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***Consenting to Domination? Theorising Power, Agency Embodiment with reference to Caste***

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***Abstract:***

Conventional analyses of domination ultimately conceive of individuals internalizing aspects of their contextual social environments (desires or norms) which determine their future behaviour in a pre-conscious fashion. We suggest that this conception of domination is mistaken and stems from a commitment to theoretical models which view individuals' actions as the result rather than a cause, of durable social structures. We offer a critical analysis of Lukes and Bourdieu as paradigmatic theorists of power who hold such a view, and contrast their work to that of Barnes and Foucault. Drawing on the latter we develop an *intrinsic* model of power which views interaction as central to social phenomena and understands social processes as arising from the continuous interaction of heterogeneous and calculative but mutually susceptible individuals.

This approach re-conceptualises three central dichotomies in studies of power: consensus versus conflict, agency versus compliance and mind versus embodiment. We argue, contrary to *extrinsic* views of power, that calculative agency is essential to both compliance and consensus and view both domination and resistance as integral to power dynamics. Contrary to theories of false consciousness we understand bodies, rather than minds, as central to the routinization of power dynamics. Whilst the paper primarily develops theoretical debates on power we briefly illustrate our position by reference to empirical data on untouchables in India.

**Key Words:** *Power, Resistance, Conflict/Consensus, Lukes, Performativity, Body.*

## ***Introduction.***

Systems of domination can be extremely durable and, though they may be challenged, most do not permanently engage in overt violence to retain control. The puzzle of how ‘the powerful secure the compliance of those they dominate’ (Lukes 2005: 85) has taxed many authors who have concluded that individuals in such settings internalise existing social rules and come to see them as natural. This would explain why so many of the oppressed either accept or collude with unjust social conditions. The trouble with such accounts is that they struggle to explain the rich and varied history of rebellion let alone the pervasive acts of resistance that occur on an almost daily basis around the world. If people are ‘unconscious’ of their oppression, then we cannot explain their decisions to resist inequality. This paper engages with the complex theoretical debates in this area and outlines a new approach to the study of social power that explains that dominated individuals are aware of their subordination and yet collude with systems of power. Ultimately, we argue, systems of domination rest on the unwilling, but knowing, collusion of the oppressed. As such, they are inherently mutable and always susceptible to change.

The theoretical literature in this area is exceedingly dense and significant points of difference between positions can seem trivial to those not immersed in it. Given the intricate nature of the debates a full review of theoretical approaches is beyond this paper (but see Hearn 2008). This paper, therefore, focuses on the work of Steven Lukes (1974, 2005) – a foremost theorist of power – *because* his ‘third dimension of power’ is seen to resolve the central problematic of whether and how the oppressed internalise their domination. Lukes claims to move beyond both Bourdieu and Foucault’s understanding of power, and addressing these claims is essential to

highlight the analytical weaknesses that underpin his approach and that of many other theorists in this field. This strategy requires us to tack back and forth between Lukes, Lukes' reading of Bourdieu and Foucault and those authors themselves, in order to unpick the key assumptions and flaws that continue to haunt analyses of domination.

We argue that models of power such as Lukes' unwittingly reify power as an external force which determines how individuals act in any given situation. Despite Luke's claims to recognise individual's conscious agency, therefore, we view his model as a form of, what we call, *extrinsic* structuralism. For all the nuances of his work, in other words, he fails to recognise the central role that all individuals play in creating regimes of power. Drawing on earlier work (Gorringe & Rafanell 2007) – which focused on empirical material - this paper outlines the analytical basis of an *intrinsic* model of power. The foundation of this position is that it is interactions between conscious individuals (both power-holders and subjects) that underpin social structures and that power cannot exist independently of such actions. We, therefore, take issue with Luke's reading of Bourdieu and Foucault and, using the insights of Barnes, we re-conceive conventional understandings of power dynamics. In so doing, we critique the concept of unconscious action and argue that calculative action is a *precondition* of forms of domination and compliance.

In arguing this, we must needs address Bourdieu and Foucault's emphasis on the embodiment of power dynamics. Like them we see individual bodies as the site where social structures and individuals' practices collide. Whilst Bourdieu and Foucault contend that bodies unconsciously incorporate the workings of power - pre-disposing people to act in particular ways - we maintain that embodied practices may be *routinised* but this does not make them pre-reflexive. Systems of domination do

indeed rely upon routinised, embodied practices, but even such practices are not beyond conscious reflection. This explains both the ubiquity of social change and why the body is so often the site of resistance.

This understanding of power dynamics inevitably requires us to revisit the troublesome notion of false consciousness and ask why people who are aware of their social position might collude with systems of power. Our approach, in other words, has implications for how we conceive agency. Rather than viewing agency as the calculative action of independent individuals, we contend that such action occurs against a background of collectively shared knowledge and mutual influence. Individual practices are always subject to negative and positive social sanctioning by other group members. This results in the adoption of uniform collective practices that become so normalised that they *by-pass*, but do not preclude, conscious reflection. On the other hand, the constraining force of the collective equally explains resistance; when resistance is organised, such social sanctions can work to create solidarity within a rebellious group and help to co-ordinate their actions.

