Fight the Power: Changing Forms of Consciousness and Protest

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The papers here focus on a central problem in today's anthropology: the relation of culture to power. They explore different kinds of power, different kinds of confrontation, and different kinds of negotiations that shape, variously, cultural outcomes. They deal with the many dimensions of contemporary societies: gender, class, ethnicity, nations and nationality, social race, and transnational social fields, organizations, and practices.

Each paper starts with a research object that is common in ethnographies: event analysis, musical forms and lyrics, elections and partisan political platforms, gender roles, forms of landholding and inheritance, local co-residential celebrations and festivals, and the categories used in negotiating everyday life. But in their theorizing, each transcends specific ethnographic locales and commonplaces of anthropological research. They extend and revise current national, transnational, and gender theorizing, and deepen our understanding of the structure and dynamics of very complex social fields that embrace at once many peoples and many nations. They deepen and develop Connie Sutton's interests in the problematics of gender and power, class, race and ethnicity, mobilization and organization, memory and historical consciousness, nationality and transnationality, and Caribbean peoples. They also share a complex skein of ties to Connie. All are true friends; two are former students, two are colleagues, and the fifth is her son.
Karen Fog Olwig's piece, "Caribbean Place Identity: From Family Land to Region and Beyond," shows us a fascinating game played on many levels with many meanings. Her people from St. John stretch the limits that define the region, as do so many other Caribbean people who have migrated-middle class professional groups, as well as those in the popular classes—people who speak many languages and move among many places in Canada, the U.S., England, and Europe. She also explores the struggle over the definition of the Caribbean within the academy. Although she does not trace the political consequences of each definition, one could profitably do so. For one of the current modalities of power that vitally affects anthropologists is the delineation and definition of a "world region." This modality has many consequences: geopolitics are centered upon it, as is so much of the activity of marketers, strategic intelligence officials, industrial location specialists, military or media planners, foundation officers, area studies specialists, political analysts, diplomats, and transnational CEOs, as well as transmigrants and travel agencies. One could thus push Olwig's analysis a bit further, for there are many social forces involved in carving out and re-delimiting world regions. The official area-studies apparatus in the United States involves ties among sectors of the foundations and research councils, universities and specialized institutes, government agencies, strategic and practical intelligence experts, and associated power wielders in various corporations and the government. This apparatus is not homogeneous; it does not produce homogeneous conclusions, and it changes with the shifting definitions of international realities. The many definitions of the Caribbean that this apparatus has produced would make a useful addition to Olwig's paper.

Combining the concerns of intellectuals, workers, and migrants, Olwig adds to our definitions of the Caribbean. She puts together the discourses of various types of intellectuals with the culture of transmigrants who use a Caribbean country as their home base. Using an analysis of family land and of local festivals, she shows how St. Johnian workers live within a transnational social field. She is also concerned, as a theorist and an analyst, with the definition of a "region" where the region itself has long involved the mobility of people, both internally and to the principal metropolitan centers in Europe and North America. As she shows, the vision of a world region has also involved a subtle dialogue among different kinds of social scientists—those located outside the Caribbean basin who
view it as being *sui generis* and those within it who emphasize its vital connectedness to the outside world.

Diana Wells and Rhoda Reddock, in their respective articles, “Re-dyeing the Cloth: The Women’s Political Platform and Trinidad and Tobago’s General Election of 1995,” and “Jahaji Bhai: The Emergence of a Dougla Poetics in Trinidad and Tobago,” investigate relations between two major ethnic groups and the ways gender relates to ethnicity. Wells discusses activist women who use and work with multinational organizations and negotiate the various strands of the global and Caribbean women’s movement. Reddock looks at the complex social movements and stances to try to institute non-essentialized “racial” or “ethnic” categories in national censuses. Wells, the U.S. anthropologist, and Reddock, the Trinidadian sociologist, complement each other. The people they each depict context the gender and racial/ethnic categories used by the dominant groups and coalitions to shore up political power relations, define the state, and shape the categories through which Trinidadians experience everyday life. In Reddock’s case, the nation’s music and lyrics, and the social responses that these songs evoke, are part of a complex that links the region’s newspapers, calypso tents, partisan politics, and the sexual encounters of individuals. In this process, different kinds of identities are asserted, validated, stigmatized, silenced. These songs are an especially important element of public opinion, and are part of a larger democratic struggle. Like Wells, Reddock also notes a complex gender dynamic that tries to define lower-class women, both Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian, in very precise ways, often by privileging upper-class women’s family forms and ways of expressing and repressing the sexuality of upper-class women.

