power; the social contract in crisis.

Apart from its immense potential for the understanding of power, agency and the positioning of social actors in political fields, the decision to 'take local commentary seriously' has been –as noted above- utterly political itself. The in-depth ethnographic approach favoured by anthropologists can undoubtedly illuminate the hidden aspects of politics, but we nevertheless often hesitate to put the political views of our informants at the epicentre of the analysis. For these views are sometimes uncomfortable. The radical, insurgent, or conspiracy-prone disposition of local-level discourse is analytically difficult to handle. All the more so because, from the point of view of local actors – especially those situated on the periphery of international decision-making centres – the Western Powers receive most of the credit and most of the blame for all the major events that have shaped the course of history. They are held responsible for justice and injustice in the world, poverty and war, globalisation, and the spread of ideas about democracy, morality, and political government. They are even held responsible for actions and omissions of local governments and local actors who – in a populist manner – find in the Great Powers convenient scapegoats and easy answers to otherwise difficult questions.

Seen from one point of view local apprehension towards powerful nations like the US, or coalitions like the EU and NATO can be explained in terms of nationalism, irredentism, corruption and generally matters of *internal* – rather than international – power relations. According to the ethnographic documentations of this volume US's relationship to various countries such as Greece, Syria, Guatemala, Panama and Peru seems to follow a typical pattern of US intervention in local political scenes that subsequently invites generalized blame for a variety of problems and conditions. Kalny in this volume is examining local perceptions of the US among activists in Guatemala, paying special attention to the real and perceived role of the US in local politics. US intervention in Guatemala has been widely documented by regional specialists as Kalny confirms. The US has been implicated in the 1954 military coup in Guatemala while during the subsequent decades of civil war US military forces, secret services and politicians were actively involved in the persecution of Guatemalan communist forces (Kalny this volume). Perhaps the worse effect of these repeated US interventions Kalny claims is the fact that the US is used nowadays in Guatemala as a convenient scapegoat for all social evils thus discouraging and even obstructing much needed social changes.

Greece has similar examples to offer. Its strategic position in the Cold War constituted foreign intervention a 'consistent pattern in the country's relationship with the West' (cf. Sutton 2003: 197; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2009, this volume). Mistrust in the sincerity of the Great Powers is not the only result of the Cold War political legacy (cf. Marcus 1999). In Greece too, the US has been used as a focus of generalized blame, often in a populist manner (Herzfeld 1993; Kirtsoglou 2006; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, this volume), while it has also been argued that Greek anti-Americanism can itself be explained in the context of Greek nationalism and irredentism (cf. Stefanides 2007).

Both in Syria and in Peru –according to Reedy (this volume) and Coxshall (this volume) respectively – the role of the Western Powers in the local politics is documented but it can in no way offer a holistic explanation of the current problems in these countries. As Coxshall rightly argues "attributing power inequalities in Rio Blanco [Peru] to Spanish colonialism and/or European imperialism conceals the complexities and contingencies that constitute and shape global connections today" (this volume).

At the same time however, dismissing people's commentary on the hegemonic role of the Great Powers and its effects as misguided, populist, conspiratorial, or simplistic, is equally problematic. Local rhetoric about the role of the US in the shaping of modern history reveals the presence of a hegemonic global empire that *presents itself* as the regulator of international developments (cf. Stefanides 2007: 190). As we have argued with Theodossopoulos (this volume), the US claims the role of the international guarantor for itself and has acted upon it on many occasions, often in an entirely unilateral manner. In a recent article on the effects of Bush's administration on Transatlantic relations, Hastings argues that "[A]merica has always viewed itself as exceptional; that it was imbued with a special role in the world" (2009: 18). Most importantly however, according to Hastings, the idea that the US has an exceptional position as the sole superpower in the world meant that it *perceived itself* as being "exempted from the international regimes and multilateral legal frameworks that lesser powers employed to safeguard their interests" (ibid).

