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THE ROLE OF POSSESSIONS IN CONSTRUCTING AND MAINTAINING A SENSE OF PAST

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In the little houses the tenant people sifted their belongings and the belongings of their fathers and of their grandfathers. Picked over their possessions for the journey to the west. The men were ruthless because the past had been spoiled, but the women knew how the past would cry to them in the coming days.

The women sat among the doomed things, turning them over and looking past them and back. This book. My father had it. He liked a book. Pilgrim's Progress Used to read it. Got his name in it. And his pipe--still smells rank. And this picture--an angel. I looked at that before the fust three come--didn't seem to do much good. Think we could get this china dog in? Aunt Sadie brought it from the St. Louis Fair. See? Wrote right on it. No I guess not. Here's a letter my brother wrote the day before he died.... No, there isn't room. How can we live without our lives? How will we know it's us without our past? (Steinbeck 1939, pp. 117, 120)

The notion of the extended self suggests that we transcend the immediate confines of our bodies by incorporating into our identities, objects from our physical environment (Belk 1988). This conception implies that the self is spatially enlarged by such extensions; that our possessions make us bigger people. However, there is another dimension in which self may be extended: the dimension of time. For besides being defined by our immediate circumstances, we are defined by our pasts and our futures. The self may be temporally enlarged when we announce that we once completed a marathon in under three hours or that we are studying to be a doctor. We also are temporally enlarged, in some circles, by having a lineage that can be traced to the Mayflower or having grandchildren named after us. And we are temporally enlarged by having visited the National Museum of American History or having heirloom silverware that we plan to bequeath to our children. Of the past and future directions in which self may be extended, the present focus is primarily on the past. Having an extensive or rich sense of past implies that we are able to clearly define ourselves and ground our identity in previous personal or group history.

Various forms of amnesia show what happens if instead we are able to think about ourselves only in the present. For instance, in a clinical case he labels "the lost mariner," Oliver Sacks (1985) reveals Jimmie G. who has no memory except for the past few minutes and his first 19 years up to 1945 when he was serving in the U.S. Navy. He thinks World War II has just ended and is baffled by the gray hair he sees in the mirror. He meets his doctor anew each day and has no memory of prior meetings. He is intelligent and can carry on a game of checkers, but quickly gets lost in chess because the moves are too slow. When he meets his brother, Jimmie is baffled by his unaccountable aging. Without having any recent past, Jimmie has lost all sense of time, continuity with his past, and ability to envision his future. He has, in Sacks' view, lost himself

Even those of us without amnesia lose or fail to recall parts of our past. For this reason our life history is often marked, commemorated, and announced by objects (e.g., Olson 1985). Photographs, souvenirs, trophies, and more humble everyday objects act, in part, as repositories for memories and meanings in our lives. The present paper theoretically explores how such objects aid in creating and perpetuating a sense of past in our lives. The theoretical structure presented has been developed with the aid of fieldwork from the Consumer Behavior Odyssey and several subsequent studies (see Belk, Sherry, and Wallendorf 1988, Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989, Kassarijan 1987, Wallendorf and Belk 1987). Due to space constraints however, the present paper presents only the relevant background literature rather than the results of this fieldwork.

THE INDIVIDUAL REIFIED PAST

Security Objects

"Why," asks Tooley (1978, p. 176) "do we keep one earring, three foreign coins (total value 304), a jacket far too small that we will never wear again?" The immediate answer likely to suggest itself is that such objects are kept for sentimental value which has something to do with

preserving memories of our past. But why should we want to preserve our past? Why use possessions to preserve our past? And do such objects allow us to accurately recall our pasts? Beyond the necessity of having a sense past in order to achieve the integral sense of identity that Jimmie G. lacks, there are other reasons that Western society deems a sense of past to be important. We tend to be especially concerned with having a past when our current identity has been challenged, as may be the case with a divorce (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, p. 212), a mid-life identity crisis (Davis 1979, p. 40), feelings of inferiority (Stillinger 1980), states of excessive change and mobility (Klapp 1969), and lack of confidence in the future (Moriarty and McGann 1983). For as McCracken (1988) eloquently notes:

Surrounded by our things, we are constantly instructed in who we are and what we aspire to. Surrounded by our things, we are rooted in and visually continuous with our pasts. Surrounded by our things, we are sheltered from the many forces that would deflect us into new concepts, practices, and experiences. These forces include our own acts of imagination, the constructions of others, the shock of personal tragedy, and simple forgetfulness. As Arendt has suggested, things are our ballast. They stabilize us by reminding us of our past, by making this past a virtual, substantial part of our present (p. 124).