In their respective papers, Diana Wells and David Sutton describe changing gender roles, projections, perceptions, and definitions, and explore the relations of all of these roles to different kinds of social power. As Wells describes, the international women’s movement in Trinidad and Tobago is a major player on the national scene. Women had already been mobilized on a regional basis for an international conference in Beijing that involved states from around the world and interested non-governmental organizations. On their return, they took a vocal role in Trinibagonian elections, asserting a women’s platform that attempted to reshape partisan politics and the electoral control of the state and its policies. They responded to regional and international movements with
action at the local and nation-state level. They continue to retain
the potential to reshape partisan politics because their view of gen-
der, ethnicity, and race differs from the view ordinarily taken in
Trinidad and Tobago. They have been able to gather political
strength by drawing on Trinibagonians' common experiences and
memories of motherhood and childhood, those primal experiences
that cut across the categories of race and ethnicity. They have crea-
tively advanced notions put forth by the "author" of Trinibagonian
nationalism, the late head of state Eric Williams, who sought to
underpin his new nation using the concept of motherhood, and, on
this basis, tried to draw women into his nation-building coalition.
In this way, these women deliberately undermined the racial polar-
ization that had previously characterized political campaigns. This
particular combination of elements—a focus on women, gender,
and transnational theory through the international women's move-
ment; a reliance on forces both within and outside the nation-state;
and a view of ethnicity and race not as primordial divisions in a
society, but as situationally variable phenomena—creates a potent
perspective, a vision that owes much to Connie Sutton's work and
teaching.

David Sutton explores gender relations half a world away from
Diana Wells, on the Greek island of Kalymnos. His is a classic case
of an unarmed people confronting armed police and soldiers, the
colonized confronting the colonizer, women confronting men. He
draws upon the discourse of the Kalymnians themselves. He shows
how male and female collective action against Turks and Italians is
depicted differently by Kalymnian nationalist intellectuals and par-
tisans. For example, the men are individualized and individually
named—males are never collectivized in these nation-buttressing
myths about history—while the women are collectivized and are
never individually named. In the only Kalymnian historical myth
that departs from this tradition, a female is named because she is
acting as though she were a male.

Sutton demonstrates how a historical confrontation—the women's
Rock War—is used in the present as a gendered struggle about mem-
ory and power. It is part of a contemporary dispute among local
notables who seek political power, leadership, and influence and
among national intellectuals, politicians, and those who write for
newspapers who seek control over a vital and emblematic piece of
the past. He weaves gender, the collective action of women, nation-
alist histories of Kalymnos, and the struggles of local notables

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to control the meaning of the past into an analysis of how this
determines forms of power in the present. This is not just his analy-
sis. Sutton tells us that all the actors engaged in this struggle
over the meaning of the past believe in history’s power to shape the
present and define their future choices.