Our commentary on power is primarily analytical, but having outlined our theoretical approach we briefly illustrate our position by reference to empirical data on untouchables in South India. Whilst caste is commonly portrayed as a top-down system of inequality the untouchables at the foot of the caste hierarchy, as Delière (1992: 171) insists, 'are both the victims and the agents of the caste system'. Our main contention is that existing understandings of power have concentrated on subordinate classes as victims and failed to capture their agency in power dynamics. Drawing on Barnes, therefore, this paper offers a more bottom-up, interactionist understanding of social domination.

***Lukes' on power, agency and compliance.***

Where Weber described exercises of power as either coercive or legitimized, Lukes famously proposed the shaping of desires as a 'third' dimension of power. Power, according to him, is also exercised by manipulating individuals such that they accept the status quo even against their own interests:

A may exercise power over B by getting him to do what he does not want to do, but he also exercises power over him by influencing, shaping or determining his very wants. (Lukes 1974: 23-4)

Power manifested as such is hidden, and conflict is concealed, since the 'real' interests of the dominated are relegated to a form 'false', or non-consciousness: 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests - *whether they know their interests or not*' (Lukes 1974: 27, emphasis added).

Following criticisms that his third dimension foreclosed agency, Lukes (2005) clarified his approach by contrasting it to Foucault's and Bourdieu's theories of power. Lukes begins by critically assessing Foucault's conception of power as productive. According to Lukes, this approach is so all-encompassing that it refers to socialization not power dynamics, and obscures domination and conflict. Foucault's conception of power, as 'the totality of practices by which one can constitute, define, organize, instrumentalize the strategies which individuals in their liberty can have in regard to each other' (Foucault, cited in Lukes 2005: 98) makes no sense to Lukes since it does not to differentiate between dominating and non-dominating practices. Parenting, teaching, doctoring, employing, administrating populations, policing and so on are all lumped together. Lukes also takes issue with Foucault's conception of agency and argues that the conception of power as constitutive of individuals' subjectivity, agency and resistance ultimately 'undermines the model of the rational, autonomous moral agent. After Foucault', he writes, 'it no longer makes sense to speak of the very possibility of people being more or less free from others' power to live as their own nature and judgment dictate' (Lukes 2005: 91-107).

Foucault's position renders agency in-existent, according to Lukes, in that, being the product of the constitutive force of power relationships, it ceases to be 'independent'. It is not clear, however, what independence entails for Lukes, though the inference is that it is something that individuals must possess prior to becoming social beings. A similar position is apparent in Lukes' conception of power. Whilst for Foucault power *only* exists in its exercise, and is not 'possessed' or 'imposed,' Lukes not only adopts the distinction between 'pouvoir' (domination) and 'puissance' (capacity) - equating power to the former (Lukes 2005: 74) - but, more significantly, sees power as *prior* to and not the *effect* of action. Power means 'to have power *over* another or others' (Lukes 2005: 73).

As we demonstrate below, this position relies on a conventional structuralist model which envisages individuals as directed by external forces emerging from the configuration of the macro-structural world. The corollary is that both agency and power are conceived as external to social dynamics. Lukes' position becomes more transparent in his sympathetic reading of Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence (2005: 138-144), which refers to Lukes' third dimension of power appears to be mirrored in Bourdieu's conception of power dynamics as emerging from the practices of an individually embodied habitus - the unconscious *incorporation* by subordinates of the macro structural world-view of ~~the~~ dominant groups. Such habitus generates non-reflexive practices which reproduce rather than challenge the status quo.

Lukes' third dimension of power appears to be mirrored in Bourdieu's conception of power dynamics but tThis seeming harmony is, ~~however,~~ punctured on two counts: by Lukes' acknowledgment of Bourdieu's weak and conceptually ill-defined analytical tools - 'magic' 'inertia' 'embodiment' - and by the fact that Bourdieu's unexplained use of 'unconscious' and 'pre-discursive' as individuals' habituated and dispositional action (treating them as if they were synonymous) ~~Lukes notes that Bourdieu~~ bypasses the very important question of how the materiality of the body is transformed by the social and how that transformation impinges on behaviour. Despite this, -but- neither author clarifies how actions are to be

understood as unconscious, non-reflexive and unintentional whilst retaining agency and a sense of pursuing one's own interests.

Lukes attempts to save his position by arguing that one can analytically identify a subordinate group's 'real' interests by observing which of their desires and capacities are suppressed. He argues, for instance, that the 'basic and central capabilities' of women under *purdah* in North India are constricted by gender inequality (Lukes 2005: 148-149). This example, however, reveals Lukes' and Bourdieu's weak spot; that individuals are not aware of their subordination though it is clear to an analyst. Furthermore, there is an implicit assumption that the dominant parties are aware of their manipulative practices whereas the dominated are oblivious to them. By relegating compliance to unconscious practices Lukes, like Bourdieu, offers a confusing understanding of domination which raises more questions about his third dimension of power than it resolves. Power and domination remain unclear, as does the question of how the dominant parties shape the consciousness (desires) of the dominated:

Power's third dimension ... is never, except in fictional dystopias, more than partially effective. It would be simplistic to suppose that 'willing' and 'unwilling' compliance to domination are mutually exclusive: one can *consent* to power and *resent* the mode of its exercise (2005: 150).

As we argue below, consent and resentment must be, by definition, practices of individuals who are very much aware of their domination. Neglecting this precludes Lukes from revealing the strategies that the dominant use to shape the desires of the dominated in a way that is hidden from the latter.

