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# Confronting Capital

Critique and Engagement in Anthropology

Edited by

Pauline Gardiner Barber,  
Belinda Leach and Winnie Lem



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Anthropology

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Winnie Lem*

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**This book is dedicated to the memory of  
Krystyna Sieciechowicz**



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# 1 Introduction

## Confronting Anthropology: The Critical Enquiry of Capitalism

*Pauline Gardiner Barber, Belinda Leach  
and Winnie Lem*

They tell you we are dreamers. The true dreamers are those who think things can go on indefinitely the way they are. We are not dreamers. We are the awakening from a dream which is turning into a nightmare. We are not destroying anything. We are only witnessing how the system is destroying itself. Slavoj Žižek addressing the *Occupy Wall Street* protest, October 2, 2011.<sup>1</sup>

As our world continues to be beset by profound transformations and crises, people are called upon to contend with the uncertainties and deprivations of a global economy restructured by the architects of a neoliberal order.<sup>2</sup> Episodes of collective dissent have erupted that index the deep polarities that are emerging in global economies and societies. Over the first decade of the twenty-first century, such mobilizations have included the “Arab Spring” of 2011, the London Riots in the summer of the same year, US citizens protesting the assault on Wisconsin’s public sector unions and the emergence of the “Occupy Wall Street” movement in the fall.<sup>3</sup> As Žižek notes in his address cited above, political observers were initially bemused by the protesters on Wall St., unable to discern their political motivation and coherence. Not so according to Žižek, other intellectuals, some politicians, and internet bloggers the world over. Their message was indeed clear as they chanted “All day, all week, occupy Wall Street”. The protesters spoke about unequal wealth distribution, corporate greed and corruption, voicing their actions as “. . . picking a fight with the most powerful interests on the planet”.<sup>4</sup> By mid-October the protestors’ ranks had multiplied and their cause had inspired parallel actions in many cities in North America and beyond, working under the banner of the original “Occupy Wall Street” initiative. University campuses are once again becoming sites of contestation. In Canada during April 2011, students mobilized on the largest university campus in the country against the corporatization of the university, while earlier that year their counterparts in the UK were on the streets in massive numbers to protest the doubling of tuition fees, along with the dismantling of social infrastructure.<sup>5</sup> Over these years, we have also

witnessed the emergence of political parties and associations with distinctive programs that challenge the hegemony of the prevailing political and economic regime. In the European context, at the level of formal politics, the *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (New Anti-Capitalist Party), formed in France in 2009, is attempting to forge unity in a fractured left while defining its anti-capitalist agenda.<sup>6</sup>

Linked to these vociferous politics are the struggles of ordinary people that centre upon the everyday dilemmas and routinized practices associated with securing a livelihood, ever subject to the vagaries of capital and the elites who are its proponents, brokers, and primary beneficiaries. In Asia, new generations of workers who have come of age during this era of tumult are engaged in mobilizations to contest the conditions of exploitation that prevail in workplaces conditioned by the drive toward hyper accumulation in contemporary production regimes. In China, the “factory of the World”, such struggles against national and international capital embodied in the transnational firm have involved collective suicides, traffic blockages, and strikes as well as civil disobedience in the face of pro-capitalist development at any cost (Lee 2007; Ngai et al. 2010).

In their work, anthropologists have unique critical purchase on the complexities and contradictions of these and varied other responses to capitalism, its ever-changing faces. This volume is in fact a collaboration of scholars—all anthropologists—whose intellectual labor is precisely devoted to confronting capital. Its central purpose is to advance a framework for apprehending the complex contours of people’s everyday struggles against deprivation and precariousness. It does so through the consistent application of a critical political economy perspective. We contend that the tradition of political economy in anthropology is fundamental to our discipline’s interrogation of the contemporary world. While our work examines what provokes people to engage with their political worlds with such courage, force and often with violence, the chapters here are primarily motivated by a deep commitment to developing an understanding of the entanglements of ordinary people within capitalism. Through fine-tuned ethnography our analyses are focused on the routinized encounters with capital that do not necessarily result in collective contestations. While we pay attention to preconditions for political mobilization, our work critically enquires into the challenges of the complicated quotidian. For the people whose lives we attempt to represent, capital is confronted in overtly political acts, but also, importantly, in the everyday practices of pursuing livelihoods, securing food and finding shelter. We take our title thus to incorporate a *double agency* in that both the anthropologists writing in this book, and the people we write about, are confronting capital.

Our work is a continuation of Marxist scholarship in the field of anthropology that has had a long and distinguished tradition, extending from and exemplified in the work of such scholars as Godelier (1977), Wolf (1982), and Mintz (1985), to Smith (1999), Schneider and Schneider (1976),

Roseberry (1988), and Sider (1986). Such scholars have been concerned to examine the processes of class formation, accumulation and the preconditions for social transformation. Through critical reflections on gender divisions of labor and social reproduction, this work was extended by feminist interventions in the work of Edholm, Harris and Young (1977), Young, Wolkowicz and McCullagh (1981), Sacks (1979), Gough (1981), and Lamphere (1987). Through the work of cultural Marxists and historians, such as Raymond Williams (1976; 1977), E.P. Thompson (1968), and Eric Hobsbawm (1959; 1984) who had also been influential in the work of others mentioned above, this legacy was revisited and extended (see for example, Lem and Leach 2002).

Marxist anthropologists have a long history of examining the collective struggles of people as they experienced the power of property owning elites, and as this changed and grew over time and was facilitated in various ways by the state. Eric Wolf famously analyzed peasant revolts, when two sectors of society and economy—one the “advanced industrial plants or factories in the fields”, and the other “peasant holdings and artisan activity”—confront each other in the modern world (Wolf 2001: 230). In the 1960s Wolf described this confrontation as “the key political problem of our time” (p. 230), a problem whose conceptualization underlay the differing approaches then promoted to development, to political strategies, and to inquiry in the social sciences. Gavin Smith (1989), Winnie Lem (1999) and Michael Blim (1990) all drew on Wolf’s work on peasants’ confrontations with emergent and predatory capital by insisting on seeing the study of the protests of agrarian populations as closely linked to a complexity of forms of livelihood that grew from specific historical circumstances. David Nugent (1997) emphasized the national state strategies for the “management” of local development problems that framed such forms of livelihood, while Lesley Gill (2000), Steve Striffler (2002) and Jane Collins (2003) each stressed the relationships to recent global economic disruptions of globalization and neoliberalism.

Anthropologists who worked within this paradigm directed their attention to those for whom the struggle to retain their connection to and livelihood from the land had been insufficient to prevent their dispossession. June Nash (1979) addressed the question of how wage laborers without property sought work under new conditions as laborers who were required to work in large resource extraction industries to feed capitalist industry and growing consumer markets. She emphasized the ways workers found both to accommodate their longstanding cultural practices, and to resist the imposition of capitalist work relations. The deprivations of sustaining a livelihood under expanding capitalism is also pursued by Gerald Sider (1993) in a study that pursued the question of why indigenous people eked out precarious livings by staying in one place rather than moving to seek out alternatives. Josiah Heyman’s work (2009) by contrast examines the mobility problematic. He explored how rural people became transformed



into workers as migrants to cities in search of a living in new manufacturing industries, where they encountered new kinds of exploitation and immiseration. Aihwa Ong (1987), Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelley (1983) and Pauline Gardiner Barber (1990) who in their respective research examined the ways in which wage workers draw on historical experience and newfound solidarities to find ways to fight back, to confront capital, collectively in both less and more formal ways. And more recently, the muddy political terrain of who and what constitutes left and right in politics has been revealed in the work of Feldman (2011) and also in Mollona's (2009) examination of political expressions and livelihood scenarios for union and non-union labor.

Despite a large body of ethnographic accounts that has focused historically on agrarian livelihoods and contestations, much anthropological attention has been directed at the daily struggles of other categories and segments of disempowered and vulnerable populations (Kasmir and Carbonella 2008; Calagione, Francis and Nugent 1992). Anthony Marcus (2006) has focused on the production and reproduction of "homeless" populations and capitalist change. Far from being simply descriptive, such accounts provide us with understandings of the complexity of action, interaction, and skill that go into peoples' daily encounters with capital. These encounters are embedded in peoples' daily routines as they negotiate individual and family work strategies and navigate markets for food and shelter. Commonplace everyday activities, such as assessing the relative price of rice, bread, cooking oil, or even medicine, all involve coming face to face with the synecdoches of capital. Considering how much income to commit to rent or for some when to stop renting and "get into the market" to own one's own home, and for a growing number, watching one's pension or other investments rise and fall with global stock markets (Smith 2011) are other instances. In all of these examples people do not simply see capital's products in front of them; in making decisions they must engage with its volatility and vicissitudes, and face the consequences of doing or not doing so.

*Confronting Capital* then is both treatise and exemplar. As a treatise we argue that the precondition for the most profound understanding of the forces, institutions, effects, and entanglements of people in capitalism is an engagement with the analytic framework of political economy. In the Marxist variant, the question of class is situated centrally, and working through the problematics of its formations is essential to understanding the ways in which capitalism is reproduced, transformed, and indeed transcended. As exemplar, we are concerned to illustrate methodologies of political economy in anthropology. Our approach insists on the significance of history in shaping social relations and class processes. By engaging in the exploration of class, its formations and their social consequences, we are also concerned to illuminate the articulations of power that inform the lives of our subjects in their everyday confrontations with capitalism. We assert the human capacity for contestation and mobilization in both predictable and

unexpected forms, and focus on the conditions that configure possibilities for modes of action to live within and transcend the strictures of power.

Through ethnographic investigations of the quotidian, the authors here reveal the increasing complexity of everyday lives. Our examples pay particular attention to the historical conditions shaping peoples' life trajectories and in so doing we engage critically, and with differing emphases, with political economy and Marxism as a mode of inquiry. In this way, the authors illustrate the productive tension between observations emerging from the field and theoretical debates that is generated by anthropological ethnography. Contemporary capitalist agendas and contradictory political discourse all too often serve to replicate and reinforce the agendas of capital. Glick Schiller (forthcoming), in her articulation of the theoretical stasis in migration studies, has argued that even for those researchers whose research agendas superficially bear the appearance of critique, analyses of global power and structured inequality give way to discourses of immigrant integration and such (see also Ong and Nonini 1997). Attempts to make sense of the complexities of the financial architecture, political modalities, and social configurations of contemporary capitalism (Tett 2009; Ho 2009) can, we argue, benefit from attention to writers who employ the analytical tools of political economy (see for example Wade 2009; Wade and Sigurgeirsdottir 2010). Contributors to this volume employ political economy as a mode of ethnographic analysis that strives to avoid mimicking the power relations of capitalist agendas as it grapples with the shifting arrangements of class and capital (Narotzky and Smith 2009; Blim 2005).