These five authors show us what local people do with the projects,
institutions, and cultural forms advanced by intellectuals, politi-
cians, and administrators who engage in building the nation-state.
At the same time, these authors also show how the transnational
coincides with the local in both the past and present. Deborah
Thomas makes this relation a research objective and problematic in
Jamaica (and by extension the Anglophone Caribbean), whose very
existence has been set by metropolitan and transnational capital.
This is a supposedly sovereign Jamaica that has been constantly
penetrated by outside organizations, firms, corporations, and agen-
cies, all neo-colonial relations that are important elements of
transnationality and its power relations. Intrusion from afar is not
only economic, political, and social, but ideological and expressive
as well. Thomas—like Olwig and Wells—describes nationwide ritu-
als. She investigates a governmental and civil society proposal to
revitalize and expand the importance of Emancipation Day, a propo-
sal raised with hopes of modifying the behavior of the popular
classes and bringing them closer to the nation and its governing
coalition. Thomas focuses simultaneously on the nation and a local
community, mindful that many Jamaican sectors project their politi-
cal actions locally, nationally, and transnationally at the same time.
She explores the heterogeneity of a particular community, situating
us in the social fields of its different actors. Like Wells, Reddock,
and Olwig, she is harking back to a question that was characteristic
of the anthropological debates in the Caribbean and elsewhere in
the 1940s and 1950s: what holds complex societies together in a
neocolonial and transnationalized world?

The dynamics between local action and nationalist construction
also provides a strand that runs through these five papers. Sutton,
for example, demonstrates that locally relevant action was simulta-
neously conceived as regional or even pan-Hellenic, as anti-colonial
and anti-Italian, and irredentist in favor of the expansion of the
Greek state. For her part, Olwig shows us a St. Johnian version of
the interaction between workers and transmigrants who operate on
several levels simultaneously, and she examines the social sectors
that build a sense of country and an ambiguous nationality around
the Fourth of July, an imported, colonial festival that celebrates the
independence of the controlling power.

Olwig’s Fourth of July festival, like other Caribbean festivals, is
the intersection of many changing forces. Nation-building intel-
lectuals want to develop or institute a national celebration, tap into or
modify existing popular traditions in order to fit in local particular-
ities or give local classes a voice in the celebration. Political leaders,
as Deborah Thomas shows us, often use certain festivals as vehicles
to convince individuals and groups to join a particular partisan or
personal coalition. In addition, state and local business firms, who
all have a strong monetary interest in developing tourism in the
islands and throughout the Caribbean, give financial support to
such festivals. In St. John, as elsewhere, some of the non-local fam-
ilies of different classes see the festival as a reason for returning and
visiting. Within the festival, some celebrate African-derived forms
of family and kin reunion. Booth-holders, who may be migrants to
the metropolitan countries, or those who migrate among Caribbean
festivals, comprise another force in this complex dialectic of belong-
ing. A regional network of ideas and organizational bands also link
the many festivals, e.g., Jamaican Emancipation and Independence
Day celebrations, St. John’s Fourth of July, and the Trinidad-Tobago
Carnival. The latter is often the underlying model exported, copied,
and transformed all over the region and its diaspora. And, as
Reddock demonstrates, the Calypso Tents—and Carnival as well—are
intimately linked to conflicts concerning the nation, the nation-
state, and the very definitions of the race, gender, and ethnic cate-
gories of everyday life.

These papers also examine different forms of the basic process of
creolization. This is not merely something for Caribbeanists to talk
about. Cultural mixing and multiplicity are critical to modern
anthropology. Creolization is a term that, though a commonplace
among Caribbeanists, has never been fully explored. Consider for
instance, that the United States is definitely a creole society, although
this term is not ordinarily used to explore its history and culture.
Creolization is not a single process, and different kinds of creoliza-
tion are going on in the Caribbean and elsewhere. These processes,
ongoing and continuous, are conditioned by varying social forces.
These forces range widely, and Deborah Thomas, Diana Wells, Karen
Fag Olwig, and Rhoda Reddock give us a taste of some of them.

One final note. We have said that the key theme of this issue is
the relation of culture to power. Connie Sutton’s history shows that
scholars can have many ways of addressing this relationship, as participant observers, activists, and teachers. All these roles are needed. Some of our authors did indeed find active roles for themselves in their chosen research sites. Some could or would define their research as part of their activism, and were fortunate enough to find a political front, an organization, or a form of activity in the places they live in and write about. Others use their research experience to define and redefine ideas that are part of a complex debate with vital political and social significance. Just as Connie Sutton has done in her writing, teaching, and political activism, each of these authors has found ways to "fight the power."

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