Lukes, thus, presents a problematic view of agency as the notion of unconscious compliance gets lost amidst his conceptual imprecision and his conception of power remains likewise imprecise. In separating power from its exercise and regarding it as prior to practice, power is reified: power emanates from power as it were.



In rejecting the Foucauldian injunction that power emerges from its exercise, Lukes tacitly endorses a view of social phenomena as external to the activity of individuals. Such phenomena become a unilateral shaping force which cannot be modified by individuals' actions. We call this an 'extrinsic' conception of power (cf. Gorringer & Rafanell 2007). Extrinsic models not only reify power outside individuals' activity - thus failing to provide an explanation of the bases/nature/origin of power - but also render agency, resistance and domination analytically obscure. In what follows we clarify what makes a power theory *extrinsic* or *intrinsic* by analysing Bourdieu's and Foucault's positions and their implications for Lukes' work. This opens the path to an approach which reconsiders reflexive agency as central to power dynamics and the body as the site of power mechanisms.

### ***Extrinsic versus Intrinsic models of power.***

Both Bourdieu and Foucault provide a 'synthesis' between the macro and micro structuralist positions by acknowledging the constraining forces of the structural world without foreclosing individual action. Whilst traditional views of power tacitly focus on the mind, Bourdieu and Foucault have made the materiality of the physical body central to power dynamics offering novel analytical tools to rethink domination. Their positions have been widely appraised but have rarely been compared and contrasted. In what follows we critically contrast their positions to reveal radically different forms of structuralism which map onto contrasting views of power dynamics and agency.

### ***Bourdieu's conception of power: an extrinsic structuralism***

Bourdieu's understanding of power hinges on the concept of habitus. With it Bourdieu attempts to overcome the over-determination of individual practices in most structuralist accounts by making habitus the site of individually strategically chosen practices which are, nonetheless, structurally shaped. The core of his argument is that agency is not overruled but rather constrained by a 'generative' principle governed by the internalized external (to the

individual) social structures. Because an individual's habitus mirrors those of others placed in the same social conditions, habitus primarily accounts for group (class) formation. Power dynamics emerge among differently constituted group habitus who are in competition according to their hierarchical position: classes in a higher position seek to 'distinguish' their habitus from those of lower social groups to protect their enhanced social status, whilst lower social groups struggle to modify their habitus in accordance with those of the higher positions. The lower classes' struggle is, however, doomed to failure because the practices (dispositions) which habitus generate function within a social 'field' which endows them with less valued 'capitals': a value determined not just by economic wealth but by an array of cultural factors (including corporeal properties). The capitals acquired by a habitus with higher class status carry an enhanced force in the social field by virtue of being more valued, and thus allow those individuals to impose their views and interests onto groups with less valuable capitals. Differently valued capitals, thus, are central to Bourdieu's conception of power as 'symbolic violence': power is 'misrecognised' and rendered invisible by an ideology of meritocracy which hides the fact that the value ascribed to ~~of~~ an individual's habitus ~~capitals~~ is determined by structural privileges rather than personal achievement.

Several problematic aspects of Bourdieu's analytical position emerge on closer inspection. Whilst Bourdieu clearly ascribes to a conflict theory of power (different classes struggle to protect or maximise their social position by protecting or attempting to change their acquired habitus capitals) his desire to explain the social world as fixed (reproduced) means that his concept of a durable habitus unwittingly conveys a consensual model of power. Compliance to the social status quo is a central theme of Bourdieu's conception of power as 'symbolic' violence: the social world is dominated by a 'doxic' (taken for granted as the way things are) view of the world which legitimizes the values of the dominant class. This is a consensual view in so far the powerless classes adopt the powerful's view of the world, thus reproducing their own subordination.

Secondly, the insistence that colluding with one's own oppression is not the product of calculative and reflexive agency but of a pre-consciously internalized set of possible actions is another problematic aspect in Bourdieu's account. For Bourdieu conscious reflexivity exists but can only generate activity homogeneous to the structural world: the powerless are driven by a desire to acquire more valued capitals and 'move up' the social ladder rather than revolt against the general structural oppressive conditions. We can see why Lukes finds Bourdieu alluring: individuals, particularly those lower down the social hierarchy, do not 'really' act in their own interests so much as collude with the worldview that oppresses them.

The main problems for both authors are the notions of agency and interests: both Bourdieu and Lukes assume that dominant individuals act in ways that are beneficial to their interests, whilst dominated parties blindly act against their own. This is because for both individuals' interests are those which are constituted within a society defined by a singular and universally followed classificatory system permeating the *totality* of a society. Consequently their models leave no room for different status groups with their own internal system of values and interests. Thus, individuals' interests and agency map onto an all encompassing macro-structural system of values which automatically favour the powerful and disadvantage the powerless. Bourdieu goes even further by conceiving of resistance as extrinsic to social structures. Hence, according to him, it can only occur under profound crises which reveal the 'arbitrary' nature of the world (when 'doxa' is unmasked). Without such external input society is characterized by reproduction, stability and durability. Such *extrinsic* structuralist accounts, portray individuals as operating in a pre-existing, pre-given configuration of the social world which is not affected by micro-level interactions.<sup>1</sup>

Such positions are problematic on two counts: firstly, they characterise practices as unconscious, pre-reflexive and unintentional and, consequently, downplay the calculative basis of individual practices. Secondly, they explicitly refute the constitutive effect of individuals' interactive activity upon the macro-structural world, adopting a reifying and

over-deterministic stance. Empirical evidence, however, reveals that individual and group struggles often seek to negotiate conflicting interests which bear little relation to totalizing class hierarchies but are clearly motivated by identifiable calculative practices. In other words, political activity is always present in the social world – and not foreclosed, as in the accounts of Bourdieu and Lukes - and it stems from the capacity to reflexively analyse one's position. We now attempt to develop an alternative model which addresses these points.