Our project then is elaborated through three key thematics that contribute to distinguishing Marxist political economy in the field of anthropology: politics, histories and livelihoods. These are investigated in the three parts of the book commencing with politics to highlight the urgency of the task at hand.

## POLITICS

The chapters in this section explore the relationship between anthropology and politics. Premised on the idea that scholarship is an intellectual labor process with different implications in different political conjunctures, contributors explore the particular issues that arise from "the intellectual labor process," particularly as an element in politically engaged anthropology. In [Chapter 2](#) Lesley Gill explores the politics of intellectual labor in contemporary Barrancabermeja, Colombia. Drawing on fieldwork with threatened trade union activists in Colombia, she examines the political and intellectual tensions faced by anthropologists who want to fashion a practice that is connected to the political struggles of progressive groups. By drawing on examples of how working class people remember the past in a Colombian city that has experienced intense political violence, Gill argues that, rather

than identifying with a particular agenda, our intellectual project involves accompanying activists as they attempt to weave the social fabric back together. She problematizes the idea of accompaniment suggesting that it requires the negotiation and re-negotiation of shifting power relationships in multiple contexts that involve continually making political decisions, and the knowledge that what it produces is always contingent. Gill further suggests that the theoretical and methodological tools of radical, historically-oriented anthropology offer intellectuals a way of thinking through the political and ethical challenges that arise in the course of research, and a way of situating their research in the world around them. Because it links past and present, addresses the realities of power, and seeks to elucidate the struggles and tensions that shape social life, such an anthropology can elaborate analyses that make evident the complexities of historical processes in the present and thus challenge the silences and amnesia that undergird repressive social orders.

Gill's discussion raises the question of how a politically engaged anthropology defines politics as a distinctive field of inquiry. The contributors all consider the question of whether political anthropology has become transformed to become the anthropology of politics. While a singular answer to this is not advanced, the authors in this volume are consistent in approaching the study of politics not as a rarefied field but as embedded and entangled in priorities, worries and fears, not only in the economies, societies and states in which they pursue their fieldwork but also in imperialistic connections to other states. In [Chapter 3](#) Leigh Binford considers these questions in his discussion of "security anthropology". He presents a critical discussion of "security anthropology" as a particular form of political engagement from within the Right Wing of liberal social science. He summarizes the arguments for and against security anthropology, while focusing his attention on the kind of world this segment of social science aspires to bring about through their actions. He draws on ethnographic work in northern Morazán, El Salvador, the Salvadoran civil war (1980–1992) and its aftermath (1992–2008) in order to make a case against anthropologists' collaboration with the US military. Binford concludes by briefly describing the rationale behind conducting fieldwork in "somewheres" such as current day northern Morazán, where nothing of collective political significance *seems* to be happening.

The authors in this section also reflect on the implications of focusing on the study of politics in a particular field site. In [Chapter 4](#) Krystyna Sieciechowicz analyzes the complexities and contingencies of political decision-making on northern Ontario First Nation reserves. Sieciechowicz observes that voting for Chiefs and councils is inordinately time consuming but also a remarkably smooth and effective way to address local concerns and come to terms with externally imposed agendas. Older political models suggested either a consensual or factional approach to understanding reserve politics. Neither addressed the needs of reserve political structures.

Drawing on insights that suggest that at critical times effective politics may be about not having leaders, Sieciechowicz argues that Anishnaabek reserve elections are all about creating Chiefs and councils conscious of their contingent positions, where real authority and power rest in a complex social network of individuals and families. Also, like Gill and Binford, Sieciechowicz makes clear that the study of politics, as well as politics itself, is imbricated in the conflicting priorities of the economies and societies that are situated differently in the locality and nation. Sieciechowicz points out then that Chiefs and councils are a requirement of the Canadian Indian Act. The election of such leaders is an act that ensures that they can and are able to convey the community's will to the Department of Indian Affairs in a circumstance in which the obverse is the intention of the legislation.

The issues of anthropologists assessing conflicting priorities in the economies and societies in which they work raises the broader epistemological question of how politically engaged anthropology can distinguish politics as a distinctive field of inquiry. This is addressed by Don Kalb and Oane Visser in [Chapter 5](#). Kalb and Visser propose that a new way of interpreting the failings of the neoliberal economy would be to argue that financialist capitalism at the eve of the 2008 financial crisis resembles the informal workings of the Soviet economy at the eve of its collapse. They argue that state capture, a large 'virtual economy', the inability of agencies to get insight into economic and financial operations, the short term orientations of managers not coinciding with enterprise viability, and a 'mystification of risk' are some of the similarities which will yield significant insights into the more recent economic crisis. Further, Kalb and Visser suggest that structural similarities are evident not only in the origins but also in the aftermath of the crisis.

In [Part I](#) the authors address issues that inflect the relationship between the anthropologist and the people being studied and confront the question of whether these are different in quality from other kinds of foci. Overall, the authors explore the question of the specificity of the *intellectual* enterprise in a broader politics of the left, and the ways in which production (research) and its products (findings) become part of political praxis. The chapters further attend to the question of the inevitable tensions that arise in the politics of scholarship, providing fruitful directions for the meaning of the term "politically engaged anthropology" in the current conjuncture.

## HISTORY

Ethnography and anthropology in the critical Marxist tradition are not only distinguished by a distinct praxis, they are also characterized by a historical sensibility embedded within what has been called "realism". This realism also suggests an orientation toward embedding the study of class formations and local disparities within the large forces that condition local social and

economic circumstances. The chapters in this section illuminate the ways in which historical ethnography therefore can be differentiated from ethnography *tout court*. In doing this, they also address the relative perspectives offered by the anthropologist practitioner and the professional historian. They consider the theoretical and methodological implications of assuming that society can only be studied as an historical phenomenon, extending the analytical gaze to determine the ways in which significant moments in history condition subjectivity, social organization and practices in everyday lives in the present. For example, in [Chapter 6](#) Linda Green explores the struggles of Yup'ik people of southwest Alaska during twentieth century American colonization through the lens of two epidemics—tuberculosis and suicide. She argues that these lived experiences of suffering and trauma have profoundly shaped peoples' subjectivities and practices, while simultaneously reworking the connective bonds of family and community life—the collective basis of indigenous identities and wellbeing. She argues that the epidemics were in fact watershed moments that must be understood alongside and in relation to two other major transformations: missionization and the interdiction of merchant capital. The multiple complex ways in which violence and impunity as social processes are enabled on one hand by silence and memory and on the other by historical amnesia and indifference, produce circumstances that come to be understood as inevitable.

While anthropologists working in this tradition insist on the importance of attention to history, sometimes history contributes to sustaining hegemonic constructions that contemporary processes have undermined. For example, Belinda Leach illuminates the inherence and also the complexities of the relationship between politics, history, and economics in work. In [Chapter 7](#) she explores some of the contradictions and tensions that prevail *within* “the working class”, which emerged during fieldwork. Drawing on research in the Ontario automobile industry, the author argues that stories based in hegemonic histories portray autoworkers as White, male and unionized, and imbue auto unions with taken-for-granted solidarity, marginalizing those who appear not to fit. But changes in the industry and the lived experience of those changes problematize these already too narrow conceptions of autoworkers, and as well have rendered many of them extremely vulnerable. The chapter makes the argument that these changes need to be incorporated into new stories that disrupt the old ones and provide a new basis from which to forge solidarities. She argues that these contradictions complicate simple analyses of solidarity for anthropologists who must reconcile analytical honesty with the potential damage to workers' broader objectives.

Gerald Sider's contribution is a theoretical engagement with issues of social reproduction that includes new ways of using and expanding Marxist concepts to address the destructive capacities of capital, particularly as it is exercised over indigenous populations. In [Chapter 8](#) he undertakes a comparative analysis of native peoples in the Carolinas and Labrador. Sider observes that both have been long subjected to cultural and political-

economic assault and he explores the conditions that incline one of those populations toward severe collective self-destruction, while the other remains free of these tendencies. He notes that in Labrador alcoholism, domestic violence and substance abuse are rife and that youth suicide has reached epidemic levels. Among the Smilings and Turks of the Carolinas, such practices are relatively absent. Moreover, he observes, native peoples in the Carolinas are largely free of close government control, unlike the native peoples in Labrador, who are pervasively controlled. By problematizing these differences, Sider examines the basis for the contrasts between native peoples' lives in Labrador and the Carolinas that in turn produces questions about the nature of the conditions of possibility for reproduction. He suggests that the possibility of "belonging to tomorrow" is in part linked to autonomy from the state hence this comparison between the Carolinas and Labrador turns to the issue of social reproduction and to the differential capacity of peoples to *participate* in shaping their own social reproduction. The chapter argues that for the Turks and Smilings, control over the land allows the notion of belonging to tomorrow, at least in part, while such ideas of belonging have been denied the natives of Labrador.

The relationship between subjectivities, practices, and histories are also addressed by Gaston Gordillo in [Chapter 9](#) that focuses on struggles for land of the indigenous inhabitants of northeastern Argentina, the Guaraní. Gordillo examines how subjectivities and imaginaries of indigeneity are produced through experiences of struggle and confrontation through time among the Guaraní. Having migrated from Bolivia to work on plantations in Argentina in the late 1800s, they are often perceived as foreigners by officials and regional elites. Gordillo first demonstrates how forms of cultural production are created by political struggles. This sets the scene for his examination of the complex ways in which Guaraní mobilizations assert a presence in northern Argentina as indigenous people who, through contests over space, are redefining their subjectivities, senses of place, and as well the way in which regional history is imagined. Gordillo argues that while this process of cultural production is marked by essentialist overtones through assertion of authenticity and a recurring sense of spatial estrangement, it also informs political practices that are beginning to redefine the spatial configuration and relative power of localities. He focuses on the case of two Guaraní organizations in the Argentinean province of Jujuy, which have been engaged since the 1900s in the claim for land in an area controlled by sugar plantations. Such struggles for land are essential for material and social reproduction of the Guaraní in the present and future.