The role of possessions in these cases is not only to act as ballast to keep us stable, but to serve as familiar transitional objects that, like the child's security blanket, provide us a sense of support as we confront an uncertain future. It is this apparent function that caused the boom in World War II photography as servicemen were provided and sought to carry with them snapshots as memorabilia of "the girl back home," their families, and their lives in prior times of peace (King 1984). These objects also served as hopeful reminders that war only temporarily ruptures the "flow" of time and that someday "normal" peacetime, loved ones, and familiar activities would be regained and the river of time returned to its proper channel.

Preserving Our Past

Objects of the past are often intentionally acquired and retained in order to remember pleasant or momentous times in one's past. Souvenirs and mementos are intentionally selected to act as tangible markers for retrospective memories in the future. Shopping suggestions are now a staple of travel guides and souvenirs commonly tangibilize the tourist experience. They not only allow us to confirm the experience to ourselves, but they may allow us the conversational cue for telling others about it (Gordon 1986, Cybart 1988). Similarly, family photographs taken especially during seasonal holidays, rites of passage such as graduations, weddings, and anniversaries, vacation trips, and (of children) during infancy, are meant to serve as edited markers and stimuli for future reflection, communication, and consolidation of sense of self. Chalfen (1987) calls the more than 11 billion amateur photos taken in the U.S. each year an investment in creating a memory bank. Hirsch (1981) notes that the development of amateur photography provided nineteenth century poor and middle class families with a visual way to preserve family heritage as could formerly be done only by those rich enough to bequeath heirlooms and estates to future generations of their families. With the mobility of twentieth century North American families, photographs now seem to serve rich and poor alike in this respect.

But as objects for retrospective reflection, photographs (along with home movies and videotapes) may act in a way that is in some respects opposite to that of other possessions. Whereas possessions like furniture, houses, and clothing may act as unchanging objects providing the security of the familiar in our lives, photographs remind us of who we once were in a way that invites comparison and highlights how we have changed. We may not be wholly different people, since features, expressions, and mannerisms tend to be retained, but the change is undeniable. Other possessions may mark the passage of time by becoming stylistically outdated, physically worn, and sometimes altered by repainting, dying, or rearranging, but these changes do not as directly imply that we have changed. The objects we see everyday tend to change slowly and imperceptibly. Only when we see these objects in old photographs or through the eyes of an infrequent visitor do we see that they, like the people who are the normal focus of our photographic records, have changed. Another exception may be objects uniquely associated with a past event. Athletic trophies, awards, wedding gifts, clothing bought for a special occasion, and other such time-marked objects (often associated with rites of passage) are more likely to act as reminders of temporal discontinuity than continuity in our lives. But our favorite chair, our familiar dinner dishes, and our favorite sweater (as long as it is still serviceable and fits) all act as objects of stability in our lives. They provide an embracing feeling of warmth that McCracken (1989) calls homeyness.

Nostalgia and Memory

The objects that McCracken sees as participating in feelings of homeyness (e.g., crafts, knickknacks, books, seasonal decorations, gifts) are also likely to participate in feelings of nostalgia. Nostalgia has been described as a bittersweet emotion in which the past is viewed with both sadness and longing (Davis 1979, Starobinski 1966, Stewart 1984).

Cognitive Versus Emotional Memories The first important characteristic of nostalgia is that it involves an emotional rather than a cognitive memory process. It is a wistful mood that may be prompted by an object-4 a scene, a smell, or a strain of music. As Ruml (1946) reflects:

The nostalgic sentiments are less well understood. Although abundantly represented in literature and in art, they have found no appropriate place in social theory. Nostalgic sentiments being incommensurable in the hedonistic calculus, are regarded as somewhat removed from the hard logic of nature and touched by a bit of moonlight and summer madness (p. 8).