The rhetoric on American omnipotence that can be found in various regions, being articulated by social actors with different histories and cultural backgrounds is therefore sketching the very real weaknesses inherent in the political vision of the modern era (cf. Kirtsoglou 2006). While in principle consensus is deemed to be the ultimate criterion of legitimacy in modern Western societies (cf. Scruton 2002: 8; Kirtsoglou 2006), in reality the asymmetrical relations of power between nations and regions allow for unilateral actions and flamboyant exhibitions of supremacy in the name of security, democracy and international stability. The very concepts that should guarantee a consensus upon the principles of international justice (cf. Rawls 1971) are employed to dissolve 'the constraints of justice that bind us' and to cast certain nations and groups 'outside the protection of the rules of justice' (Frey and Morris 1991: 9, 10; Kirtsoglou 2006: 79). As a result, "the 'social contract' as a principle of Western post-enlightenment political organisation has been and is being constantly violated" (Kirtsoglou 2006: 79). Among the numerous and diverse techniques of legitimising this infringement is the creation of 'interior exclusions', that is carried out either through attacks on morality and reason, or through the very processes of 'modernisation' that will supposedly guarantee the fulfilment of the contractarian promise, by 'ensuring the equality of the signatories' and the existence of 'sanctioning mechanisms in the event that the contract is broken' (ibid).

The attacks on morality take the form of discourses that indirectly or openly exploit the theme of 'civilisation' versus 'barbarism'. Examples of such insidious and politically disorienting attacks on morality can be found in popular and populist versions of arguments on the position of women in Islamist regimes, and of course in the discourse on terrorism (cf. Kirtsoglou 2006). In turn, dismissing some of the most extreme expressions of local commentary as mere conspiracy theory is a form of attack on reason and this is why I have thus far insisted that 'taking local commentary seriously' (in all its forms and expressions) is an utterly political act. For, it seeks to ethnographically address the purported supremacy of western rationality which often cannot stand the close scrutiny of an anthropologically situated analysis (cf. Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2010). Finally, the Tanzanian example of post-socialist governance (Green this volume) that brought little change to local political organisation while perpetuating power asymmetries is an excellent example of the violation of the social contract through the very processes of 'modernisation' that are supposed to guarantee it.

Seen in this context, this special issue is composed of '*ethnographic explorations of the social contract in crisis*'. Local commentary about the US and the Great Powers in general can be viewed as a narrative metaphor for the actors' *lived relationship with power*. Informants around the world speak in this volume, in their own historically situated manner of what Gledhill points out in his concluding remarks on 'Power and its Disguises': "[t]he Western imaginary has always been based on the assumption that all humanity could benefit from allowing the West to exercise domination, reinforcing its case with democratic, capitalist, industrial, scientific and rationalist imaginaries" (2000: 241). In the various ethnographic documentations that comprise this special issue, 'America', or the 'West' are being revealed as fluid categories of blame and *symbols* of power that feature in rhetorical efforts to position the self vis-à-vis asymmetry. Reedy (this volume) rightly calls these narratives of global power socially relevant 'speech-acts' (cf. Austin 1962) that effect the construction of identities and give people a sense of agency. What often seems to be a conspiratorial, unjustified, overrated and populist strategy of blame, can be regarded as a relational and dynamic form of oppositional practice (cf. Williams 2008) that connects power, identity, history and agency. As we have pointed out with Theodossopoulos (this volume) narrative power compensates so to speak for the lack of 'real', 'hands on' power to influence political developments.

All the examples presented here by the various contributors revolve around the discursive reworking of the past and the present that reveals the actors' struggle to control *logos*. I use the term *logos* here to signify discourse, meaning and causality thus encompassing the instituting-instituted characteristics of rhetoric. *Logos* can be thus understood not as speech, but as a metanarrative of rhetoric that encapsulates and objectifies rhetorical effects. Like rhetoric, *logos* is generative and it can thus be understood as a site for the articulation of agency and precisely because it is connected to meaning and causality it is deeply implicated in the production of power. Hence *logos* produces power just as it is produced by it and therefore, 'talking about the powerful' is both an act of authorship and an act of resistance. It is, I claim, a form of *dialogue with power*. This dialogue provides in turn a context where symbols of power like the US are cut down to size (Theodossopoulos, this volume), discussed, commented, criticized as morally inferior (and thus the source of all evil), and at the same time portrayed as smaller, and less threatening, than they really are (Reedy and Kalny this volume).