## LIVELIHOODS

The questions of land and social reproduction leads us into thinking about the ways in which people produce the material basis for their continuation

from day to day and year to year. This is the question of livelihoods, which presents itself as another distinctive field of inquiry in the work of anthropologists who subscribe to the analytics of political economy. In this section, contributors explore the ways in which people are embedded into the social relations of capitalism through livelihoods.

The notion of livelihood gets us beyond the difficulties that prevail in applying the concept of the informal economy in analyzing the working lives of those who are dispossessed, disenfranchised, and displaced within capitalism. In [Chapter 10](#) Judith Whitehead interrogates the concept of the “informal sector” as it has been applied to the working lives of slum-dwellers in central Mumbai. Drawing on the notion of the “logic of capital lurking in the background” the author examines how the informal sector concept has erased the history of retrenchment in Mumbai’s textile industry in the past two decades. She shows how capital operates through the fragmentation of absolute, relative, and relational space in a global city. In this case, the fragmentation of spatial/temporal frames ties labor to specific places, enabling capital to capture de facto monopoly profits through differentiated forms of engagement with the “informal sector.”

The question of where the sources of value are in the informal sector is clearly problematic as informality, and the modes of livelihood that are contained within it, defy neat analytical categorizations. The question of how to analyze the ambiguous, the hidden and the flexible in livelihood practices is the point of departure for Christopher Krupa. In [Chapter 11](#) he explores the invisibilization of certain ways of making a living in the agro-industrial, flower-exporting, highlands of Ecuador. Krupa focuses on the role played by what he calls “spectral livelihood practices” in the reproduction of both capitalist and quasi “peasant” forms of production. Drawing on Marx’s phenomenological critique of social categories produced under capitalism, he proposes a method of class analysis that interrogates the slippage between labor’s relational construction in a field of exchange and its sociological construction as a population category. Such slippages, as he argues, are shown to underlie the expansion of agribusiness throughout the Andes in Ecuador highlands and an accompanying dispossession of highland peasant communities. This dispossession contributes to the shaping of a rural working class that awaits wage opportunities while simultaneously positing the terms by which such opportunities are denied. Here, Krupa focuses on two “ghostly figures” rendered invisible by such visions of a regional political economy, an elderly sheep herder of a highland indigenous community and labor sub-contractors doing task work on the fringes of the flower plantations. Each of these figures, so he suggests, reproduces, within the heart of an export sector, sets of relations deemed anachronistic to it; as livelihoods forged outside the wage nexus, their illegibility to capital is, however, of considerable benefit to it. The “peasant” communities that the sheep herder helps to reproduce become the source of workers for under-remunerated and undocumented sub-contracting services increasingly used

by flower plantations to undercut labor costs. Drawing on these case studies, Krupa proposes an expanded method of class analysis that attends to the dialectical construction of capital's interior and exterior, of those earning a living through the primary class relation and those restricted from it, and how the latter, while positioned outside the domain of political economy, nevertheless continue to haunt it.

Krupa's chapter reinforces the idea that livelihood as a concept extends our understandings of class beyond narrower terms such as "making a living", or "occupation", or even "work". This theme is also explored in [Chapter 12](#). Here, Wenona Giles uses the concept of livelihood to examine the life situation and possibilities of people who are located in long-term situations of statelessness, inside and outside of refugee camps. Based in research concerning Afghan and Somali refugees, Giles reflects on what livelihood means from anthropological and geographical perspectives. She considers the thorny issue of livelihood in the context of women living in refugee camps, where they receive humanitarian aid but are still unable to meet their own and their family's daily needs. Does the concept of livelihood expand our understanding of class and north-south relationships beyond narrower terms such as "making a living/occupation/'work'?" She addresses the question of the present and future of displaced and exiled workers.

In [Chapter 13](#) Marie France Labrecque considers the role that local Yucatecan tradition is made to play in developing tourist markets and the workers who supply those markets in this Mexican peninsula. Under the guise of "gender mainstreaming", one of the outcomes of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, access to credit for women is made contingent on their performance and maintenance of tradition. This occurs through the wearing of traditional dress, called the huipil, and preparing traditional foods, and also through programs in which they learn to make such traditional items for the market. While the premise of gender mainstreaming is that public policies concentrate on equality rather than on women as such, concerns have been raised about the ways that women might be, or are instrumentalized, especially in a context of "market fundamentalism", the supremacy of the market over peoples' lives. The training of craftswomen in Mayan culture shows also the instrumentalization of indigenous culture. Yet paradoxically the majority of the women in the program who received microcredit for years worked harder than ever but did not significantly improve their standard of living.

The notion of livelihood also extends anthropological work beyond economic anthropology. The question of politics inheres in work focused on livelihood. Ethnographic studies of the working class bring this to light most evidently. Also addressing workers' vulnerabilities, in [Chapter 14](#) Susana Narotzky asks how workers' local attempts at survival, which are marginal, informal and traditional, get reconfigured as social innovation. Unpacking idealistic calls for "another economy" which often, if sometimes unconsciously,



draw on alternative sets of values that are seen as extra-economic, such as those associated with women's work, Narotzky examines the social relations of informal and often marginal forms of livelihood. In the contemporary economic era, there is a complex relationship between apparently novel, "alternative" approaches to making a living, forms of production that are in fact modes of survival, and the political and economic forces that embed all of these within a hegemonic capitalist market economy.

In the Afterword (Chapter 15) Gavin Smith revisits our notion of confronting capital to stress the value of the kind of critique that emerges in the preceding chapters to the praxis of taking on and engaging with power. Here he explores the distinctive elements of the approach shared by the authors to the present volume, which he takes to inhere in the concepts of history, reality and difference. History connotes the materiality of the past, the connection between the conditions of history and constructions of it, and the consequences of all of this for the present. Reality emphasizes the materiality of history, in the actual conditions in which people today must live their lives. Finally, for Smith, difference evokes inevitable outcomes of contradiction and conflict that make resolution appear impossible, and indeed may maintain and perpetuate difference. Ultimately, it is out of contradiction and conflict derived from histories of difference and the reality of the contemporary moment, that the tools and resources for social change will emerge.

## NOTES

1. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oEUZNfOtPIE> (accessed 14 October, 2011).
2. The principles, practices, and strategies imposed to create this world order have been amply documented (see Harvey 2005).
3. See Collins (2011).
4. <http://rabble.ca/rabletv/program-guide/2011/10/best-net/video-naomi-klein-occupy-wall-street>, (accessed 14 October, 2011).
5. See <http://www.nowtoronto.com/daily/news/story.cfm?content=180078>. Accessed March 28 2012
6. <http://www.npa2009.org/>. Accessed March 28 2012.

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Part I

Politics



## 2 Making Connections

### The Politics of Intellectual Labor in Colombia

*Lesley Gill*

On a hot day in 2006, several Colombian Coca-Cola workers sat down together in their union office in Barrancabermeja to organize a presentation about the human rights situation for a delegation of activists that would arrive from the United States. The US activists wanted to learn about the political violence that wracked the city, which was a center of militant trade unionism, a one-time guerrilla stronghold, and now controlled by right-wing paramilitaries tied to the Colombian state. They also wanted to meet with Coca-Cola workers whose union—the National Food and Beverage Workers' Union (SINALTRAINAL)—had charged in a lawsuit filed in the US that the Coca-Cola Company colluded with the paramilitaries to murder and terrorize trade unionists. For the last four years, an international campaign launched by SINALTRAINAL against the multinational had gathered steam, and the local union affiliate had to decide how to talk to the US visitors and cement their solidarity in the fight against the soft drink giant.

I had just interviewed Efraín González,<sup>1</sup> a former union local president, who sat next to me as the meeting got underway. González had told me in chilling detail how, in 1984, after guerrillas from the National Liberation Army (ELN) detonated a bomb in the bottling plant, company officials accused him and seven other union leaders of collaborating with the insurgents. The labor leaders were imprisoned on an army base for twenty-nine days, and soldiers repeatedly tortured González. Even though twenty-two years had passed, periodic nightmares still disrupted his sleep.

Other workers had also told me about the ELN bombing and its aftermath, even those who began work at the factory several years later. For many of them, the event represented a low point in a history of abusive relationships with company managers. Workers also emphasized the enormous solidarity of other unions, civic groups, and urban residents on behalf of the imprisoned labor leaders, who eventually returned to their jobs. Yet neither González nor any of the other workers mentioned the popular support that the ELN once enjoyed in Barrancabermeja, especially among trade unionists, and the relationships that connected the guerrillas to the working class population. In contemporary Barrancabermeja, it was dangerous to talk about the guerrillas, and the government consistently

sought to delegitimize unions by accusing them of maintaining links to the insurgents. Importantly, too, the guerrillas no longer represented a credible political alternative for most trade unionists. Their defeat by right-wing paramilitaries and their increasing involvement with criminal activities had moved many workers to question the political goals of the insurgency and to deny or distance themselves from any suggestion that they had sympathized with it.

As the union meeting came to order behind a steel-plated door and armed bodyguards stood watch outside, neither González's depiction of the broad-based outpouring of solidarity in 1984 nor the storied militancy of Barrancabermeja's working class seemed relevant to a presentation about contemporary life. Beginning in the late 1990s, paramilitaries in connivance with state security forces had ruptured the solidarity between the USO (Unión Sindical Obrera)—Colombia's most militant and powerful trade union—and the working class organizations and neighborhoods of Barrancabermeja, and they had violently expelled guerrilla militias from the city. Dozens of USO leaders were dead or exiled; other community organizations and unions—including SINALTRAINAL—had grown weaker or ceased to exist; and massive terror had displaced thousands of people from the city and silenced others.

Although the remembered stories, facts, and rumors that the men experienced or heard from others about the 1984 plant bombing, as well as memories of community solidarity and collective struggle, circulated among them, they were defined less by their engagement with current political questions than by nostalgia. Workers did not consider the information important enough to pass on to the group of international activists that would arrive. They were ready to discuss the details of the current repression but not the painful memories of lost relationships, defeated political projects, and personal betrayals that had shaped their histories. Their search for solidarity with international human rights organizations represented a desperate effort to confront the violent deterioration of labor conditions in the city.