***An intrinsic conception of power.***

In contrast to the above, social constructionist accounts focus on the constitutive nature of micro-activity. Unsurprisingly, Bourdieu has criticized such approaches for privileging interaction and neglecting structural contexts.<sup>2</sup> For Bourdieu, power can be only be exercised if granted by the pre-existing structural positioning, but constructionists argue that this obscures the bases of such pre-existing structural conditions. Butler, for instance, famously insists that power arises from the 'regularised and sanctioned set of conventions' emerging from the performative activity of individuals' actions (Butler 1993: 107). Identifying power, thus, means explaining the collective practices which sustain authority. Two authors, Barnes and Foucault, who ascribe to this view, initially seem to provide discordant analytical models (Barnes' emphasis on *consensus* and power as capacity; Foucault's emphasis on *conflict* and power as struggle) but we argue that they share the same ontological understanding of how social phenomena are constituted. Amalgamating their respective analytical tools allows us to construct an *intrinsic* model of power based on the micro-dynamics of individuals' actions.

From Foucault we harness the productive (power holders and power subjects are the effect and not cause of power dynamics) and conflictual (struggles among groups and resistance are central to social life) conceptions of power. From Barnes we adopt the emphasis on the reflexive nature of *all* participants in power dynamics – both power holders and power subjects – and his focus on the interaction dynamics of a collective (social life is not the

product of *single* individuals externally guided by structural forces but is the achievement of *a collective of* interacting individuals).

Let's unveil our reconstruction in more detail. Barnes (1983) argues that social life arises from the performative force of the self-referential activity of a collective of mutually susceptible individuals: social reality emerges from the references we make about it. Individuals interact and, in the process, learn, exchange, share and negotiate knowledge, beliefs and categories about the world they inhabit. Collectives constitute the 'objects' which they refer to by using agreed categories. For instance, 'marriage' is what we collectively take to be marriage. By talking, learning and acting about marriage we constitute the conventions of what we socially understand by the term. Marriage, thus, becomes a social institution that serves to coordinate social behaviour.

Unlike Bourdieu, Barnes stresses the micro-dynamics of interaction as the basis of social life. This model reveals that to conceive power as that which is *possessed* by someone who can impose her wishes onto others does not address *what* power is; how it emerges in the first place. In a similar vein to Butler above, Barnes (1988: 7) suggests that we must ask 'why it is that someone happens to be in a position of being able to enforce influence or coercion onto others'?' If we envisage social life as emerging from the self-referential activity of a collective of interacting individuals, power, a social phenomena in its own right, should be conceived likewise. Power, thus, is that which is *granted* by the communal belief in it.

Lukes distinguishes between 'granted' power (e.g. a political leader) and coercive power. Under the performative model, however, even the use or threat of brute force should be seen as a self-referential activity underpinned by the *belief* in power. There is no case of social domination by brute force which can possibly sustain itself by force alone. Even coercive power must rely on the collective belief in its potency. If the belief in power were to vanish, so would the power of the coercer. In Barnes' words: 'the problem of why power is obeyed is no deeper than that of why a traffic-light is obeyed' (1988: 59).

If power is the result of a particular distribution of knowledge among a collective, it follows that some groups or individuals will have an increased capacity to manipulate it. This capacity should not be confused with *possessing* power, but with influence over the self-referring activity underlying the collective granting of power.<sup>3</sup> The implications of this model are significant for understanding agency and resistance. If the exercise of power relies on the powerful having been 'granted' power, and depends on the continuous self-referential activity of individuals making judgments from their immediate environment, this process requires calculative and reflexive capacities. This applies to power based on legitimized authority (a leader is granted discretionary decision-making authority by the collective) as well as more direct forms of coercive power (to follow a command or to yield to a threat it must be understood). In other words, power can continue to be exercised not because it overrides calculative agency *but precisely because of it*. No individual ever operates identically to another, however, so the self-referential process is always open-ended and under-determined. There are always multiple ways to interpret, negotiate and carry out a command. Authority, therefore, is never static.

### ***Stabilizing power: conflict and consensus dichotomy revisited***

If not enforced by external structures what anchors power? Here, we draw attention to the role of emotional sanctioning in group formation. Interactionists have long noted the essential role of mutual sanctioning in interaction encounters. Goffman (1987) and Scheff (1988) in particular have highlighted the role of shame and embarrassment at the heart of social organization. Weber (1978) noted how groups coalesce by generating and protecting internal status markers, endowing members with the special 'honour' to belong and restricting interaction with outsiders - power status indicators are often independent from economic wealth.