Power Relations; the struggle to command *logos*.

Local efforts to engage in dialogue with power are certainly polyphonic in the sense that the struggle to command *logos* can never assume a homogenous form. In the context of mining conflicts in Peru, Coxshall warns us against binary conceptualizations of powerful/powerless and urges us to 'talk across difference' focusing on 'points of friction' (cf. Tsing 2005). This will enable us to effectively illustrate the complexities and contingencies of global connections.

Indeed, various papers in this volume attest to the existence of internal differentiations in local discourse. Theodossopoulos, for example, demonstrates how Panamanian views of the United States reflect divergent opinions, sometimes critical and sometimes empathetic. In a process that Theodossopoulos calls 'humanisation of the other', Panamanians perceive their own identity as a never ending process and negotiate their relationship with the US accordingly, in historically rich narratives that are marked by the return of the Canal to Panamanian authorities in 1999. Like Panamanians, many in Greece admire the education and efficiency of North Americans. Despite blaming the US

as agents of disaster that betrayed Greek trust in the West, some Greeks also recognize that 'the Americans' are pioneers in the arts and sciences, or even 'natural' allies of Greece (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, this volume). Similarly, Kalny points out that while criticism of the US is widespread in Guatemala "this powerful nation is also highly admired, and a permanent flow of mostly young men… head to the North", in such a manner that a "countless number of families depend on *remesas* (remittances), their relatives send back to Guatemala from the US".

The seemingly irreconcilable internal contradictions of local rhetoric can be explained if one considers *logos* as a site for the construction and negotiation of identity. The US as a symbol of power enacts the very characteristics of power that is both generative and destructive. Being in dialogue with power is revealed as a context for the negotiation of a collective self in process. As Reedy carefully demonstrates, conspiracy theories about the US are part of constructing a modern 'Syrian' identity, one that is not separate from a general 'Arab' one.

If the self is constituted in *logos* – and instituted in practice – and *logos* constitutes and is constitutive of power, then the effects of power that is 'exercised from innumerable points' (Foucault 1977; 1980) need to be considered. The intricate relations of power undoubtedly play a significant role in the production of subjectivities both at the micro and macro levels and the ethnographies in this special issue offer ample support to such a claim. The cultural dimensions of governance in Tanzania for instance, explored here by Maia Green, become a context for the examination of the relationship between power and subjectivity. Part of the democratization and 'good governance' agenda in post-socialist Tanzania is the establishment of a civil society sector that aimed in the elimination of poverty and the enhancement of local participation. This project is by no means unusual to other projects in other parts of Eastern Africa (cf. Green 2003, this volume) but, as the author clearly demonstrates, it brought little change to local political organization. Instead of acting as intermediaries between the family and the state, civil society organizations were modelled on existing structures of governance and thus merely replicated social relations and practices associated with government. When local people talk of 'government on paper' they engage critically with what Green calls *apolitical* economy; namely, the insistence on form over content and the idea that communities are

undifferentiated units of production, consumption and exchange that can be subjected to some universal governmentality.

The Tanzanian example of ordinary citizens "who strive to situate themselves in particular relationship to government and power" (Green this volume) is not unique in this collection. Equally telling is the case of Guatemalan women documented here by Kalny. When women face family planning issues and discrimination, local activists speak of either Spanish colonialism (that supposedly brought with it the denigration of women) or of the tragic influence of the US as the country responsible for illegal trafficking of children for adoption. Kalny is then right to argue that references to foreign evil powers are employed to silence Guatemalan women who struggle with a local network of power. The wider effects of power at the macro-level are employed at the micro-level in order to silence subaltern voices by simplistic strategies of transference of responsibility. Similar issues of micro (so to speak) level power dynamics are expressed by Syrian informants who clearly comment on the seizing of power by the Alawi clan with the help of the US (Reedy, this volume). In turn, according to Reedy's informants, the non-Alawi population must "put up with a corrupt leadership that hoards resources and money without sharing it with its people". Despite being seemingly a story on the terrible effects of US intervention in local politics, this narrative – as Reedy pointedly claims – is about power and the impossibility of a permanent Syrian category of national identity.

