INTRODUCTION

Rhetoric and the Workings of Power—the Social Contract in Crisis

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... 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.

— Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*

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 (1977) would argue, and also relational insofar as it is manifested in relationships (Etzioni 1993; Kritzman 1988; Wolf 1999). It has long been argued that resistance itself, as Foucault ([1976] 1990: 95) put it, “is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (see also Abu-Lughod 1990; Mitchell 1990; Reed-Danahay 1993; Williams 2008). In a recent article on autonomy and the French alter-globalization movement, which also builds on Donald Moore’s (1998) argument, Williams (2008: 80–81) claims that “[r]esistance ... emerges not from an originary site but from oppositional practices, which ... are always relational and dynamic.”

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 by local narrative, the contributions to this special issue do not conflate power—as a concept and context—with Western powers as political formations. They rather attempt to deconstruct relations of power; to examine the consequences 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 as 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 will then explain why the editors of this special issue consider the decision to examine local commentary 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). In other words, local actors’ commentary about politics and their arguments constitutes distinct political cosmologies, which can be seen as symbolic spaces where social 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 article that includes a discussion of Fischer-Rosenthal’s (1995) term ‘orientation work’, Carrithers (2006: 195) claims 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. The narrativization of history that unfolds is an attempt to situate oneself in a trajectory “by finding a larger story, a larger plot line” that safely establishes a context for causal relations between events (*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 recognized by other theorists (cf. McNay 2000; Ricoeur 1983, 1988; Somers and Gibson 1994). What is important to draw out here is the connection between commentary, narrative, rhetoric, and agency. I take the first two concepts 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 contextualized within it. The relationship between commentary/narrative, on the one hand, and rhetoric, on the other, rests in the persuasive character of the former. In other words, what people say about politics (among other things) encapsulates a series of arguments that, as part of narrative, aim, first, to persuade the self and others; second, to make sense of history; and, third, 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 articles in this issue explore—namely, the embodied and discursive workings of power.

By concentrating on local rhetoric, the authors in this collection seek to enrich anthropological knowledge of power and resistance. In order to steer away from negative conceptualizations of the power-resistance continuum, I propose that we take a closer look at rhetoric and its relationship to agency. Rhetoric, Carrithers (2005) claims, has a cultural and distinctly human character. It “conveys cultural matter,” but it also “demonstrates specific traits of humans in distinction to other species” (*ibid.*: 578), 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 view 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 the social imaginary. These concepts stretch undoubtedly into 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 theorized by Castoriadis (2007), who is greatly preoccupied with what he calls *vis formandi*, the power of creation. In his astute reading of Sophocles’ play *Antigone*, Castoriadis (ibid.: 15) singles out verses 332–363 and particularly the phrase “ouden anthropou deinoteron,” meaning “nothing is more terrifying, formidable, amazing, achievement capable than *anthropos* [man (*sic*)].” One of the main characteristics that make *anthropos* such a formidable being, according to Sophocles, is the fact that s/he is ‘self-taught’, that is, not just capable of being taught (by someone else), but capable of teaching her/himself and thus 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 long before rhetoric) has not been taught or given to man as a gift, “nor is his political substance given or acquired once and for all” (ibid.: 17). We have taught ourselves the power to persuade each other; indeed, as Carrithers (2005: 579) argues, “we even exert ourselves rhetorically to teach ourselves to succeed by rhetoric in the micropolitics of everyday life.”¹

Castoriadis’s *vis formandi* is, in my opinion, what Carrithers (2005: 580) advocates to be the “mark of distinctly human sociality,” that is, “the capacity to change and to create new cultures.” 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 simultaneously to make history and to make sense of history by devising the practical and discursive tools necessary for both of these actions.² 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; see also Braidotti 2002: 13; McNay 2000: 20), what are the implications for our understanding of agency?

“Through the glass of rhetoric,” Carrithers (2005: 578) contends, “we can see that, in any moment of interaction, some act to persuade, others are the targets of persuasion.” Working further with this idea, and borrowing Lienhardt’s (1961) term ‘agents and patients’,³ Carrithers (2005: 578) attempts to “recover the fundamentally *interactive* character of agency and rhetoric urging us to speak of ‘agency-cum-patiency.’” The interactive or intersubjective character of agency partly ensues from the inherent multiplicity and relational quality of subjectivity (Kirtsoglou 2004: 37, 38), and this is 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 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—that is, creating *while being* created.