Collins (2000) and Barnes (1988) have combined the Durkheimian emphasis on emotional sanctioning and the Weberian emphasis on the protection of group status markers and argued

that the emergence of group boundaries is inherently linked to the constitution of social orders. The constitution of standardized collective patterns of knowledge and practices relies on constraining individual heterogeneity, in great part through the informal dynamics of emotional sanctioning. Intra-group consensus is essential to group formation but so is inter-group conflict. As Barnes (1992:269) notes: ‘a general susceptibility to [...] others is reconstituted as susceptibility to fellow members and their invocation of special honour [...] status groups can establish their own special honour only by enjoining contempt for outsiders’. Inter-group conflict is essential to maintain the boundaries of a group. We argue that processes of exclusion and inclusion based on possession, or lack of, certain group markers are continuously present in social life and are at the heart of power dynamics. As Collins puts it:

Emotional rituals can be used for domination within a group or organization; they are a vehicle by which alliances are formed in the struggle against other groups; and they can be used to impose a hierarchy of status prestige in which some groups dominate others by providing an ideal to emulate under inferior conditions (1975: 56).

An important aspect emerges from this position: conflict and consensus cannot be seen as dichotomic but rather as integral to the constitution of social life. This provides a corrective to Luke’s and Bourdieu’s contradictory position that power dynamics must be seen as conflictual and yet are based in pre-reflexive collusion of dominated groups.

### ***Identifying power: reconstructing Foucault’s productive conception of power***

Foucault implicitly adopts a similar perspective - groups coalesce around the competing struggles for ‘regimes of truth’ which ‘produce’ social phenomena. For Foucault the productive force of exercises of power is central both to the constitution of power holders and power subjects, *and*, as is rarely acknowledged, to power itself. The oft-quoted statement that ‘Power is neither given or exchanged ... but rather exercised. It exists only in

action' (1984: 94), indicates that Foucault is not concerned with who *has* power but with the *effects* of particular mechanisms (or technologies) guiding social activity. Understanding power means identifying those mechanisms through which power emerges, is exercised and, thereby, constitutes the subjects immersed in it.

Significantly, from this perspective, group formation precedes identity formation. The idea that power underlies the emergence of social phenomena under the guise of group identity formation is a central, but seldom noted, tenet of Foucault's conceptual argument. An individual's subjectivity and agency emerges from collective categorization. Gender, class, race, religion, and caste, thus, are all constitutive of our identity. Collective categorization, therefore, is a central aspect of struggles to impose particular world views ('regimes of truth'). Individuals emerge as social beings with agency from the continuous dynamics of power struggle between different groups. It is in the permanent micro-dynamics of interaction and struggle among groups to impose collective categories that the constitution of an individual self is effected. Foucault views power as productive precisely because it constitutes the attributes which are central to individuals' identities as social beings. As Kusch's (1991) reconstruction of Foucault puts it: productive power should be understood as an *internal-essential relation of interaction* and not an *external-accidental relation of comparison*. Accidental attributes are those which do not constitute identity whereas essential attributes do; hair length is an accidental attribute of sex identity, whereas reproductive organs are essential. An external relation of comparison occurs when attributes are already formed (A is taller than B) whereas an internal relation is that in which the interaction constitutes a *social* identity (A becomes a teacher and B a student through *interaction*).

Unlike Bourdieu's extrinsic model, which envisages individuals entering into power relationships with pre-constituted (by the structural field) amounts of power (capitals), for an intrinsic model of power what individuals *are*, and *the power they will possess*, emerges in the process of interaction. Domination, likewise, should not be seen as preceding these



mechanisms but as their effect: social power emerges from internal-essential relations of interaction which constitute power holders and power subjects, dominant and dominated. Thus, in order to identify power we must locate *the essential, rather than accidental*, attributes being constituted. We must, in other words, start by empirically identifying those mechanisms underlying the constitution of group markers – in particular those which signify identity and social status within a particular social order. Following both Bourdieu and Foucault, we recognise that the body is central to the shaping of individuals as social agents. We now turn to develop this insight.

***Bio-power: embodied power and calculative/reflexive agency.***

Clearly, the corporeal incorporation of the status markers generated by inter-group struggles acts to ‘naturalize’ social phenomena in general and identity in particular. As Foucault and Bourdieu note, human bodies are shaped, constricted, exercised and socially signified – in short, constituted - through power relations. Emotional dynamics based on honouring and dishonouring are central to these mechanisms of power and they are most compelling in embodied, face-to-face interaction. Whilst Bourdieu (akin to Lukes) sees ‘incorporation’ as pre-reflexive, resulting in pre-discursive, non-intentional practices we argue that such embodiment must necessarily be fully reflexive. Individuals must know the meanings attached to physical attributes if bodies are to become markers of social status. This is because a ‘marker’ will not be fully functioning unless a collective has accepted it as a ‘marker’ and in order to generate such agreement it must be consciously and reflexively negotiated, learned and incorporated. Power relations, warns Foucault (1979: 25), have an ‘immediate hold on the body’, but bodies are ‘conscious’ of being manipulated, excluded, exercised, organized, tortured, trained, labelled, or categorized.