The implication of *logos* and power in the formation of identities is evident in the case of Greece and Peru albeit in different ways. It has been argued that anti-Americanism in Greece can be explained in terms of the lack of American support to specific nationalist and irredentist Greek claims such as the Cyprus issue. As we have shown with Theodossopoulos (this volume), Greek anti-Americanism is closely connected to the production of modern Greek cultural and national identities vis-à-vis global power politics and interests. In turn, the negotiation of identity in the context of micro/macro power relations in Peru takes a different form but follows a similar pattern. In an ethnographically rich description Coxshall explains why the 'population' of highland Piura chose to capitalize on indigeneity despite the fact that they reject 'indigenous' as an identity label because of its pejorative connotations in Peru. In their campaign against a mining company the local population managed to benefit from

globalisation, political environmentalist discourses and the UN Declaration on Indigenous Peoples by capitalizing on the very identity concept they otherwise reject.

The proposition that identities are produced within relations of power is almost self-evident. In turn, my argument here that local commentary on the powerful is a kind of dialogue with power, and thus a site of resistance, is based on the intricate relation between power and *logos*, that is between power, and the effects of rhetoric. Local people's struggle to command *logos* marks their struggle to command history, discourse, the production of meaning and the understanding of causality. Like any dialogue, the dialogue with power can never be simple and monovocal. It is comprised by many and antithetical voices, it is carried out at various levels and it encompasses conflict. In all its internal multiplicity this dialogue remains a site for the negotiation of identity and the enactment of agency.

What is important to consider however, is that power in the political realm of modernity is not a force independent of and unrelated to forms of political organization. Relations of power take specific political forms, and in fact, as Kapferer (this volume) explains, such political forms create and shape the very field where political society is produced. Kapferer argues that the state as an idea and a political formation is a political machine with a totalizing dynamic oriented to achieve potency in the field of social relations. Echoing Deluze and Guattari (2002 [1980]; 2004 [1972]) Kapferer claims that the totalizing dynamic of the state is intrinsic to all social formations (regardless of whether and actual state exists or not) and is counteracted by the dynamic of the war machine. The 'war machine' is not only about warfare. It is "*rhizomic* in practice and open-ended, a relational and structuring process that spreads out laterally and horizontally in all directions" (Kapferer, this volume). The dynamic of the state and the dynamic of war (as a rhizomic process and not simply as warfare) are irreducible to each other, while modern states do not fall neatly into any of the two categories. *Corporate* states, neo-liberal and neo-conservative policies express major aspects of the war machine, but power in general, as it is created in social processes, is always in excess of what the state can command or control. The struggle of everyday people to command *logos*, that takes the form of challenging the "legitimacy of sovereign powers and its relations to human

misery and oppression" is the very process that intensifies what Kapferer calls the constant crisis of the state.

Kapferer claims that violent power is at the heart of the authority of the state and supports a variety of disciplinary practices that facilitate the state as the central force in the production of the social and of society. Tanzanian civil society organizations can be viewed as an example of disciplinary practice here. In turn, the critique offered to the notion of the social contract (and its ideological implications) by all our informants in this volume is closely connected to Kapferer's argument that the very notion of the social contract "is grounded in such processes and itself is a major ideological instrument for the production of the society of the state".

Bureaucratic institutions (such as those in Tanzania) and practices of cultural (re)invention such as the examples of Peru and Syria are implicated in the social production of the modern state that itself encompasses both the dynamic of the state and that of the 'war machine'. In that sense, the effort to command *logos* is not only related to the negotiation of identity and agency from a site of resistance, but it is also a desperate (or shall I say despondent) struggle to control the *rhizomic* violence of the dynamic of the 'war machine', inherent in the production of modern states. Globalisation and global interconnectedness has only intensified the crisis of power since it has distinct rhizomic war machine properties (Kapferer, this volume). At the same time however, globalisation (perhaps precisely because of its war machine properties) has intensified the struggle of *logos* and credited it with common characteristics across various regions of the world. What we have termed elsewhere 'community of the discontent' (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2010) is precisely a wider discursive community that intensifies the crisis of power and what Kapferer (in this volume) calls the *aporia* of the state. The US as a symbol of power becomes a discursive concept that operates as a metaphor of power asymmetries worldwide.