The current union president started the meeting by stressing that "we must focus on human rights." He was articulating a general concern that the international delegation should appreciate the dire situation that had faced members of popular organizations in Barrancabermeja since 2002, when paramilitaries took control of the city. Although the emphasis on rights partly reflected an understanding of their North American audience's political sensibilities, it emerged, too, from the violent paramilitary dismantling of trade unions and civic organizations after the defeat of the guerrillas. The presentation elaborated by union members emphasized the victimization of workers in the present. It focused on statistics and contained little of the combative Marxist language about "class struggle," "the bourgeoisie," "the working class," and "imperialism" that had infused past struggles. Yet these concepts continued to inform their

analyses of social life, despite the eclipse of socialism after the cold war. They did so because of a long history of left-wing political organizing in Barrancabermeja, and because of the new political power of socialist discourses since Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez began articulating his “socialism of the twenty-first century.”<sup>2</sup>

Organizing a presentation for the international visitors illustrated the difficulties workers face in connecting individual memories of collective struggle and resistance to contemporary concerns and alliance building in neoliberal Colombia, where the discourse of human rights has replaced the notion of class struggle as the “language of contention,” i.e. “the framework for talking about and acting upon social orders characterized by domination” (Roseberry 1994: 361). Dominant currents of rights discourse treat workers as abstract victims. By emphasizing their individual victimization rather than the confrontational politics that have long shaped working class relations to the state and private corporations, they threaten to remove workers from the militant history of Barrancabermeja and depoliticize the meaning of their deaths. Connecting past struggles to current realities is difficult because the far-right government denies or downplays past crimes and obfuscates current political violence, and because it has destroyed political alternatives and fractured collective identities through a combination of violence and free-market reform. At issue is the relationship between historical knowledge and the politics of solidarity in a violent, disorganized present.

All of this presents problems for anthropologists who want to fashion a political practice that is attuned to and connected with the struggles of progressive groups and coalitions, a form of practice located at the juncture between a commitment to progressive political struggle on the one hand, and the intellectual pursuit of better understandings and analyses on the other. Gavin Smith argues that the work of anthropologists is two-fold. First, it involves grasping how research subjects understand themselves within unfolding historical processes and within certain kinds of social relationships and institutional configurations. Then, it requires connecting these understandings to a broader social field in which they can be turned into progressive political practice. Grasping and situating knowledge in historical contexts, and making political and intellectual connections to broader fields of power are thus central to his method (Smith 1999; Narotzky and Smith 2006).

What is at stake in Barrancabermeja is not only life itself, but how ordinary people talk to each other about their lives and histories in ways that bring them together and keep them talking, despite the different ways that the past is silenced and more powerful groups organize social life. Repairing the tattered social fabric means coming to terms with the deep divisions that violence and neoliberalism have created among working people, constructing a historical narrative that links the past to the present, and forging new alliances and institutional forms to channel popular demands,



all of which are fundamentally projects for working people. The issue for intellectuals is how to support these processes and projects, if asked to do so, until the time when discussion turns again to collective action.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter addresses these concerns by exploring the politics of intellectual labor in contemporary Barrancabermeja.<sup>4</sup> I argue that, rather than identifying with a particular agenda, our intellectual project involves accompanying activists while they attempt to weave the social fabric back together (see Binford 2008). Accompaniment requires the negotiation and re-negotiation of shifting power relationships in multiple contexts that involve continually making political decisions, and the knowledge that it produces is always contingent. Accompaniment is only one of several ways that anthropologists have addressed some of the ethical and political dilemmas within what is broadly referred to as “activist” anthropology (e.g., Hale 2006; Low and Engle 2010). I further suggest that the theoretical and methodological tools of radical, historically-oriented anthropology offer intellectuals a way of thinking through the political and ethical challenges that arise in the course of research, and a way of situating their research in the world around them. Because it links past and present, addresses the realities of power, and seeks to elucidate the struggles and tensions that shape social life, such an anthropology can elaborate analyses that make evident the complexities of historical processes in the present and thus challenge the silences and amnesia that undergird repressive social orders.<sup>5</sup>

## DIRTY WAR AND POLITICAL STRUGGLE IN COLOMBIA

Exploring how the intellectual labor of academics might contribute to the development of emergent forms of solidarity and progressive political projects is nowhere more important than Colombia. Colombia is unlike other Latin American countries, where the officially denied violence of past dirty wars was remembered, commemorated, forgotten, or simply acknowledged after the return of liberal democratic governments in the 1980s and 1990s. Formal constitutionalism and electoral democracy have co-existed for years with a brutal counterinsurgency war in which right-wing paramilitaries—organized first as clandestine death squads tied to the military and then as a nationally federated, standing army—waged a dirty war against unions, peasants associations, and other popular organizations. The mercenaries made little distinction between armed insurgents and unarmed civilians who participated in a range of social justice struggles. They persecuted trade unionists, homosexuals, peasant leaders, journalists, human rights defenders, and anyone labeled a guerrilla sympathizer. Over three thousand trade unionists were murdered between the mid-1980s and the early twenty-first century, mostly at the hands of the paramilitaries, and Colombia obtained the distinction of being the most dangerous country in the world to be a trade unionist.

After paramilitaries and state security forces pushed insurgents out of several longtime strongholds and regained territory once controlled by them, paramilitary commanders and the Colombian government announced the start of a “peace process,” even though the paramilitaries had never been at war with the state. Paramilitary commanders participated in a so-called demobilization (2003–2006) that mainstreamed many of the mercenaries into Colombian society. In exchange for prison sentences of as little as eight years, they agreed to testify publicly about murders, massacres, and forced disappearances ordered by them and carried out by their troops. Yet they revealed selective, incomplete information in their testimonies and, on occasion, used the public fora to slander and discredit activists whom they had been unable to kill.<sup>6</sup> In addition, although they agreed to dismantle their organizations and surrender ill-gotten wealth, there was no mechanism to force them to do so, and the 2005 Justice and Peace law, which governed the demobilization process, did not seek to expose the involvement of state officials and regional elites in the creation and expansion of paramilitary entities. Not surprisingly, reorganized paramilitary groups continued to operate in the countryside and in poor urban neighborhoods, but the Colombian state denied their existence and attributed ongoing violence to “emergent groups of delinquents” whose crimes were not politically motivated. The distinctions between criminal violence and political violence, as well as between the paramilitaries and the official state, once again became difficult to discern, while a haze of amnesia threatened to obscure the past.<sup>7</sup>

Paramilitaries had targeted working people in Barrancabermeja, which emerged as an oil enclave in the early twentieth century, because of the strength and militancy of its unions and social organizations, especially the USO, and because several insurgent groups had operated in the city with the support of urban residents. For decades, working people had found inspiration in the ideas and practices of the left, and the USO had long declared itself an alternative political project, one sustained by anti-imperialism, revolutionary nationalism, and the defense of national resources. This position enabled the union to forge alliances with peasants, students, teachers and informal sector workers and mobilize them (Vega et al. 2009). In the 1970s and 1980s, for example, the oil workers, along with neighborhood associations, student groups, Christian base communities, some political parties, and other unions, organized a series of “civic strikes” that focused on the lack of potable water and other public services in poor neighborhoods and that became prototypes for similar protests in other Colombian cities. For many people in the city, whether or not they were directly connected to the labor movement, the experience of solidarity through involvement in a dense network of interconnected popular organizations provided a sense of dignity and a refuge from the daily humiliations that they experienced at work and in their neighborhoods. Progressive politics gave them an individual sense of belonging to a larger social collectivity, a way of

engaging the state, and the means to link their aspirations to larger national and international movements, while remaining connected to each other in Barrancabermeja.<sup>8</sup>

Some trade unionists, students, and poor residents in Barrancabermeja saw hope for change in the upsurge of the revolutionary left. Internationally, the 1979 victory of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas over the Somoza dictatorship revived belief in the efficacy of guerrilla warfare and the power of broad-based social movements, and in Colombia, the emergence of the Coordinadora Guerrillera Nacional in 1985 reflected efforts to unify several insurgent groups and develop a mass political base. Although leftist insurgencies never won broad popular backing in Colombia, as they did in Nicaragua and El Salvador, they did develop regional bases of support, particularly in Barrancabermeja. Even though the relationship between the insurgents and the urban popular organizations was not seamless, many residents of Barrancabermeja's working class neighborhoods wanted what the guerrillas claimed to be fighting for (e.g., control of Colombia's national resources, especially oil, public services, and better working conditions) and the guerrillas moved easily among the urban poor, who either collaborated with them or tolerated their presence with few initial problems.<sup>9</sup>

Nowadays, all of this has changed. As the Colombian state's dirty war against the insurgents intensified, paramilitaries in league with state security forces drove guerrillas militias from Barrancabermeja in 2002, after a four-year period of massacres, disappearances, forced displacements, and extrajudicial executions marked their tightening stranglehold on the city and the inability of the guerrillas to protect the local population. Urban residents blamed the guerrillas, as well as the state security forces, for what happened, noting that the guerrillas had ceased conducting political work among recruits and the general population, and that they no longer had a clearly defined political objective. Some explained with a deep sense of betrayal how young, poorly trained *milicianos* fingered their civilian support networks to the paramilitaries and switched sides to save their own lives. The guerrillas inability to protect their support base and their violent expulsion from the city erased to a considerable degree the belief that the insurgents were committed to an alternative vision of society and able to make that vision a reality.

Disillusionment with the past and fear of the present has moved many urban residents to deny past involvement in the insurgency or any form of progressive politics today. Only by claiming to be "innocent," which means renouncing political connections to the left and hopes for social transformation, can they pursue their lives in paramilitary-controlled Barrancabermeja. The penchant of the military, its paramilitary allies, and the dominant society to regard all residents of the poor urban periphery as either guerrillas or guerrilla supporters only reinforces this retreat from politics, and for some residents, the "peace" brought by the paramilitaries is preferable to the violence of earlier years.<sup>10</sup>

The city now appears calm, but death, disorganization, and fear have weakened or destroyed popular organizations that once channeled political sentiment in the city. They have facilitated the incorporation of working people into new exploitative forms of labor regulation, rent extraction, and political subjugation that accelerated the reconfiguration of the local economy in accord with neoliberal principles, which has further debilitated workplace solidarity, community ties, and the clandestine networks people used to build opposition (Gill 2009a). Working class neighborhoods are fragmented. Social life has grown more isolated, as the left public sphere has shrunk, and as people have turned inward to seek individual solutions for their problems. Surviving labor and social movement leaders live precarious lives, surrounded by bodyguards and cloistered inside armored vehicles, offices, and homes. Paramilitary spies constantly monitor the ebb and flow of social life, and widespread impunity allows still active paramilitary groups to wage a campaign of selective intimidation and assassination against anyone who challenges their rule.