More fundamentally our intrinsic model of power suggests that agency and its manifestations - subjectivity, beliefs, practices, reflexive capacity, calculative competence and so on - are the effect of such incorporation. As Foucault (1979: 135-170) argues, social practices *shape* bodies into becoming specific social agents. What is more, an individual

does not exist as a social being prior to being 'categorised' but rather because of it. For instance, as we see below, untouchables become untouchable in and through embodied and interactive caste practices which constitute their subjective identity. Thus, the constitution of subjectivity via the materiality of the body does not override agency (or constrain it, as Bourdieu argues) but *enables* it. Problematizing the 'naturalness' of the body is a political exercise. To study power is to identify the multiplicity of techniques manipulating the physicality of bodies and generating new identities.

Embodied practices often reproduce domination, but they should be seen not as unconscious and pre-discursive but as dispositional, routinized activity, *constantly reinforced* by the practices, beliefs and mutual monitoring of a collective. Bodily behaviour follows our knowledge of what is appropriate and demanded from us – e.g. we can identify bodily behaviour which 'speaks' our beliefs: body movements which convey deference, courtesy, respect, devotion, fear, apprehension, embarrassment, etc.

Those mechanisms which shape the 'materiality' of the body are directly implicated in shaping the 'dispositional' tendencies of those bodies (diets, exercise, deportment, submission, etc.) Bourdieu correctly indicates the dispositional tendencies of a 'bodily hexis' when internalizing a habitus, but he sees these dispositions as constituted early in an individual's biography and carried along in an unmodified character. From an intrinsic perspective, by contrast, we argue that dispositional activity exists but it is the result of permanent reinforcement, permeated by the calculative and conscious activity of individuals, and rarely remaining unmodified.

This position, we contend, offers a better understanding of power dynamics and illuminates social practices. To illustrate this, we turn now to data on caste discrimination.

### ***Caste and Power***

We begin by asking what it means to be 'untouchable'? How are untouchables identified as such? What are the markers of untouchability? These questions are central to an intrinsic

analysis of power relations in the caste system. In conventional analyses, caste is usually seen as a persistent, hierarchical social structure that is so naturalised as to impinge upon people's self-definitions and identities and thus their social practices. Scharma, notes that untouchables (the most degraded of all castes) have inculcated a 'psychological state of accepting deprivation and destitution as justified and proper' (cited in Gorringe 2005: 118). Untouchables, Moffatt (1979) concludes, accept the cultural underpinnings of the dominant social order. The suggestion is that there is no scope for inter-caste competition because each caste knows its place in a 'harmonious' system. Conceived like this, the caste system is consensual and permanent. A similar understanding of caste identity as an acquiescent, and hence fixed, feature of individuals is offered by Dumont (1980), who views material might as subordinate to status in a caste system where notions of ritual purity and impurity have been naturalised. Such interpretations clearly correlate with Lukes' third dimension of power and Bourdieu's notion of symbolic violence as an unreflexive incorporation of the dominants' unjust social conditions.

As Gupta (2005: 411) notes, however: 'If traditional scholarship on caste were to be accepted, then even those who were considered low or impure in the ritual order would consider their position to be just and befitting their status'. The supposed consensus on which the hierarchical order rests obscures a multitude of conflicts. Empirical research has shown that status concerns are intertwined with ever changing economic and political processes (Price 1989). The lowly position of untouchables as Deliège (1992) observes is defined as much (if not more) by dependence and their role as labourers as by the ritual tasks assigned to them. 'The system, as a system', Gupta argues, 'worked primarily because it was enforced [by power] and not ideological acquiescence' (2005: 413). In the terms of our analytical position, then, the power of dominant castes is not 'held' or 'given' but is continuously created and reinforced by a variety of 'sanctioning' mechanisms.

How is this power manifested and imposed, negotiated or challenged? Price (1989: 562) argues that caste is primarily a 'political phenomenon' and notes how caste categories

jostle(d) for recognition of their status claims from a central monarch. In contrast to portraits of a stable or immutable ideological system, this stress on the politics of caste relations tallies with a closer reading of the historical and empirical data and foregrounds the contingent processes through which caste hierarchy is constructed and reconstructed. We have argued elsewhere (Gorringe and Rafanell 2007) that caste is a continually created social structure/phenomena, and that its depiction as harmonious is a theoretical imposition which does not correspond to the empirical reality of how caste is lived, practiced and permanently contested.

What then explains the persistence of caste? Given the longevity of caste, a Bourdieuan might expect the stable incorporation of hierarchical habitus dispositions. This seems to have occurred in rural south India. Athai, an elderly Paraiyar (an untouchable caste in Tamilnadu), described an untouchable woman begging for food:

The amma (woman) will stand outside and she'll usually be scratching her head with one hand like so (general laughter) and saying 'Madam' – still playing with her hair – 'give me food madam'.<sup>4</sup>

In narrating this scenario Athai's body took on the characteristic stoop and humiliated stance of a dependent Dalit (Untouchable). Such accounts were widely recognised to the point where there was a common assertion that it was 'easy' to identify people's castes. Such attitude would suggest a permanently incorporated habitus but, contradicting Bourdieu's model, Dalit individuals *are continually reflecting* on their position. In the same conversation Athai recounted her experiences of going to market:

A: When I used to go to market ... I would be told to take my shoes off, but I never did. I can't walk without my chappals! So I walked along the market street with my chappals on – The shop keeper said: 'What are you?' I asked: 'Does who or what I am affect the colour of my money?' Then they said 'you are not supposed to wear slippers on this road', so I said; 'I'm a Puliamma (a [low, but touchable, BC caste](#) in

Tamilnadu) I can wear them, are you going to serve me or do I have to return to the bus?’