The production of various new, seemingly paranoid and conspiratorial stories about unknowable and powerful remote forces that are paradoxically never concretely close to the actor while managing to be omnipresent and insinuated to the lives and bodies of 'local', vulnerable populations mark perhaps the transition from a modernist perception of the nation-state to a globalised view of politics. Local-level conspiracies are

unlike the nationalist and irredentist narratives of Greece, Guatemala, Panama and Syria (this volume) that attempt to rationalise the failures of the social contract[4]. While the latter are still based on the belief that the contractarian land of promise is somehow attainable (cf. Kirtsoglou 2006), the former arise and evolve out the realisation that 'social contract theories are indeed a *kind* of foundation myth' (Gellner 1995: 62), nothing more than a hypothetical, imaginary concept (Sandel 1998: 105) that rhetorically dresses a sinister *realpolitik* (ibid: 79). Such 'absurd' and 'paranoid' stories far from revealing simply a 'lack of reason', echo the effects of power as a system of "total and circulating mistrust" (Foucault 1980: 158) in the meta-modern era. Conspiracy theories can therefore be seen as a desperate and radical struggle for the control of *logos*. They stand at the limits of rhetoric, oscillating between the persuasive and the absurd, and as such they can only be analysed as structural forms and not on the basis of their content.

On the contrary, the everyday action of 'talking about the powerful' lies at the core of rhetorical endeavour; it reveals certain power asymmetries (sometimes by masking others) and follows the fate of all expressions of resistance: namely *it simultaneously challenges and reifies its very object of commentary*. The ethnographic contributions in this volume eloquently and thickly describe the local efforts to rhetorically command *logos* and to establish some kind of dialogue with power. The identity-making properties of this dialogue constitute it a site for the negotiation of agency in a world of violence. The efforts to command *logos* however are not themselves in a position of exteriority to power and they are therefore characterised by a certain impossibility. Revealing the role of symbols of power (like the US) is often done at the expense of concealing the role of other symbols of power at a local level. Power, in all its disguises (cf. Gledhil 2000) is certainly a slippery partner in dialogue. Nevertheless, the very act of establishing a dialogue with power is itself an oppositional practice. The present collection demonstrates various aspects of this process trying to shed light to as many manifestations of political power as it is possible in the scope of an academic collection. No doubt the everyday commentary and analysis of informants and anthropologists alike will continue to reveal more of power's disguises as we go along.

*** *** ***

---

[4] I am indebted to the anonymous reviewer who astutely pointed out this contrast and provided me with the tools necessary to comment on it.

References

Abu-Lughod, L. 1990. 'The Romance of Resistance: Tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women', *American Ethnologist* **17**(1): 41-55

Austin, J. L. 1962. *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bourdieu, P. 1990. *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Braidotti, R. 2002. *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Carrithers, M. 2005. 'Why Anthropologists should study rhetoric', *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute* (N.S.) **11**, 577-583.

Carrithers, M. 2006. "Witnessing a shipwreck" German figurations in facing the past to face the future. *Revista de antropología social* **15**: 193-230.

Castoriadis, C. 2007. *Figures of the thinkable*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 2002 [1980]. *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London and New York: Continuum.

Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. 2004 [1972] *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London and New York: Continuum.

Etzioni, A. 1993. 'Power as a societal force', in *Power in Modern Societies*, M. E. Olsen & M. N. Manger (eds). Boulder: Westview Press. 18-28.

Fischer-Rosenthal, W. 1995. "Schweigen-Rechtfertigen-Umschreiben: Biographische Arbeit im Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten", en W. Fischer-Rosenthal y P. Alheit (eds.), *Biographien in Deutschland: soziologische Rekonstruktionen gelebter Gesellschaftsgeschichte*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Foucault, M. 1980. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (ed Colin Gordon). New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, M. 1990 [1976]. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. London: Penguin.

