Territory, Subjectivity & the Power of Movement

Provocations and intersections with theory

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African Migrations Workshops:
The Contribution of African Research to Migration Theory

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Menu du jour

• Defining power and providing a vocabulary to speak of it
• Revealing its many faces and machinations
• Exploring its intersections with human mobility, community, and authority
• Discussion of how to engage with ‘theories’ of power
Where I come from, where I stand

- Theory provides multiple services:
  - To help generate questions, hypotheses
  - To help name and reveal empirical findings
  - As an end in itself, to reveal patterns and engender generalisations
- The greatest contributions of studying migration is not to migration theory
- The greats contributions to studying migration will not come from migration theory
- Power is everywhere and theories help to name, explain and signify much of what we observe
Defining Power: A First Stab

Not so much this

As this

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Defining Power: A First Stab

“the ability of a given individual, corporate body, political organisation or political system to further interests, shape behaviours (positively and negatively), and inform strategies for action.”
Defining Power: Some Immediate Questions

- At what level does power operate? Where is it most significant?
- How do we observe positive and negative power? Counterfactuals?
- Is intentionality and consciousness necessary? How is it identified?
- How is power related to legitimacy? Authority? Influence? Control?

Benita, age 7, asks why?
Power’s Three Faces as Determinants of Social Relations

- **Power as possession**
  - Government right to status determination
  - Powers of the presidency
  - States vs. UNHCR and NGOs

- **Power as a resource**
  - Social capital
  - Education (i.e., knowledge)
  - Charisma

- **Power as a system of strategies, practices and techniques**
  - Governance
  - Migration and asylum regimes
  - Social movements
  - Religious Institutions
Mechanisms of Power: Coercion

“The use, or threat thereof, of physical confinement or removal; torture or the application of pain; physical destruction of the means for survival; or death including indirect form of coercion such as law making and enforcement”

- Typically associated with ‘realist’ position in politics and analysis
- Invasion, slum razing, torture, rape
- Detention, Deportation and harassment
- Are these only coercive?
Defining Power: Materialism

“Control over natural resources, commodities and their allocation (by any means) of remuneration for labour, services, or resistance to providing such.”

- Characteristic of Marxism and ‘structuralist’ approaches
- Market and labour regulation
- Capital accumulation and investment
- Assisted voluntary return programmes
- Often aided and abetted by values
Mechanisms of Power: Values, norms, identities

“Formation of wants, desires, appropriateness and systems of values.”

- Often associated with post-structuralist, post-modernist approaches (Gramsci, Anderson, Foucault, Malkki)
- Legitimization of authority and rights
- Policing of boundaries through symbols including language
- Systems of responsibility and self-regulation including loyalty
- Often instituted and supported by other forms of power
Disembodying Power: A Fourth Face

Power is:

- Diffuse and acephalous: Althusser’s “decentred structures of dominance”

- Exercised unconsciously

- Effects are unintentional often without identifiable agent
  
  • Analytical emphasis shifts to systems of meanings and their origins
  
  • Practices of daily life become opportunities to entrench domination and levy resistance
Propagating capitalism?

The Socialist Party: Anti-Obama Political Cartoon

Congolesse sign painting, Johannesburg

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Migration, State and Community

“...sovereignty is nowhere more absolute than in matters of emigration, naturalization, nationality, and exclusion.”

- H. Arendt (1958), Origins of Totalitarianism

Weber, Arendt and Foucault’s ‘Nation State’

- Bounded, clearly delimited territory
- Bounded, universally recognised population (i.e., nation)
- Standardised set of self-reinforcing rules (coercive, economic, normative)
- of values and sources of authority

The challenges of migration?

- Territorial integrity breached
- Diversity of population types
- Diversification and deterritorialisation

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Links to Power: Terms and Tools

- Sovereignty (Politics, Law)
- Resistance: (Politics, Law, Anthro, Sociology)
  - Strategies and Tactics (De Certeau)
  - Weapons of the Weak
- Subjectivity and Normativity (Anthropology and Sociology; Post-colonial studies)
- Authority (Politics, Anthropology)
- Governmentality (Politics, sociology, Anthropology)
- Regulation (Politics, Soc., Economics)
- Regimes (Politics, Economics, New Sociological Institutionalism)
- Values, Exchange, Community (Anthropology, Econ)
Where to from here?

- At what level does power operate? Where is it most significant?
- How do we observe positive and negative power? Counterfactuals?
- Are discussions of power better at explaining past events or predicting future ones?
- Can power provide a unified theory of migration and socio-economic transformation?
- Can a more nuanced understanding of power improve our engagement with politics, policy and knowledge production?
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