N: Ah, but you had to lie about your caste didn't you. You couldn't say 'I am a Paraiyar'.

H: Also you did not live there, you will be there for ten minutes and then gone...

N: Say that again, they don't worry so much about outsiders.

[Group Discussion March 1999].

Encapsulated here is the way in which caste as a hierarchical system is maintained, but also contested, through practice. Athai, as an untouchable, was prohibited from wearing shoes on the market street and was challenged. As she was unknown to the shopkeeper, however, she was able to dissemble. This highlights the critical importance of shared knowledge to a system of domination. Both parties above know the rules of caste conduct but do not know each other's place within the system. The shop-keeper may suspect that Athai is untouchable due to her clothes, language or mannerisms, but does not know enough to deny her his services or create a scene by insisting that she remove her slippers. This example illustrates two of the main points of our position, that is, that caste distinctions crystallize because they operate at the level of continuous *collective* reinforcement; and secondly this happens because they are not permanently incorporated pre-discursive individual dispositions: embodied markers of caste distinction are not beyond conscious reflection for either party.

This example also illustrates which are the 'essential' (constitutive) and 'accidental' (customary/variable) markers of untouchability. It is clear from the above that appearance, attire, language – often seen as markers of lowly status - are not sufficient to pinpoint someone as untouchable. Such traits are even less conclusive in urban areas where westernized garments are ubiquitous. Other important markers are impurity, occupation, accepting cooked food from others, lack of education and residence (Dalits live(d) in settlements outside villages). These criteria have been seen as essential to caste identity, but

studied empirically at the micro-level they are not unequivocal; vegetarian (pure), independent, educated Dalits living in urban areas are still regarded as untouchable. As an educated young Dalit explained:

Jai Singh: Untouchability? How to define it? It is evident in broken friendships, or in friendships maintained as a 'special case'. They say: 'Oh I don't think like that about you', but then serve you food on [banana] leaves [which can be thrown away afterwards]. It is elders addressed in derogatory and demeaning terms 'va-po' (come, go) (Interview, March 1999).

This interviewee's caste identity was revealed to his peers when quota candidates (Dalit students benefiting from positive discrimination) were called forward in class. Others are subjected to questioning about their family and origin (where are you *really* from?) to ascertain their status. Kinship, then, appears to be the defining characteristic of untouchability. Birth into an untouchable caste makes you untouchable. Birth, however, is not a 'visible' marker, as seen in Athai's ability to 'pass' as another caste. Furthermore, the historical record offers examples like the Nadar caste who succeeded in organizing themselves and *collectively* renegotiated their standing from an ostracized caste to one of power (Hardgrave 1969). Caste, as Price (1989) observes, is not impermeable to politics, it is constantly constituted, challenged and reconstituted.

Anandraj, an untouchable manual labourer in rural Tamilnadu, offers a snapshot of the contested processes of caste domination. He started a small shop in his village:

Because the Chettiar [higher caste] shop near the bus stop would not serve our children properly. If they asked for sweets, they would be poured into their hands from a distance so that half of them fell on the floor (Interview, October 1999).

The modicum of independence gained from his earnings enabled him to embark on this unprofitable but symbolically significant challenge to caste indignities. Anandraj, however, said that his employers faced pressure to sack him because he had 'two jobs'. Even such localised and insignificant 'resistance' contests the hegemony of the dominant caste and

tolerating it would set a dangerous precedent. Elsewhere in Tamilnadu Dalits have been killed for 'presuming' to walk down a high-caste street in western clothing. The existence of such coercive strategies would not be necessary if the subordinate groups did not engage in permanent acts of challenge to the status quo. In other words, it is only by analyzing the micro dynamics of everyday practices between dominant and dominated that we can understand how domination works in a caste context. In Robinson's telling phrase: 'What the landlords most fear is a population without fear' (1988: 259), A fearless population must necessarily be a reflexive one; individuals are constantly reminded of their social status. Under this view the wider social structural world has to be conceived not as external and guiding individuals' practices but rather as constituted and maintained by the activity of people from the ground.

### ***Conclusions:***

#### ***Extrinsic versus Intrinsic conceptions of power.***

In sum, power is not possessed by individuals at the top of the social hierarchy by virtue of their structural positioning, rather it emerges from the micro-dynamics of acquiring, sharing and applying knowledge which constitutes the structural features in the first place. Discretion over power, however, is not equally distributed. Some groups have the capacity to manipulate the distribution of knowledge and can direct the social routines that act as background knowledge. Since full control of knowledge routines is impossible, however, power elites are always at the mercy of the subordinate's negotiation of knowledge. Power is thus open-ended and relies on the micro-dynamics of all parties involved.

Accordingly, and as seen in the empirical illustration, the notion of *false consciousness* lurking in Lukes' third dimension of power is misconceived. Restrictions upon what is known and may be learned can enhance the stability of a universally detested system of rule, but fundamentally such rule rests upon conscious knowledge and not unreflexive practice. The fact that humans necessarily routinize practices is not to say that they are cognitively

inaccessible – untouchables remove shoes when passing by temples as a matter of routine, but this does not mean that they cannot question such behaviour. Consciously calculative action occurs against a continuing background of routine action, thus allowing re-production of current systems of knowledge. Routinized activity, however, does not preclude conscious calculative activity rather *it is a necessary condition for calculative action to proceed*.