Neisser (1982) suggests that another barrier to understanding emotional nostalgic memories is that the vast majority of research on memory has been in artificial contexts that may bear little relation to remembering in natural contexts.

Sacred Memories A second important characteristic of nostalgia, as suggested by recent naturalistic studies, is that past times that are nostalgically recalled are sacred times (Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry 1989). Especially when they are involuntarily remembered, these times are mysterious, powerful (kratophanous), unexpected (hierophanous), mythical, and prompt feelings of ecstasy or flow. These are also the elements that seem to fascinate Proust (1981; originals 1913/1927) in his 3000+ page self reflective novel, *Remembrance of Things Past*. Rather than objects of nostalgia serving as simple cues to propositional memories involving knowledge that something occurred, these objects provoke rich textural memories involving knowledge of the experience recalled (Belk 1986, Langer 1963). For Proust, this mystery and rich textural detail are clearly evident in the three volumes of memories that well forth from the cup of tea and little Madeleine cakes which his mother served him (actually the mother of the novel's Marcel) one day during his ill health:

I feel that there is much to be said for the Celtic belief that the souls of those whom we have lost are held captive in some inferior being, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate object, and thus effectively lost to us until the day (which to many never comes) when we happen to pass by the tree or to obtain possession of the object which forms their prison...And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine soaked in her decoction of lime-blossom which my aunt used to give me (although I did not yet know and must long postpone the discovery of why this memory made me so happy) immediately the old grey house upon the street, where her room was, rose up like a stage set to attach itself to the little pavilion opening on to the garden which had been built out behind it...and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square where I used to be sent before lunch, the streets along which I used to run errands, the country roads we took when it was fine. And...so in that moment all the flowers in our garden and in M. Swann's park, and the water-lilies on the Vivone and the good folk of the village and their little dwellings and

the parish church and the whole of Combray and its surroundings, taking shape and solidity, sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from my cup of tea (1981, 1, pp. 47, '51).

With sacred nostalgic memories evoked by sacred possessions, it is not so much that these objects "stand for" particular events evoked in documentary fashion, as that they are the stimuli for an evolving network of vivid memories; that is, they "lead to" other memories in an interwoven net that grows rich in associations, moods, and thoughts.

Imagining the Past. A third significant aspect of nostalgic memories is that, rich and evocative as they are, they are, like other memories of the past, imaginary rather than "real". As Mead observes, "...the past (or some meaningful structure of the past) is as hypothetical as the future" (1932, p. 12; see also Mead 1929, Lynch 1972, Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich 1983). Mementos, souvenirs, photographs, and other possessions that may evoke the past for us, are all dumb objects that provide only mute and shapeless testimony that there was a past. Only when we interpret these objects do they have meaning. And like our selectivity in deciding which of these possessions we will save and treasure (Belk 1988), we also selectively interpret our hypothetical past in a way that is most pertinent to us, just as we unavoidably do when we read fiction (Larsen and Seilman 1988). As with most fiction reading and all of our approaches to the sacred, we dwell on the nostalgic past for its own sake rather than for some utilitarian purpose (Lowenthal and Prince 1976). Just as Proust comes to realize that it is not the magic potion of the tea that contains his memories, but rather is himself, we must realize that our things are the incarnation of our experiences only to the extent that we can bring them to life through the reflections and interpretations that they stimulate.

It is this imaginary character of our nostalgic memories that allows us to use the past as a safe haven to which we may displace our hopes and ideals (McCracken 1988). Our mythical images of a golden age of childhood, the good old days, or our carefree college year when life was good and we were our ideal selves, help explain our fondness for adult collections of childhood objects such as dolls, toys, comic books, and Teddy bears (Schlereth 1985). It further accords with Kant's contention that the feeling of nostalgia is a longing for our childhood (1798, Starobinski 1966). And it also accounts for what Tooley (1978) sees as the ideal treasure trove of personal objects:

...souvenirs and bottle caps and trophies and photographs and baseball cards and sea shells and coin collections--things that have symbolic value in their own right (coins), things that have the capacity for stimulating pleasant memories, and things that reinforce a treasured mythology of the self, things that revivify a former version of a self overlooked in the press of the daily and present self; things that recall a time of happiness obliterated by the weight of current unhappiness; things to be touched fondly, turned over musingly, returned to the box, which is in turn shoved back into storage (p. 174).