As an expression par excellence of the instituted-instituting social imaginary, rhetoric, as has been pointed out, involves both discourse and practice. It is through its special relation to practice that rhetoric can be conceptualized 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 that themselves create more history (Bourdieu 1990: 53). Practical rhetorical acts necessarily rely on habitus as instituted social imaginary. More often than not, as Bourdieu (1977: 94) claims, this kind of practical knowledge lies "beyond the grasp of consciousness." 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 a radically new history attesting to the existence of *vis formandi*. Of course, radically new practical forms—or some of them—will themselves eventually become 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 about the elective affinities between rhetoric, social imaginary, and habitus has been motivated by the need to engender a positive analytical framework for an understanding of agency and the power-resistance continuum. Foucault (1977: 24, 194) has long argued that power should be viewed not as a negative element but instead as a productive one. However, Foucault's ([1976] 1990: 95) idea that resistance is never exterior to power has been debated specifically in relation to its consequences in the theorization of agency (cf. McNay 1992, 2000; H. Moore 1994; Sangren 1995; Williams 2008; Žizek 1999). According to McNay (2000: 9), "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," essentially foreclosing an account of agency.

These criticisms notwithstanding, I believe that Foucault's (1980) theorization of power and resistance as "co-extensive with society" (ibid.: 142) and "interwoven with other relations, which condition them and are conditioned by them" (ibid.: 104) can be useful here, so long as it is understood in the more general framework of agency delineated above. Power and resistance can therefore be seen neither as antithetical and all-pervasive nor as succumbing to the control of some volitional/voluntaristic subject, who manipulates them at will; rather, they should be 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 crystallize, deconstruct and reconstruct, challenge and reify relations of power. 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 history that systematically conceals its genesis.

In Dialogue with Power: The Social Contract in Crisis

Apart from its immense potential for understanding power, agency, and the positioning of social actors in political fields, the decision by the co-editors of this special issue to examine local commentary has been politically motivated. The in-depth ethnographic approach favored 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 center of our analyses, as these views are often discomfiting. Indeed, the radical, insurgent, or conspiracy-prone disposition of local-level discourse is analytically difficult to handle. This is all the more so because, from the point of view of local actors, especially those situated on the periphery of international decision-making centers, the Western powers receive most of the credit, as well as the blame, for all of the major events that have shaped the course of history. They are held responsible for justice and injustice, poverty and war, globalization, and the spread of ideas about democracy, morality, and political government. They are even held accountable for the actions and omissions of local governments and actors who, in a populist manner, find the world's great powers to be convenient scapegoats and easy targets to whom they can attribute all manner of political problems.

Seen from one point of view, local apprehension toward powerful nations or coalitions such as 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 evidence presented in this issue, the relationship between the United States and various countries, including Greece, Syria, Guatemala, Panama, and Peru, seems to follow a typical pattern of US intervention in local political scenes—interventions that have subsequently led to generalized blame being laid on the US for a variety of problems and conditions. Eva Kalny's article examines 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, with the CIA implicated in the 1954 military coup that ousted the country's freely elected president. During the subsequent decades of civil war, US military forces, secret services, and politicians were actively involved in the persecution of Guatemalan communist forces. Perhaps the worst effect of these repeated US interventions, Kalny contends, is the fact that in Guatemala the US has become a convenient scapegoat for all social evils, diverting people's attention and thus obstructing much-needed social changes.

Greece has similar examples to offer. Its strategic position during the Cold War meant that foreign intervention constituted a "consistent pattern in the country's relationship with the West" (Sutton 2003: 197; see also Kirtsoglou and Theodosopoulos 2010 and in this issue). Mistrust in the sincerity of the great powers is not the only political legacy of the Cold War (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; see also Kirtsoglou and Theodosopoulos this issue). It has further been argued that Greek anti-Americanism can itself

be explained in the context of Greek nationalism and irredentism (cf. Stefanidis 2007). The articles by Kathleen Reddy and Wendy Coxshall, on Syria and Peru, respectively, attest that the documented role of the Western powers in local politics can in no way offer a holistic explanation of the current problems in these countries. As Coxshall (this issue) 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.

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. Stefanidis 2007: 190). As I argue with Dimitrios Theodossopoulos (this issue), the US claims the role of the international guarantor for itself and has acted on this basis on many occasions, often in an entirely unilateral manner. In a recent article on the effects of George W. Bush's administration on transatlantic relations, Dunn (2009: 18) argues that "America has always viewed itself as exceptional; that it was imbued with a special role in the world." Most importantly, however, according to Dunn, 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 of American omnipotence that is found in various regions, articulated by social actors with different histories and cultural backgrounds, therefore sketches the very real weaknesses inherent in the political vision of the modern era (Kirtsoglou 2006). While in principle consensus is deemed to be the ultimate criterion of legitimacy in modern Western societies (Kirtsoglou 2006; Scruton 2002: 8), 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 of opinion on the principles of international justice (cf. Rawls 1971) are employed to dissolve "the constraints of justice that bind us" (Frey and Morris 1991: 9) and to cast certain nations and groups "outside the protection of the rules of justice" (ibid.: 10; cf. Kirtsoglou 2006: 79). As a result, "the 'social contract' as a principle of Western post-enlightenment political organization has been and is being constantly violated" (Kirtsoglou 2006: 79).