The fear that labor leaders have confronted everyday for several years not only isolates them from an increasingly fractured rank-and-file; it also raises questions about what kinds of memories can form under such circumstances. Targeted individuals and working people in general cannot publicly situate their stories within the context of past political struggles for fear of reprisals. The experience of terror, constant threats, narrow escapes, and the continuous worry about what might lurk around the next corner or befall a vulnerable family member also impose an oppressive “presentism” on their lives, one that, during the height of paramilitary terror between 2000 and 2003, forced them to live within a sequence of events that they did not control. Moreover, along with the state’s unwillingness to investigate threats and attacks against activists, the Colombian state’s maximum law enforcement organization—the Department of Administrative Security—has handed over lists of unionists to the paramilitaries, who have then targeted the individuals for assassination. In addition, prosecutors pursue trade unionists and other human rights defenders with investigations of spurious criminal charges, based primarily on false allegations made by former paramilitaries. These politically motivated criminal investigations stigmatize activists as terrorists, force them to spend time and money on defending themselves, tarnish their reputations, and have a chilling effect on their activities (Human Rights First 2009).

Constructing a historical narrative that connects past struggles to a vision of the future is nearly impossible under these circumstances. The daily lives of labor leaders and other activists—of one thing after another—differ from an everyday life in which people can claim some stability, a degree of continuity between the past and the future, and enough autonomy to act on the world in order to change it.<sup>11</sup> They lack the autonomy, the physical security, and the time needed to rebuild horizontal forms of social solidarity. Although these conditions describe to varying degrees social life

under neoliberalism for many working people elsewhere, Barrancabermeja is an extreme case in the neoliberal order.

Not surprisingly, demands for radical social transformation appear misguided and ill-informed in light of both the massive state and paramilitary violence and an increasingly suspect guerrilla war. Calls for justice have been reconfigured in the language of human rights. In the absence of a broader national progressive coalition calling for radical social transformation, geographically isolated and threatened unionists today have few other options than to articulate their struggles in the abstract, individualist language of human rights, which aspires to universality but constantly falls short of its professed ideals given the structural inequalities around which the neoliberal order is built and re-built.

## THE RISE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Global human rights discourse with its emphasis on the individual did not blend seamlessly with workers' notion of collective social justice rooted in class struggle. As the violence intensified in Barrancabermeja, a debate arose over the very notion of "rights," which was a conceptual category that had not figured prominently in workers' understanding of the world and how to change it. The US had used the notion of human rights to attack the Soviet Union, and when the Carter administration adopted human rights rhetoric in its policy toward Central America, left-wing trade unions viewed the concept as a thin cover for escalating US militarism. Moreover, they felt uncomfortable with the way that human rights discourse pushed political struggles into the legal realm and distracted attention from the strikes, meetings, popular assemblies, and other concrete actions that they associated with class struggle. As retired oil worker Ramón Rangel observed "The USO was a union characterized by concrete actions [*acciones de hecho*]. If anything happened, we organized a civic strike, a labor strike, or a meeting right away. We were formed that way as trade unionists, and that's how we were. We didn't value legal struggles, and we didn't think that anything would be solved through legalistic discussion with the state."<sup>12</sup>

Yet as persecuted left-wing intellectuals in the Southern Cone started to frame their resistance to military dictatorships in the language of human rights, the concept achieved broader acceptance elsewhere in Latin America.<sup>13</sup> Colombian workers began to debate the notion of rights in the 1980s, as human rights organizations appeared in Barrancabermeja in response to the escalating violence. Activists—some of whom were from the labor movement—founded the Regional Human Rights Corporation (CREDHOS) in 1987, and by the early 1990s, Barrancabermeja and the surrounding Middle Magdalena region saw a boom in local human rights committees, which were increasingly tied to national and international organizations.

Despite mainstream understandings of rights as rooted in individual freedoms, much of the early human rights activism in Barrancabermeja developed in support of the right to armed rebellion and revolutionary socialism, even though considerable controversy surrounded discussions of guerrilla tactics, the place of armed rebellion in societal transformation, and the use of violence to achieve political goals.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, the 1976 Algiers Declaration, which stated that rights were collective and understood the protection of communities from oppression as an important goal, received much discussion in Colombian human rights workshops.<sup>15</sup> As violence and fear decimated trade union membership and as expressing dissent grew more dangerous, denouncing state violence constituted the centerpiece of all trade union activism, and the initial suspicion of human rights discourse receded. A human rights committee organized within the USO, and like similar committees sprouting up in the region, its primary weapon was the *denuncia*—a public report of human rights crimes directed to national and international audiences.

Human rights reporting, however, grew ever more depoliticized in the aftermath of the cold war, as the Colombian dirty war heated up. Early Colombian solidarity groups that organized under the banner of human rights became NGOs, and reporting procedures that adhered to international legal standards focused on the objective production of statistics. The NGOs no longer expressed alliance with leftist programs and downplayed the social and historical contexts in which rights violations occurred in order to generate accounts that focused on individual victims and perpetrators (Tate 2007). Most of the major international human rights organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, analyzed paramilitary terror in isolation from the class warfare that accompanied the post-cold war spread of neoliberalism in Colombia and regional struggles over land and labor. Human rights discourse became intertwined with neoliberalism, because it insisted on the centrality of the individual at a historical moment when trade unionism and mass politics were in decline, and when the dispossession of peasants and working people was augmenting the relative surplus population of workers and redistributing wealth upwards (Harvey 2005: 176–178).

As the limits on political debate narrowed and the brutality of the dirty war intensified, human rights became an apolitical, moral imperative. Colombian NGOs and international organizations advanced human rights as a defense of the innocent individual against dehumanizing power but increasingly treated these individuals as decontextualized victims, removed from the history of social, economic, and political struggle in Colombia. By so doing, the discourse of human rights ignored the dynamics of power and disregarded the collective motivations that drove victims and perpetrators into conflict. It also rendered opaque the historical memory of a time when many working people in Barrancabermeja engaged in collective social justice struggles.<sup>16</sup>

Although the discourse of human rights drew people into alliances precisely because it cut across political lines, rights-based opposition offered less a vision of a better world than a critique of what was wrong with the present.<sup>17</sup> It had little to say about what a collective political project might look like. Yet in Barrancabermeja, human rights discourse remained in tension with Marxism, which had enabled some workers to persevere through years of loss and upheaval. Marxist analyses still provided workers with important concepts that allowed them to think about the world and explain the status quo, even though the vision of the industrial proletariat spearheading a socialist revolution had ossified in the super-charged rhetoric of some Colombian labor leaders and was irrelevant to the present. Consequently, as trade unionists reworked what it meant to be a worker in contemporary Colombia, it was unclear how they would formulate a collective vision of social justice. Moreover, as workers, such as those at Coca-Cola, reached out to allies in the US and Europe who equated “empowerment” with liberal individualism, and who did not share the rich regional history of radical politics, the possible futures that both groups could imagine separately and together was open to question.<sup>18</sup>

US human rights activists had difficulty developing a conceptual or political link between the goal of policy makers in Washington and Bogotá to enact a neoliberal agenda in Colombia and the ways that political violence was severing social relationships, isolating people from each other, and incorporating vulnerable people into new relationships of inequality (see Gill 2009a and 2009b). SINALTRAINAL leaders, however, saw the cultivation of international alliances as an important way to circumvent multinational corporations and the repressive Colombian state, draw attention to the plight of Colombian workers, and ultimately, to build a transnational movement against capitalism. How might a radical political anthropology keep the door ajar so that, as workers and their allies struggle over political alternatives in Barrancabermeja and elsewhere, new conceptualizations of collective rights, or the emergence of other kinds of rights, might develop and new alliances form?

## INTELLECTUAL LABOR AND THE POLITICS OF ACCOMPANIMENT

In Barrancabermeja, where social mobilization was fractured and replaced by social fragmentation, making the political and intellectual connections urged by Smith means not only understanding how continuing repression, neoliberal policies, and widespread impunity disarticulate social life; it also means grasping how the violence has created silences, betrayals, and more intimate forms of repression among working people and how these shape memories of the past and visions of the future. To this end, “engaged” anthropology is less about allying ourselves with a particular agenda than

negotiating the shoals of daily life with our research subjects. This process is best captured by Leigh Binford's notion of *acompañamiento*, or accompaniment, which he developed in the context of fieldwork with former FMLN guerrillas in El Salvador. For Binford, accompaniment involves "being with" his research subjects, who are no longer part of a revolutionary project, as they confront the challenges of daily life. It means doing our best to appreciate their goals and understandings during the brief time that we are with them, documenting their setbacks and detours as they try to get from one day to the next, and negotiating when and how to prod the process of social change along, if asked to do so (Binford 2008). This kind of anthropological practice builds on long-term relationships with one's research subjects, as it seeks to understand and locate the ideas, relationships, and feelings of ordinary people within changing historical and political processes.

In Barrancabermeja, where political violence is more acute than in contemporary El Salvador, accompaniment has had various meanings. According to exiled political activist Angelina Marín, "many people [in Barrancabermeja's working class neighborhoods] considered the time of the popular militias to be one of military accompaniment for them" (Marín 2006: 356), and the police and the military did not venture regularly into these neighborhoods.<sup>19</sup> After the expulsion of the militias, however, the armed security provided by the insurgents was replaced by the unarmed protection offered to a few prominent activists by a small number of young Europeans and North Americans who were tied to international human rights organizations. Accompaniment came to refer to the practice of going about the daily round of activities with endangered social leaders, and even staying in their homes at night, as a means of protecting them from assassination attempts and broadening the social and political parameters in which they operated. Although there was much uncertainty about the quality of the protection offered by unarmed foreigners, who did not work with anyone who carried a weapon, international accompaniment became one of the few security options available to popular organization leaders who remained in the city and continued to speak out against the status quo. Even though some high-profile trade unionists eschewed this form of security and opted for armed body guards through a state-sponsored protection program, they believed that the presence of a foreigner helped to make them safer from paramilitary attack.<sup>20</sup> Paradoxically, however, foreign accompaniment, even as it legitimated the work of urban activists whose political projects were slandered and attacked in Colombia, gave rise to a new problem, as these very activists were increasingly compelled to seek confirmation from abroad.