Systems of power always present both a degree of stability resulting from routinized dispositional activity and a degree of oscillation arising from individuals learning, checking, questioning and negotiating the validity of knowledge systems in ever changing circumstances. Universal, objective, unchanging structures of domination - like the ones Bourdieu's model tries to capture - do not exist empirically. As seen in the example of caste, structures emerge and are sustained internally by the collective, they are *intrinsic* to interaction dynamics, and not *extrinsic* from and guiding them. The distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic structuralist models is more than descriptive, since they offer different ontological positions about social phenomena and thus provide completely different conceptions of agency. The extrinsic nature of Bourdieu's model envisages 'strategies' to maximize profits (social status within a totalizing pre-structured world) operating mostly at the pre-verbal level of bodily activity. Our intrinsic model understands individual strategies as stemming from the inherent capacity of humans to learn from the environment and reflect on potential activity according to different interests, goals and possibilities emerging in localised social contexts.

Each social group has a shared code of practice which is constituted and accepted as 'normal'. Normality, as seen in the case study, is reinforced by social emotions, especially shame and ridicule. Shame arises out of the self monitoring of one's actions by viewing one's self from the standpoint of others. Shared embodied codes are central to forging group alliances and boundaries. We contend, therefore, that sanctioning mechanisms engender 'calculative conformity' (Barnes 1988: 43). Conformity, compliance and consensus are the product of the calculative capacity of individuals negotiating their individual differences and



interests and modifying them into a collective good. Consensus and conflict, thus, are not opposed but different aspects of power dynamics, best seen as dyadic rather than dichotomous. Both intra-group emotional solidarity and inter-group dishonouring underpin power. As seen above, it is revealing of Lukes' conceptual weakness that he clearly contradicts his notion of unconscious compliance in asserting that 'consent' does not exclude 'resentment'. He concludes that 'internalized illusions are entirely compatible with a highly rational and clear-eyed approach to living with them', and ultimately simulates Foucault in noting that 'power meets resistance' (Lukes 2005: 150). Lukes' position is problematic on two counts: unconscious internalization of power cannot be compatible with rational reflexivity about it; secondly, resistance does not 'meet' power rather it is its effect.

### ***Political practice, agency and resistance re-visited***

Agency does not pre-exist social interaction but emerges from the subjectivities constituted by the social dynamics of group formation. From this perspective, for political practices the consciousness of subordinates does not need to be 'raised', as in Bourdieu, so much as coordinated. Strategic activity should be understood as the reflexive, calculative assessment of the demands of specific contexts. It adapts internalized and habituated activity to fit the newly encountered situation according to personal goals, interests, changing contexts, beliefs, social constrictions, and mutual sanctioning etc.

Agency is not that which remains *after* the socialization process but that which enables it. Agency is a 'thing' of the social world and not independent from it as Lukes implicitly suggests. Agency is the crucial medium through which collective interaction is mobilized and social life is constituted. Agency is neither an epiphenomenon of an over-socialized individual (people are not social dopes) nor the independent capacity of isolated individuals (calculative inferences are always done under the influence from others').

Because social life is the result of the permanent self-referential activity present in collective action, change and stability result from similar activity. There is no fundamental difference between actions which transform and actions which reproduce social orders. If social

structure is dependent upon the ‘enunciation of its continuation’ as Butler (1997: 19) puts it, every act of enunciation poses the possibility of further stabilization or potential discontinuity. Rules, norms, laws and beliefs exist because individuals repeatedly adopt them but acts of repetition are open to challenge and open up choice, action and resistance. As Barnes notes, past instances only *under-determine* action and individuals inevitably alter their practices over time.

Accordingly our model conceives of resistance and therefore change, not as *possible*, but rather *inevitable*. This is not to say that co-ordinating resistance is a straightforward exercise. Often power-holders maintain their position through strategies of divide and rule. Preventing the dominated from co-ordinating themselves reinforces domination and explains how powerful agents can dominate despite the clear wish of the dominated to withdraw from the situation. History and our data show that dominated individuals are aware of these dynamics and often put their lives at stake to challenge contextualized instances of domination. Empirically identifying the mechanisms maintaining domination, thus, can enable politically effective resistance.

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<sup>1</sup> Bourdieu is particularly forceful in making this point: ‘the notion of situation, which is central to the interactionist fallacy (...) Interacting individuals bring *all their properties* in to the most circumstantial interactions, and their relative positions in the social structure govern their positions in the interactions’ (Bourdieu 1995:58-59-60, emphasis added).

<sup>2</sup> Bourdieu’s criticism focuses on Butler (Bourdieu 2000, 2001) but he has also criticized the strong programme supported by Barnes (Bourdieu 2004) and ‘postmodernists’ including Foucault.

<sup>3</sup> Hence political parties fight for the support of popular mass media newspapers, for instance. The same logics apply to coercive dictatorial powers. Typically brutal regimes resort to the manipulation of knowledge (political propaganda) more than to direct violence.

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<sup>4</sup> Ethnographic data on Dalit movements was collected between 1998-9 and consists of 30 group discussions, 32 formal and 30 informal interviews with activists, leaders, academics and non-participating Dalits complemented by participant observation. Respondents have been anonymised.

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