Among the numerous and diverse techniques of legitimizing this infringement is the creation of 'interior exclusions' that are carried out either through attacks on morality and reason or through the very processes of modernization, which will supposedly guarantee the fulfillment 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" (Dimitrakos, quoted in Kirtsoglou 2006: 80). The attacks on morality take the form of discourses that indirectly or openly exploit the theme of 'civilization versus barbarism'.

Examples of such insidious and politically disorienting polemics 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. This position seeks to address ethnographically the purported supremacy of Western rationality, which often does not withstand the close scrutiny of an anthropologically situated analysis (cf. Brown and Theodossopoulos 2000, 2003; Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2010). Finally, the Tanzanian experience of post-socialist governance (discussed below), which brought little change to local political organization while perpetuating power asymmetries, is an excellent example of the violation of the social contract through the processes of modernization that should 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. Within these pages, informants around the world speak in their own historically situated manner, stressing that, as Gledhill (2000: 241) argues in the concluding remarks of *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." In the various ethnographic documentations that comprise this issue, the concepts of 'America' and 'the West' are revealed as fluid categories of blame and symbols of power that feature in rhetorical efforts to position the self vis-à-vis asymmetry. Kathleen Reedy (this issue) rightly refers to these narratives of global power as 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 (Williams 2008) that connects power, identity, history, and agency. As I point out with Theodossopoulos (this issue), narrative power compensates for the lack of the 'real', 'hands-on' power to influence political developments.

All of the examples in this special issue present a discursive reworking of the past and the present that reveals the struggle of social actors 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 understood not as speech but as a meta-narrative of rhetoric that encapsulates and objectifies rhetorical effects. Like rhetoric, *logos* is generative and therefore can be understood as a site for the articulation of agency. 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. In this rendering, '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—a dialogue

that provides a context wherein symbols of power such as the US are cut down to size (Theodossopoulos this issue), discussed, commented on, and criticized as morally inferior and thus the source of all evil. At the same time, however, these symbols are portrayed as smaller and less threatening than they really are (Kalny this issue; Reedy this issue).

Power Relations: The Struggle to Command *Logos*

Local efforts to engage in dialogue with power take multiple expressions, demonstrating that the struggle to command *logos* never assumes a homogeneous form. In the context of mining conflicts in Peru, Coxshall warns us against binary conceptualizations of the powerful and powerless and urges us to talk across differences, focusing on “points of friction” (cf. Tsing 2005). This will enable us to illustrate effectively the complexities and contingencies of global connections.

Indeed, various articles in this special issue attest to the existence of internal differentiations in local discourse. Theodossopoulos, for example, demonstrates how Panamanian views of the United States reveal divergent opinions, sometimes critical and sometimes empathetic. In a process that humanizes the other, Panamanians distinguish between their overtly critical view of US politics and their relationships with individual North Americans. The latter are portrayed in complex terms, both positive and negative, reflecting a discursive strategy that allows opportunities to develop a new relationship with North Americans, situated in the context of national pride that emerged after the return of the Panama Canal to Panamanian authorities in 1999 (Theodossopoulos this issue). As in the case of the Panamanians, many in Greece admire the education and efficiency of North Americans. Despite blaming the US for being the agent of disaster that betrayed Greek faith 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 issue). Similarly, Kalny (this issue) points out that despite widespread criticism of the US 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) that their relatives send back to Guatemala from the US.”

Such seemingly irreconcilable internal contradictions in 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 a power that is both generative and destructive. Being in dialogue with power provides the context for the negotiation of a collective self in process. As Reedy (this issue) carefully demonstrates, conspiracy theories about the US are a facet of modern Syrian identity, an identity that is not separate from a general Arab one.

If the self is constituted in *logos* and instituted in practice, and if *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 at both the micro and macro levels, and the ethnographies in this issue offer ample support to such a claim. The cultural dimensions of governance in Tanzania, for instance, explored here by Maia Green, provide the context for an 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 aimed at the elimination of poverty and the enhancement of local participation. This project is by no means unusual when compared to projects in other parts of Eastern Africa (cf. Green 2003 and in this issue), but, as the author clearly demonstrates, to date it has brought little change to local political organization. Instead of acting as intermediaries between the family and the state, civil society organizations, modeled on existing structures of governance, merely replicate social relations and practices associated with government. When local people talk of 'government on paper', they engage critically with what Green (this issue) calls an "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 relationships to government and power" (Green this issue) is not unique in this special issue. Equally telling is the case of Guatemalan women, documented here by Kalny. When women face family planning issues and discrimination, local activists speak either of Spanish colonialism (which supposedly brought with it the denigration of women) or of the tragic influence of the US, the country held responsible for the illegal trafficking of children for adoption. Kalny is right to argue that references to 'evil foreign powers' are employed to silence Guatemalan women who struggle within local networks 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 the transference of responsibility. Similar issues of micro-level power dynamics are expressed by Syrian informants, as related by Reedy (this issue), when they comment on the role of the US in the seizing of power by the Alawi clan. 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 appearing to be a story about 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 impact of *logos* and power on 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 for specific nationalist and irredentist Greek claims, such as the Cyprus issue. As I have shown with Theodossopoulos (this issue), 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 globalization, political environmentalist discourses, and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by capitalizing on the very identity concept that they otherwise rejected.