Accompaniment by a foreigner sent a message to would-be assassins that local activists were embedded in international human rights networks that were capable of mobilizing a rapid response in the case of an emergency. The rationale behind international accompaniment was that because of the political



relationships that the Colombian state maintains with other powerful states, especially the US and the EU, and because of the economic and military aid that it received from them, government officials want to minimize the political costs of gross human rights violations and avoid the possible sanctions that might result if a foreigner witnessed a human rights crime. Similarly, the reasoning was that paramilitary leaders allied with the Colombian government would not want to attract the attention of powerful states by committing atrocities in the presence of foreign observers, and therefore Colombian activists accompanied by North American and European observers were less vulnerable to assault than others (Mahoney and Eguren 1997).

Daily life is more complex and unstable than this argument suggests, and it is never certain that accompaniment will have the desired effect. Yet by the time I first arrived in Barrancabermeja in 2004, many activists had embraced it as one way to address a pressing need, and my willingness to accompany SINALTRAINAL workers was the condition of possibility for my research. Because human rights defenders were almost the only foreigners not associated with the oil company, most of the trade unionists and other people with whom I had contact viewed me as a human rights activist. This, in turn, shaped who I could talk to and the directions that my research could take.

Unlike the indigenous people of Cauca province studied by anthropologists David Gow (2008) and Joanne Rappaport (2005), neither the Coca-Cola workers nor other Barrancabermeja trade unionists and activists were particularly concerned with research, and they were not interested in sharing the role of researcher with me. Yet like academics, they, too were involved in knowledge production practices, and these practices blurred the lines between “activist” and “researcher.” SINALTRAINAL leaders, for example, insisted that I meet with a wide range of peasant, women, and labor groups, in the city and the surrounding region, to document human rights violations and to send a message locally that these groups were tied into broader networks of power. They and other local activists had long participated in this kind of knowledge production, and I was happy to join them. Accompanying threatened trade unionists and collaborating with their human rights work thus opened the world of left political activism in Barrancabermeja to me, and it pulled my research well beyond the controversy that surrounded Coca-Cola.

Yet being cast in the role of human rights defender not only misrepresented my institutional connections and overestimated my ability to do anything about the human rights violations;<sup>21</sup> it obliged me to work both within and against the individualizing, depoliticized, and a-historical thrust of contemporary human rights discourse and practice, and it presented a series of tensions that I had to constantly negotiate. The number of international human rights activists in Barrancabermeja was minuscule in comparison to the number of people who needed protection, and accompaniment thus involved decisions about who to accompany, and when, where, and how to do so. In addition, my trade union interlocutors assumed that I would use the stories of terror to speak out in the US about what was happening in

Colombia, and to the best of my ability, I intended to do so. They patiently contextualized the stories that I heard, provided their preferred explanations and interpretations, and occasionally prodded me to meet with the labor attaché at the US embassy in Bogotá to advocate for particular concerns. Yet I was not always in a position to verify what I heard, nor did I have the time to evaluate their analyses. The process of accompaniment involved constantly negotiating and re-negotiating the political agenda of my research project with the political agendas of my trade union interlocutors.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, the urgency and presentism of human rights work conflicted with my growing interest in producing a historically informed account of the popular struggles that shaped the making and unmaking of the urban working class, an account that, I hoped, would connect the current social disorder in Barrancabermeja to the partial defeat of the city's social movements, restore historical agency to working people, and explain what the repression destroyed.

On one occasion, for example, my host—a trade union leader—asked me to cancel an interview that I had scheduled with the head of a group of families who had lost relatives in a 1998 paramilitary massacre. The massacre had announced the mercenaries' intention of taking control of the city. It represented a watershed in the political transformation of Barrancabermeja and had divided the social memory of urban history into two periods, “before” and “after” 1998. Although I was eager to conduct the interview, my host encouraged me to call it off so that I could accompany his wife—an activist in a woman's organization—to a town upriver from Barrancabermeja, where her organization operated a soup kitchen, and where she traveled at least once a week. Paramilitaries tightly controlled the town and had, in the recent past, tried to kill her. Without beating around the bush, the man informed me that a refusal to accompany his wife would constitute nothing less than complete moral bankruptcy on my part. There was, he insisted, no other choice, and only after much discussion and awkward back-and-forth, did we manage to reach a compromise: I would do the interview, meet his wife in the river port at mid-day, and travel back to Barrancabermeja with her in the afternoon.

Paramilitary violence has also created deep divisions and suspicions among ordinary people because of what they did, or were forced to do, to each other. Re-building effective alliances thus requires not only the broadening of political space and the legitimation of political projects that are routinely repressed and misrepresented by the government and the dominant society; it also demands that working people come to terms with the divisions and silences among themselves. Yet as they do so, exposing these hidden histories is a complicated and delicate matter for academic researchers and drawing them out is not necessarily a positive move.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless, as Edelman notes “Some of the professional intellectuals' best work . . . involves probing beneath the surface, questioning appearances and asking uncomfortable questions . . . of their [social] movement interlocutors”

(Edelman 2009: 248–249). Moreover, not to ask penetrating questions and to simply accept the stories that activists tell about themselves and their organizations does a disservice to the goals of these movements and “can involve an abdication of responsibility that flies in the face of genuine engagement” with our research subjects (Edelman 2009: 261).

For example, the stories that my trade union interlocutors tell about the paramilitary attack on Barrancabermeja are silent about the intentional targeting of gays and lesbians, who have suffered less for their political beliefs than for their sexual orientation. Homophobia appears to have intensified in Barrancabermeja with the spread of HIV-AIDS, and most of the male trade unionists that I encountered in Barrancabermeja expressed this homophobia through the casual use of the term “*maricón*” (effeminate man) as an off-hand insult or form of one-upmanship between heterosexual men, as well as a more direct denigration of men who have sex with other men.<sup>24</sup> Yet like heterosexual unionists, homosexuals have endured the degradation of labor relations, i.e. downsizing, out-sourcing, and privatization, in this working class city with particular intensity, and paramilitaries label both trade unionists and homosexuals “*desechables*” or disposable, and attack all of them in so-called “social cleansing campaigns.” The notion of solidarity as understood by heterosexual workers does not extend to homosexuals, and the periodic murder and torture of gay men is not cause for protest; indeed, to the extent that urban residents perceive gays as sexual predators or the transmitters of HIV infection, their elimination is quietly welcomed.

Not surprisingly, gay activism in Barrancabermeja, which has only emerged over the last ten years, operates under severe constraints, and with few exceptions, the handful of activists who openly organize around HIV or diversity issues have done so despite grave risks to their physical safety. One activist recounted to me numerous examples of the discrimination that he had experienced from other threatened social movement activists in labor, womens and human rights groups, and he always ended these stories with the question “human rights for whom?” Although he could discuss the dangers that the paramilitaries posed to him with considerable calm and equanimity, talking about the betrayals of presumed allies in the struggle for human rights was another matter, and his eyes would well up with tears. Moreover, when I occasionally accompanied him on weekends, when the ebb and flow of city life slowed and he felt especially vulnerable, several trade unionists looked askance at my behavior; one even warned me that “my friend” was in fact a child molester who enticed young boys into a life of perversion.

Despite my efforts to defend the integrity of this individual and to occasionally engage trade unionists in broader discussions about homophobia, I never felt that my efforts made much of a difference. I would be told, for example, that “homosexuals in the US are not like the ones in Colombia,” whom I presumably could never understand. Probing forms of discrimination and inequality among activists in Barrancabermeja is a very sensitive

matter that threatens male trade unionists' sense of self, which has already been battered by economic restructuring and attendant forms of violence, and points to a gaping hole in accepted notions of solidarity. Yet if asking questions about inequality and discrimination, as well as intellectual honesty, are part of our political project, we must think carefully about how to ask about, as well as act and write against, homophobia and other forms of oppression, even if this means challenging the analyses and understandings of some of our research subjects.

Intellectual labor is an intensely political process, and it is never straightforward. The analyses that emerge from it do not necessarily provide a voice for the voiceless, and they may even contradict the views that some activists hold of themselves and their organizations. Our accounts arise from experiences with the people we study, our reflections on our field notes, which serve as memory aides when we begin to write, and the ideas debated in the academy and the wider society at the time. Moreover, Smith notes a tendency inherent in the development of our analyses to "*put things in the past*" and to inadvertently close down the open-ended and always incomplete ways that people engage their history *in the present* (Smith 1997: 93). Yet the intellectual labor process does not end with the completion of a book, the production of a report, or the publication of an article. Despite the tendency of these products to "fix" knowledge, they represent a single moment within a more continuous process of shifting relationships, intellectual exchanges, and political debates in which alliances—among our research subjects and between them and anthropologists—are constituted *through* struggle (Thompson 1966).

We are constantly obliged to defend out concepts and analyses to our peers, to the people we study, and to a wider audience. We also use our changing anthropological knowledge to make decisions about how to intervene in the public sphere and about what to teach our students and how to relate to them. Negotiating the boundaries between contributing knowledge and analysis to social movements and jumping into the struggle itself is always a complicated process. The tensions that emerge are themselves productive of new questions and knowledge. Although intellectual labor takes place within unfolding historical processes, its importance resides in how we as researchers, activists, and analysts engage present struggles that are shaped in complex ways by the past. Intellectual labor is thus inherently conflictive, and the knowledge that it generates is never completely settled, at least not for very long.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Leigh Binford, Avi Chomsky, and Steve Striffler for their input on this article.