Authenticity One final significant aspect of nostalgic memories may seem to contradict the preceding one. Even though our nostalgic memories are essentially un-real and imaginary rather than objective and inherent in the objects that inspire them, we nevertheless insist upon the authenticity of these objects, and insist that unauthentic, faked, or forged objects cannot possibly contain the powerful memories of "the real thing." This apparent contradiction is best understood in terms of the nature of the sacred. As MacCannell (1972) argues, it is the very shallowness and artificiality of our lives that causes us to seek the authentic. Restated, it is the ordinary profane nature of our lives that causes us to seek the sacred. This restatement is supported by the (sacred) characteristics thought by Baugh (1988) to define authenticity: it manifests itself to us and creates epiphany (hierophany), it is able to transform the world (kratophany), it is totally unique (singularity), and it causes us to suspend our perception of the everyday world (transcendence). However, the additional sacred element of contamination is the property most useful for understanding why we insist upon authentic objects from our past. Because the sacred experience is thought to contaminate only the objects that were present during its occurrence, inauthentic, faked, or forged objects lack sacred power to carry our memories. A similar wedding ring, a photograph of a similar family's Thanksgiving feast, or a car that is like the one we had in college, may provoke a brief nostalgic flashback, but they are clearly inferior to and would hardly be traded for "the real thing." To claim that we once met a person who looked just like Woody Allen is to say much less than saying we once met the real Woody Allen.

This desire for authenticity is time and culture specific. Only in the past several hundred years has Western culture come to revere the original and abhor the copy (Orvell 1989, Trilling 1971). The rise of interest in this sort of authenticity appears to be closely tied to the rise of individualism in Western culture (Belk 1984, Handler 1986). It is also within this temporal and cultural frame that singularity has come to be regarded as a property of the sacred.

Antiques and Old Things

The items considered to this point are those that are intimately connected to our personal past in some way. The role of such objects in creating and maintaining a sense of past is easier to appreciate than the role of other old objects and antiques that have not previously been a part of our personal past. If these objects are heirlooms from our family's past, they aid in aggregate identity as discussed in the next section. But if they are merely old things, even if others consider them sacred or valuable, how can they play a role in our own sense of past? To answer this question we must go beyond McCracken's (1988) concept of displaced meaning, since rather than keeping the past at a safe distance, the collector of old things ("owner" seems too dispassionate) seeks to bring it closer. A more useful perspective to keep in mind is the stipulation that the past, and especially the nostalgic past, is imaginary. Because of this hypothetical quality, we may seek to appropriate part of our identity from objects and time periods to which we have not previously been connected. By coming to know these objects and time periods we may come to feel we have knowledge of what it was like to have been a part of them. Their "otherness," presumably superior artistry, and survival in spite of fragility, make them more extraordinary and sacred than objects of the present. As we insinuate ourselves upon the life of such objects we extend our identity to encompass what we imagine their original era to have been.

Hillier (1981) speaks of collecting antiques as an attempt at "conjuring up the past," based on the hope that "a particular antique has absorbed something of an earlier time, something which we may be able to distil from it" (pp. 71, 78). In this sense the antique acts as a fetish object or talisman. Some antique collectors, in an apparently projective attempt to establish an even closer connection to these objects, even suggest that an antique "speaks" to them because they have had some connection with it in a former life (Cherry 1989).

THE AGGREGATE REIFIED PAST

Self is comprised not only of our individual identities, but also of more aggregate levels such as family, work organization, city, and nation (Belk 1988). What applies at the individual level, also applies at these aggregate level. Americans who once prided themselves on being unencumbered by the past, have become as active as anyone in enshrining their material past in museums, archives, and monuments. These things offer a proof that the past was real and regains meaningful:

Americans must not dismiss the endless viewing of Lenin's refrigerated body and the preservation of the bones of saints as alien superstitions. These, like Dolly Madison's gown, Benjamin Franklin's printing press, and George Washington's uniform, are more than curiosities. They provide direct, three-dimensional evidence of individuals who otherwise exist only as abstractions (Hindle 1978, p. 6).