Foucualt, M. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison*. London: Penguin

Frey, R. G & Morris, C. W. 1991. Violence, Terrorism and Justice. Introduction in R. G. Frey & C. W. Morris (eds) *Violence, Terrorism and Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gellner, E. 1995. *Anthropology and Politics; Revolutions in the Sacred Grove.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Gledhill, J. 2000. *Power and its disguises: Anthropological Perspectives on Politics*. London: Pluto Press.

Green, M 2003 Globalizing Development in Tanzania. Policy Franchising through participatory project management, *Critique of Anthropology*.

Hastings, D. 2009. 'Assessing the debate, assessing the damage: transatlantic relations after Bush', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, **11**: 4-24.

Herzfeld, M. 1993. The Social Production of Indifference; Exploring the Symbolic Roots of Western Bureaucracy. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kirtsoglou, E. & D. Theodossopoulos, D. 2010 Intimacies of anti-globalisation: Imagining unhappy others as oneself in Greece. In *United in discontent: Local responses to cosmopolitanism and globalization* (eds) D. Theodossopoulos & E. Kirtsoglou. Oxford: Berghahn.

Kirtsoglou, E. 2004. *For the Love of Women*. London: Routledge.

Kirtsoglou, E. 2006. Unspeakable crimes; Athenian Greek Perceptions of Local and International Terrorism. In *Terror and Violence; Imagination and the Unimaginable*, eds A. Strathern, P. Stewart and N. Whitehead. London: Pluto. 61-88

Kritzman, D. 1988. *Michele Foucault, politics, philosophy culture*. New York: Routledge.

Lienhardt, G. 1961. *Divinity and experience: the religion of the Dinka*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marcus, G. E. (ed.) 1999. Introduction to the volume: The paranoid style now. In *Paranoia within reason: a casebook on conspiracy as explanation* (ed.) G. Marcus, 1-11. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

McNay, L. 1992. *Foucault and Feminism*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

McNay, L. 2000. *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the subject in feminist social theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Mitchell, T. 1990. 'Everyday Metaphors of Power' *Theory and Society* **19**: 545-77

Moore, D. S. 1998. 'Subaltern struggles and the politics of place: Remapping resistance in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands', *Cultural Anthropology* **13**(3): 344-81.

Moore, H. L. 1994. *A Passion for Difference*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Ortner, Sherry B. 1995. Resistance and the problem of ethnographic refusal. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 37, no. 1:173-193.

Rawls, J. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Reed-Danahay, D. 1993. 'Talking about Resistance: Ethnography and Theory in rural France', *Anthropological Quarterly* **66**(4): 221-9, 240-6.

Ricoeur, P. 1983, *Time and Narrative, vol. 1*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ricoeur, P. 1988. *Time and Narrative, vol. 3*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Sandel, M. 1998. *Liberalism and the limits of justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sangren, P. S. 1995. '"Power" against ideology: a critique of Foucauldian usage', *Cultural Anthropology* **10**(1): 3-40.

Scruton, R. 2002. *The West and the Rest: Globalisation and the Terrorist threat*. London and New York: Continuum.

Somers, M. R. & Gibson, G. D. 1994. 'Reclaiming the Epistemological "Other": Narrative and the social construction of Identity'. In C. Calhoun (ed) *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity*. Oxford Basil Blackwell.

Stefanidis, I. D. 2007. *Stirring the Greek Nation: political culture, irredentism and anti-Americanism in post-war Greece 1945-1967*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Sutton, D. 2003. Poked by the 'foreign finger' in Greece: conspiracy theory or the hermeneutics of suspicion? In *The usable past: Greek metahistories* (eds) K.S. Brown & Y. Hamilakis, 191-210. Lanham: Lexington books.

Tsing, A. L. 2005. *Friction*: *An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton, MA: Princeton University Press.

Williams, G. 2008. 'Cultivating Autonomy: Power, resistance and the Frech alterglobalisation movement', *Critique of Anthropology* **28**(1): 63-86.

Wolf, E. 1999. *Envisioning power: ideologies of dominance and crisis*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Zizek, S. 1999. *The ticklish subject: the absent center of political ontology*. London: Verso.