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 relationship 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 mono-vocal. Carried out on various levels, it is composed of many, often antithetical voices and 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 formations of political organization. Relations of power take specific political forms; in fact, as Bruce Kapferer (this issue) 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 achieving potency in the field of social relations. Echoing Deleuze and Guattari ([1972] 2004; [1980] 2002), Kapferer claims that the totalizing dynamic of the state is intrinsic to all social formations—regardless of whether or not an actual state exists—and is counteracted by the dynamic of the 'war machine'. The war machine is not only about warfare. It is "rhizomic and open-ended, characterized by a relational and structuring process that spreads out laterally in all directions" (Kapferer this issue). 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 either of the two categories. Corporate states, whether employing neo-liberal or neo-conservative policies, express major features 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*, which takes the form of challenging the "legitimacy of sovereign power and its relation to human misery and oppression," is the process that intensifies what Kapferer calls the "constant crisis" of the state (this issue).

Kapferer contends that violent power lies at the heart of the authority of the state and supports a variety of disciplinary practices that facilitate the state's position as the central force in the production of the social and of society. Tanzanian civil society organizations can be viewed as an example of such disciplinary practices (see Green this issue). In turn, the critique offered on the concept of the social contract (and its ideological implications) by all of

our informants in this special issue is closely connected to Kapferer's argument that the notion of the social contract is "grounded in such processes and is itself 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 those in the examples from Peru and Syria) are implicated in the social production of the modern state that itself encompasses the dynamic of both the state and the war machine. In that sense, the effort to command *logos* not only is related to the negotiation of identity and agency from a site of resistance, but also is a desperate (or shall I say despondent) struggle to control the rhizomic violence of the dynamic of the war machine that is inherent in the production of modern states.

Globalization and global interconnectedness have intensified the crisis of power and have therefore also intensified the struggle for *logos*, crediting it with common characteristics across various regions of the world. What has been termed elsewhere a "community of the discontent" (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos 2010) is precisely such a wider discursive collective that has the capacity to escalate the crisis of power. Kapferer (this issue) refers to an aporia of the state, that is, "the impossibility of the state, in the end, to constitute, control, and order society." In this understanding, the US, for instance, operates as a symbol of power, in the process becoming 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 into the lives and bodies of 'local' vulnerable populations—perhaps marks the transition from a modernist perception of the nation-state to a globalized view of politics. Local-level conspiracies are unlike the nationalist and irredentist narratives of Greece, Guatemala, Panama, and Syria (this issue) that attempt to rationalize 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 of the realization 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 up a sinister realpolitik (ibid.: 79). Such conspiracy theories, far from revealing simply a lack of reason, echo the effects of power in the meta-modern era as a system of "total and circulating mistrust" (Foucault 1980: 158) and 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 be analyzed only 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 endeavor. 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 special issue eloquently and thickly describe local efforts to command *logos* rhetorically and to establish some

kind of dialogue with power. The identity-making properties of this dialogue constitute it as 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 are therefore characterized by a certain unattainableness. Revealing the role of global symbols of power (such as the US) is often done at the expense of concealing power brokering at the local level. Power, in all its disguises (Gledhill 2000), is certainly a slippery partner in discourse. Nevertheless, the act of establishing a dialogue with power is itself an oppositional practice. The present special issue, by demonstrating various aspects of this process, aims to shed light on as many manifestations of political power as is possible in the scope of an academic collection. No doubt, commentaries and analyses of informants and anthropologists alike will continue to reveal more about the (dis)guises of power along the way.

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Notes

1. By implication, one could argue that rhetoric is a distinctly human faculty, not only because it is implicated in pedagogy (teaching others by persuasion), but also, and perhaps primarily, because it is the means par excellence of teaching oneself by persuading oneself about the content of what is being taught.
2. More specifically, according to Carrithers (2005: 577), 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.”
3. Lienhardt’s (1961) original distinction between ‘agents’ and ‘patients’ sought to differentiate between the initiators and the objects of action.
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.

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