National, Regional, and Local Possessions

Just as individual antique collectors may appropriate senses of pasts in which they have not directly participated, nations may also try to

appropriate pasts that are not their own. This may be done by imitation with classical architecture in public buildings and classical poses and clothing on public statues, or it may be done more directly by acquiring the art and artifacts of another culture. The more direct appropriation may involve classical works like the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum or "primitive" works like the anthropological artifacts in the Smithsonian collection (Cole, 1985, Meyer 1973). Whereas the acquisition of the classical works attempts, like antique collection, to establish a lineage to the past and appropriate its imagined glories, the acquisition of "primitive" works is more an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of the acquiring nation (Chamberlin 1979). From the point of view of the nation whose heritage has been appropriated however, these transfers often amount to a theft of national selfhood. Repatriation attempts, such as Greece's claim on the Elgin Marbles and Nigeria's claim on the Ashanti regalia also held by the British Museum, are not often successful however, despite arguments such as Nigeria's that:

These antiquities are the only authentic objects which illustrate and illuminate the course of our development. This is vital to us as a people, as it enables us to establish our identity, and hence restores our dignity in the community of nations (Chamberlin 1979, p. 113).'

The same concern with magic, sacredness, and authenticity that we invoke in personal possessions is also an important part of aggregate national, regional, and local possessions. Walter (1988) depicts a cup that seems suitable for coffee or tea and notes that it appears boring and possessed of low energy, until its heritage is revealed and our perceptions change:

However, when we learn that the cup is made of amber and...may be as old as 1500 B. C., the energy changes. We marvel that the shape of the humble teacup claims such remote antiquity, but the fabric of the cup evokes even more wonder than the form. Amber, to prehistoric folk, was a sacred substance. It was valued as highly as gold (p. 73).

As Stewart (1984) explains, part of this new reverence is because we see the modern as cold and sterile while the antique is warm and exotic. But a part of the status of antiquities housed in museums is due to the authentication and sacralization that takes place in transferring these objects to the museum. Not only is the museum a sacred temple of modern society (Rheims 1961), but sacralization is aided by removing the object from ordinary use and transferring it to the context of other sacred objects (Belk, et al. 1988).

Over the "life" of a significant object, a number of sacred and profane transformations may take place before it reaches a museum, as Fisher (1975) illustrates with a hypothetical warrior's sword. As an object that the warrior views as both a sign of social status and a key instrument of survival, the sword may obtain personal sacred status for him. Upon his death if the sword does not become a profane spoil of war, the society's priests may obtain it as a sacred symbol of the spirit of the warrior. When the society falls and the sword becomes looted wealth, it enters the profane world. And when anthropologists finally obtain the object and transfer it to a museum, it is once again a sacred object in still another system of meaning. We might also note that in each step in this social biography of the sword it becomes increasingly alienated from its original context, being first appropriated by a more aggregate local society and ultimately by a totally foreign society.

While archaeological, anthropological, and historical museums are those that may seem most relevant to collecting objects that provide an aggregate sense of past, natural history museums, art museums, and museums of science and industry perform similar functions. And museums are not the only repositories of sense of past at the local through national levels of self. Data collection in economics, meteorology, popular culture studies, and a variety of other disciplines also archive our past. So do libraries, historical societies, and cemeteries which now mark permanent graves rather than recycling the land for other burials. As Shapiro (1985) documents, the impetus for the development of each of these repositories occurred during the midnineteenth century in the U.S.. Prior to this time, the view of history seems to have been less linear and more cyclical. This difference is seen more clearly however in the contrast of present view of using the past to construct desired identities versus the medieval European view of a changeless social order and an irrevocable past (Mead 1929). Then, and in preceding civilizations, preserving the past in public institutions was not encountered (Lowenthal 1985, p. 365).

An aggregate sense of past implies a collective memory (Halbwachs 1950). There is some evidence that the salient past differs markedly by generation (Schuw and Scott 1989). The period of late adolescence and early adulthood when adult identity is crystallizing is an especially prominent source of generational memories. This seems to account for the different musical preferences of different generations (Holbrook and Schindler 1989) and the different eras of collectibles preferred by those who have reached midlife (Davis 1979). Collective memory is thus generation-specific.