1. This is a pseudonym.
2. Although the "socialism" espoused by Chávez is closer to Keynes than Marx, Chávez's critique of neoliberalism and US imperialism and his espousal of

- “socialism” and radical participatory democracy have helped keep the idiom of socialism alive among Colombian workers. Aviva Chomsky notes a similar phenomenon among workers in Barranquilla (personal communication).
3. Smith lays out the challenges in a particularly insightful article on the ways that intellectuals and Peruvian peasants deal with the past in the present. See Smith (1997).
  4. This chapter is indebted to the work of Gavin Smith and his vision of progressive scholarship. (see, e.g., Smith 1999; Narotzky and Smith 2006; and Sider and Smith 1997). It also builds on the important contributions of Susana Narotzky (Narotzky and Moreno 2004; Narotzky and Smith 2006; Narotzky 2009a & 2009b), as well as the work of Leigh Binford, Marc Edelman, and Gerald Sider and conversations with all of them over the years.
  5. Such a theoretical and methodological project stands in sharp contrast to the simplistic appropriations of anthropological theory by those social scientists who currently serve on the Pentagon’s Human Terrain Systems teams in Iraq and Afghanistan. These anthropologists bracket off the military’s job of fighting, controlling and repressing Iraqi and Afghani citizens and ignore politics in what Marshall Sahlins describes as an effort to present countersurgency as “a global project of applied anthropology” (Sahlins 2009: ii).
  6. See the web site [Verdadabierta.com](http://Verdadabierta.com) for information about the paramilitary demobilization, public testimony, and ongoing activities.
  7. For more on the links between “old” and “new” paramilitary organizations see Romero (2007) and Hristov (2010), and for an insightful analysis of the shifting boundaries between criminal violence and political violence (Ceballos Melguizo 2001), as well as paramilitaries and the Colombian state, in Colombia (Gill 2009a). The blurring of boundaries between political violence and criminal violence has also been noted in post-peace accord Central America (see, e.g., WOLA 2003, 2007).
  8. Grandin refers to this as “insurgent individuality” (Grandin 2004: 181).
  9. Delgado (2006: 139), for example, refers to the insurgents as “the uncomfortable allies” of the trade unionists.
  10. See Hylton (2007) for a discussion of the paramilitary “peace” in Medellín.
  11. I draw on Gerald Sider’s distinction between daily life and everyday life. See Sider (2008).
  12. Interview with Ramón Rangel, July 2009.
  13. See Tate (2007: 72–106) for a discussion of early human rights activism in Colombia.
  14. Ibid.
  15. Tate (2007: 103).
  16. See Grandin and Klublock (2007) for a more general discussion of this phenomenon elsewhere.
  17. See Brown (2004).
  18. For example, see Gill (2009b) for a discussion of the tensions and diverse agendas that shaped the transnational campaign against Coca-Cola in which workers in Barrancabermeja were involved.
  19. The popular militias were armed, urban groups that controlled territory, defended residents against state violence, and espoused the political philosophy of the guerrillas. They also extorted money from merchants and, after the paramilitary incursion in the late twentieth century, were either exterminated, incorporated into the paramilitary structures or dispersed. See Ceballos Melguizo (2001) for an interesting discussion of the various armed actors in the city of Medellín and the shifting boundaries between political and criminal violence.

20. The Colombian state has operated a protection program for threatened leaders of unions, political parties, human rights, peasant, and civic organizations since 1997, and the program has been funded in part by the US Agency for International Development. Not surprisingly, activists are mistrustful of it because of a widespread belief that the state is both incapable of protecting them and complicit in trying to kill them.
21. Although I coordinated two delegations of US activists in Colombia with the US-based human rights organization, Witness for Peace, in July 2006 and again in 2010, I have never worked for a human rights organization.
22. See Narotzky 2009a, for another example.
23. During the course of my research, I became privy to much information about the complicated histories and commitments of people that I encountered in Barrancabermeja that could be embarrassing, humiliating, and even life-threatening if I were to write about it.
24. The concept of male homosexuality, i.e. men who have sex with men, is a relatively recent development in Latin America, where only the passive partner in same-sex sexual encounters have been stigmatized and labeled a maricón. The emergence of homosexuality as a separate sexual category has taken place with the growth of urban sexual subcultures, the spread of HIV-AIDS and a groundswell of gay organizing that began in the 1990s (see Lancaster 1992: 235–278; Parker 1991; Green 1999; and Ballvé 2008 ).

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### 3 Security Anthropology and Northern Morazán, El Salvador

#### Confronting the Present There and Elsewhere<sup>1</sup>

*Leigh Binford*

In early June of 1994, I arrived at El Salvador's International Airport, located near the coast in Comalapa and about 30 km. from the capital city. Compared to earlier, civil war-era entries in 1986 and 1991, this one was a breeze. As a Fulbright-Hays scholar with the imprimatur of the US Department of Education, I was met by US Embassy officials and whisked through migration and customs without any issues. Before dropping me off at a hotel in the city, my escorts asked for my passport and told me to stop by the embassy a few days later to receive an orientation and retrieve the document and visa, which they would obtain through diplomatic channels. That orientation took place as scheduled, conducted by the local United States Information Service (USIS) officer, who explained my rights to use the embassy library, mail service and canteen.<sup>2</sup> Interested in hitting the ground running, anthropologically speaking, I attempted an informal "interview" by asking the officer about his history of government service and the background to his (and others') El Salvador posting. He talked about the competition among career foreign service officials for the plush jobs in places like London and Paris; the movement of personnel in and out of rental homes in San Benito and Escalón—wealthy capital city neighborhoods; and regulations on travel that put much of the capital and most rural areas off limits to foreign embassy personnel. But the point that really struck me was his explanation of the mandatory three-year rotation, intended, he stated, to ensure that US foreign service employees do not identify too closely with the subject population, in which case they might have difficulty implementing State Department policy. Then he passed me to the resident "spook".

That is, the Political Officer. But it is generally accepted that in most if not all embassies "political officer" is a crude euphemism for Central Intelligence Agency operative. In this case the political officer was built like actor Matt Damon in the Bourne trilogy; the sculpted body and short crew screamed military or intelligence service. His job was to "orientate" me to the current situation in El Salvador, to list my "obligations" and then some. He said that officially I was not allowed to live or travel

outside the San Salvador area. When I interrupted in order to explain that Fulbright-Hays had approved a project for the northern reaches of Morazán department—the wartime rearguard of the Peoples Revolutionary Army (henceforth ERP) faction of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN)—he replied that he was just communicating policy, a polite way of relieving the US Government of responsibility in case I got into trouble. Then he made a more insidious suggestion: If I should see anything or hear anything that might be of interest, he would appreciate my letting the embassy know. When I inquired as to what that “anything” might entail, he was unable or unwilling to elaborate. Perhaps he was referring to clandestine arms caches left over from the civil war (a possibility, albeit unlikely) or a plot on the part of disgruntled ex-ERP combatants to reinstate insurgent activity (more remote still). Armed conflict had ended almost two and a half years earlier, the FMLN transforming its rebel army into a political party and contesting the March 1994 “elections of the century,” in which they had been defeated by the ruling right wing National Republican Alliance. Those left out of the Peace Accord, or dissatisfied with its terms, tended to pull back from political activity all together and focus on mending the tattered household economy. A small number joined up with former army soldiers to form roving criminal bands that robbed and assaulted FMLN supporters and opponents alike.<sup>3</sup> However he intended the comment, the Political Officer was asking me to make a choice between my responsibility to my research subjects, on the one hand, and my presumed loyalty to the US nation-state, on the other. I was to become the eyes and ears of the US Government in northern Morazán, in Salvadoran parlance, an *oreja* (informer) or *soplón* (snitch).

The experience would hardly merit inclusion in a chapter that addresses politically-engaged anthropology, but for the US government’s recent employment of professional anthropologists and other social scientists to work on the ground in counterinsurgency projects in Afghanistan, Iraq and perhaps elsewhere. In this chapter I discuss critically this “security anthropology” as a particular form of political engagement from within the Right Wing of liberal social science. I briefly summarize the arguments for and against security anthropology, but I am much more interested in discussing the kind of world security anthropologists aspire to bring about through their actions than in critically dissecting those actions themselves. And since the Iraq and Afghanistan wars remain unresolved, I draw on ethnographic work in northern Morazán, El Salvador, the Salvadoran civil war (1980–1992) and its aftermath (1992–2008) in order to make a case against anthropologists’ collaboration with the US military. Finally, I discuss briefly the rationale behind conducting fieldwork in “somewheres” like current day northern Morazán, where nothing of collective political significance seems to be happening.

## SECURITY ANTHROPOLOGY

Beginning in the early years of the new millennium, some military strategists began to discuss the need for precise knowledge of the “human terrain” upon which counterinsurgency wars were being fought if “hearts and minds” were to be won over and victory achieved. These ideas gained impetus around 2004 with the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the growing strength of the Iraqi insurgency. The replacement of Donald Rumsfeld with William Gates as US Secretary of Defense ushered in a coterie of strategic planners critical of Rumsfeld’s heavy weapons-based “shock-and-awe” approach and open to a cultural turn being promoted by General David Petraeus and a bevy of military intellectuals (see Jager 2007).

With the assistance of Berkeley and Yale-trained anthropologist Montgomery McFate and anthropologically-savvy, political scientist David Kilcullen—on loan from the Australian army to the US Defense Department—“culture” assumed a prominent strategic role in the army’s revised FM 3–24 counterinsurgency manual and an operational role in the form of the Human Terrain System and five-person Human Terrain Teams (HTTs) placed with each of twenty-six brigade units in Afghanistan and Iraq. These teams, which include at least one anthropologist or other social scientist, gather social, cultural and economic information from local informants, village elders, etc., that, once processed, is used to construct human terrain “maps.” These maps help field commanders identify the “bad guys” and draw up strategies to win natives’ hearts and minds to the coalition cause (McFate 2005a; González 2009a, 2009b, 2008, 2007). The “security anthropologists” (Gill 2007) defend military collaboration by claiming that it reduces armed confrontations, and thus human suffering, all around and allows the military to devote more resources to meeting civilians’ needs for roads, electricity, education, etc. (McFate 2005a). Against accusations that the work violates basic tenets of the American Anthropological Association’s Code of Ethics, McFate decried the reflexive and postmodern turn of contemporary US anthropologists, concluding that something she calls “disciplinary anthropology” has “become hermetically sealed within its Ivory Tower” (McFate 2005b).