Family Heirlooms

Unlike anonymous antiques, monuments, landmarks, and museum artifacts, family heirlooms have been directly experienced by individuals and families during their past. Such heirlooms are not universal in a society, but are restricted to higher social classes. These classes are more likely to have furnishings, jewelry, silver, collectibles, paintings, objects d'art, and even articles of clothing to pass along (Bossard and Boll 1950), although middle class families who have remained in one place over several generations may also have some heirlooms (McCracken 1988, chapter 3). U.S. blacks who are descended from former slave families may have oral traditions, but have been barred from multigeneration material cultures (Haley 1976). Although it is most common to think of traditional peoples as possessing only oral heritage (e.g., Bateson 1958), there is also a material heritage in groups like the Aranda of Australia (Strethlow 1947). In fact among the Northern Aranda, tjurunga objects are thought to be the embodiment of ancestors and are hoarded as most treasured possessions.

Having family heirlooms, collections, or other significant possessions that children or grandchildren are willing to take over can provide a sense of familial self continuity that extends beyond death. Barthes (1984) reflects after his mother's death that he "finds" her in an ivory powder box, a cut-crystal flagon, a low chair, raffia panels, and the large bags she loved. Even when families do not pass heirlooms to succeeding generations, the continued existence of childhood home and other important objects may provide a sense of continuity or even immortality. When these objects are instead destroyed, we lose a part of our past, a part of our selves:

A picture of Barney's childhood home hung just inside the entrance of his own home. The childhood home had been deeded to his father when his father was a child. Though the house and the land had long since been sold outside the family, Barney expressed dismay when he told me of the experience of driving by some years before and finding it "wiped out." His voice quavered and tears came to his eyes as he told me this story.

The darn thing, last time I was up there, they even stripped the house out of there. The old home, well, I thought the thing would stand forever. That's what happens to everything; nothing comes of nothing anymore (Boschetti 1986,p. 42).

CONCLUSIONS

Previous studies of time in consumer research have ignored the role of possessions in creating and maintaining a sense of past. A sense of past is essential to a sense of self. The self extends not only into the present material environment, but extends forward and backward in time. Possessions can be a rich repository of our past and act as stimuli for intentional as well as unintentional recollections. While few of us undertake as comprehensive a life history review as Proust, our memories constitute our lives; they are us. We fervently believe that our past is accumulated somewhere among the material artifacts our lives have touched--in our homes, our museums, and our cities. And we hope

that if these objects can only be made to reveal their secrets, they will reveal the meanings and mystery of ourselves and our lives.

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possessives in possessive-noun constructions in Lancashire dialect. On the basis of a corpus of 26 interviews we show that reduction patterns according to the (in)alienability hierarchy. This dialectal evidence runs counter to the normal assumption about English, i.e. that there is no such effect. For the purpose of this paper we will remain agnostic with regard to these aspects of the status of these forms we will analyse [ma] as the fullest variant and the other forms as reduced, with [m] being more reduced than [mi] and [ma]. 3. The purpose of this article is to account for the variation in the realisation of the 1Sg possessive pronoun, both across and within speakers. Smart emphasises the multiplicity of meanings of home and the role of the specific context in which the participants live and use objects. As she argues, the meaning of home is not fixed, since it reflects various relationships and associations (memory, to relationships, and to events) which constitute the overall idea of home and homemaking (Smart 2007:163). The revealing of cultural characteristics of home can be particularly important in the case of migrants' homes in movement, which often represent a multicultural space realised

or presented through a process of imagination country to another and to look at the process of imagining and maintaining a sense of belonging to one's community. According to Barbara Mills, "Inalienable possessions are objects made to be kept (not exchanged), have symbolic and economic power that cannot be transferred, and are often used to authenticate the ritual authority of corporate groups".[1]. Barbara Mills praised her investigation of how "inalienable possessions are simultaneously used to construct and defeat hierarchy", saying it "opens a boxful of new theoretical and methodological tools for understanding social inequality in past and present societies." [1]. Cosmological authentication[edit]. As an ideology, The Dreaming is immaterial but in another sense, The Dreaming flourishes. Godelier contends that Weiner refocuses attention on the role of women in constructing and legitimizing power.[25]