Criticisms of security anthropology, affiliated programs and future plans have been varied and wide-ranging. “Informed consent” loses all semblance of meaning when local inhabitants meet up with khaki-clad and sometimes weaponed-up HTT anthropologists traveling with occupying forces, indeed, as part of those forces. “Full disclosure” of results is not possible when the information and conclusions reached through analysis of it remain military property. Most importantly, security anthropologists cannot ensure that no harm comes to those who share information with them, since the ultimate goal of direct and indirect activity is to identify the enemy and “neutralize” it (González 2009b; American Anthropological Association 2007; Price 2007). Confessions and slip-ups occasionally make this crystal clear, as when US Army Lt. Col. Gian Gentile chastised officials for attempting to “whitewash” Human Terrain Teams, which

“whether they want to acknowledge it or not . . . do at some point contribute to the collective knowledge of a commander which allows him to target and kill the enemy in the Civil War in Iraq” (cited in González 2009b: 68).<sup>4</sup> González has suggested that the Human Terrain System could easily mutate into a Vietnam-era CORDS/Phoenix style program, with targeted arrests, tortures and assassinations of hundreds or even thousands of people (2009a, 2009b, 2008).<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, neither he nor the American Anthropological Association rule out all forms of professional relationship between anthropologists and the military institution, since much collaboration—teaching in service academies, for instance—does not violate the Association’s Code of Ethics.<sup>6</sup>

## NORTHERN MORAZÁN AND SECURITY ANTHROPOLOGY

In this section I deepen the criticism of security anthropology by tracing pre-war, wartime and post-war social relationships in northern Morazán, El Salvador. Through this example I suggest that, however the US Military and its allies have refined their tactics, the strategic objectives remain unchanged: the elimination of movements contrary to US interests, implantation of a polyarchical system of governance and the social engineering of conditions that facilitate maximum exploitation of a country’s human and material resources. Just what kind of society do military planners, State Department bureaucrats, US politicians and, most important, transnational enterprises envision for Iraq, Afghanistan and that “most of the rest of the world” in which the US Military is active today?

### First Period: A “Forgotten Land” (pre-1980)

The region of the department of Morazán, El Salvador located north of the Torola River offers a useful, albeit anecdotal and indirect, example of the contradictions of counterinsurgency anthropology. Northern Morazán was the wartime rear guard of the People’s Revolutionary Army, yet its pre-war history gave few hints that many of its inhabitants would come to play distinguished roles in the annuals of twentieth century Latin American revolution. The area is rugged and mountainous with poor quality soils, frequent droughts and low yields of corn, beans and henequen, an agave processed into fiber and then worked into twine for conversion to rope, hammocks and other artisanal goods. With the exception of a small financial/commercial elite and some family-sized farms, households were extremely poor and many adult males felt compelled to work seasonally in the coffee, sugar cane, and cotton plantations of El Salvador’s volcanic cordillera, intermontane valleys and coastal regions to the south and west. Inhabitants of one rural community opined that before the war the main difference between the rich and the poor was that the former did not sleep with their pigs. Another oft repeated story tells of parents who, dependent on child labor,

disparaged education by repeatedly reminding intellectually curious youth, “You can’t eat the alphabet!” (*Las letras no se comen*).

For most young people, desire for education would have made little difference anyhow, because primary schooling beyond third grade was available only in municipal seats (*cabeceras*), while “higher” education, meaning high school and above, required leaving northern Morazán for San Francisco Gotera or another city, affordable only by the regional petty bourgeoisie. Apart from municipal government, the rudimentary educational system and a few public health posts, the state presence took the form of detachments of repressive security forces—National Guard and Treasury Police—stationed in the main towns. As for religion, a single Catholic priest watched over fifty thousand northern Morazanian souls from the parish seat in Jocoaitique. But this politically conservative, patriarchal figure showed up in outlying communities only when invited to preside over Saint’s Day celebrations and other important occasions that promised him a good payday. In many aspects northern Morazán in the early 1970s was little different from the areas of western El Salvador in the 1920s studied by Jeffrey Gould and Aldo Lauria-Santiago (2008): Neither the State nor religion exercised more than a weak hegemony over the resident population.

Yet weak hegemony was hegemony nonetheless. A predatory regional petty bourgeoisie of mid-sized merchants cum money lenders, some of whom also owned substantial tracts of crop and grazing land, clothed productive, commercial and financial domination of poor peasants and workers in a web of patron-client relations that extended from municipal centers into distant hamlets. During liturgies in Jocoaitique and elsewhere, the priest hammered home the message that poverty on earth would be rewarded by wealth in the afterlife, where the rich would pay for mistreating and exploiting the poor. Any person who stepped out of line had to contend with the security forces, often warned beforehand by a network of local spies affiliated to the National Democratic Organization (ORDEN). Resistance, such as it existed, tended to take the form of James Scott’s “weapons of the weak” (1985): malicious gossip, petty theft and acts of sabotage. Though discontent was occasionally reflected in votes against the military’s ruling National Conciliation Party—as occurred in Jocoaitique in the 1960s—postwar historical memory registers no widespread, collective anti-government protest prior to the mid-1970s. Indeed, apart from the official church’s Catholic Action program, Alcoholics Anonymous, and a half dozen rotating credit associations, there existed little in the way of collective organization at all (Binford 1996).

Such features contributed to geographer David Browning’s (1975) characterization of northern Morazán and other rugged areas bordering Honduras as a “*tierra olvidada*” (forgotten land), passed over when coffee substituted for indigo—the source of a blue, colorfast dye by the same name—as El Salvador’s main export in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Yet the absence of significant agrarian capitalist development with marked class polarization did not mean that the region and its inhabitants lay beyond the

compass of agro-export development. It merely meant the partial separation of the sites of production and reproduction of northern Morazanian labor power. Most northern Morazanian households combined subsistence cultivation with petty commodity production, but the zone's developmental backwardness ensured a large supply of cheap migrant labor power that cotton, sugar cane and coffee plantation owners could draw in during critical moments of the production cycle and then discard when the harvest terminated and workers' services were no longer required.

Neither the national nor foreign governments expressed concern about the material conditions of this and other rural Salvadoran populations. Therein lies one of the contemporary lessons that we can extract from events during this period. "Security" anthropologists enter only *after* a previously politically stable or "secure" situation—however little material, social, and psychological security was experienced by the resident population—has become politically insecure for dominant groups. They manifest no interest in poverty, exploitation, repression and torture unless and until they lead to security "problems." In the Salvadoran case, government troops and civil guards ruthlessly crushed an ill-conceived Communist-inspired peasant rebellion in 1932, following victory in battle with the massacre of thousands (see Gould and Lauria-Santiago 2008). For the next forty-seven years the military's National Conciliation Party governed El Salvador on behalf of the agro-export elite. The United States government sanctioned military rule, growing landlessness, poverty, desperation and repression because workers and peasants there presented no security threat either to state control or nearby neighbors.

However, after the Second World War, one avenue after another—colonization of South Coast land reserves, labor migration to Honduras and urban industrialization—proved incapable of relieving the social pressure generated by unencumbered capitalist accumulation in the context of rapid population growth and an increasingly skewed land distribution (Williams 1986). The contradictions came to a head when massive fraud denied the presidency to Napoleon Duarte of the Christian Democratic Party in 1972. Four years later landed elites blocked a modest land reform approved by the military government under Molina. Rather than pushing for progressive land and wage reform, which might have reduced tensions, at least temporarily, the United States Government stood idly by, when, that is, it was not arming the police forces and providing counterinsurgency training to military cadets in order to prevent another Cuba (McClintock 1985). The pre-history of conflict, and particularly the role of domestic and imperial capitalism in aggravating social contradictions, tends to be conveniently ignored unless and until mass social movements threaten state capitalist hegemony.

## **Second Period: Civil War (1980–1992)**

The combination of widespread poverty, a weak state presence and apparently "uncontaminated" culture proved attractive to Rafael Arce Zablah,

a founding member of the ERP, who toured northern Morazán in the early 1970s (Medrano 1994: 68–74). ERP recruitment and the formation of a rebel army was nourished by a decade of church-based community organization spearheaded by a progressive priest and assorted peasant catechists. The priest, a young Salvadoran named Miguel Ventura, arrived to direct a new parish embracing three municipalities. Ventura organized a broad network of catechists and coordinated their activities. The catechists received training in “peasant universities” staffed by mostly foreign (Spanish and US) priests inspired by the Liberation Theology of the Second Vatican Council. They promoted the conjoined development of material and spiritual aspects of the rural and urban poor. Through the message and practice of Liberation Theology, people in northern Morazán and other Salvadoran “somewheres” began to reassess their experiences of suffering and exploitation, eroding the state’s hegemonic control. But these activities also attracted the attention of the regional Security Forces, which harassed the Christian Base Community leadership for its purported Communist orientation. The accusation was untrue, but threats and subsequent persecution set the stage for the movement’s radicalization, collaboration with the ERP and the incorporation of many participants into the armed opposition (Binford 1996, 2004).

The first protracted battle with army units occurred in October 1980. Early military incursions into northern Morazán were accompanied by wholesale massacres of households, groups of households and even entire communities. As many as a thousand people—mostly infants, children, adolescents and adult females—were systematically slaughtered in and around the hamlet of El Mozote between December 11–13, 1981, in an operation carried out by the US-trained Atlacatl battalion, but enabled by almost fifty years of paranoid anti-Communism. The US Embassy did not condone the massacre; it denied that it had even taken place. Under congressional pressure, the Reagan administration dispatched Todd Greentree and Robert Blakeley to the region to investigate accusations aired in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* by journalists Raymond Bonner and Alma Guillermoprieto, respectively (Danner 1994). The US officials were accompanied by armed Salvadoran soldiers, for which reason interviews in a nearby community and an urban camp housing Morazanian refugees produced ambiguities and circumlocutions, a harbinger of the kinds of statements that might be obtained by armed Human Terrain Teams. Greentree suspected a massacre, but the presence of Salvadoran soldiers stifled frank testimony, making it feasible for the investigators to accept the military’s claims of an armed altercation in El Mozote and the possibility that some civilians “could have been subject to injury as a result of the combat” (Hinton 1982).

In El Salvador massive and uncontrolled use of violence failed to crush collective resistance, and torture victims and massacre survivors (or surviving friends, relatives and family members) enrolled in ERP ranks and in

the ranks of other FMLN groups in other parts of the country. Something similar occurs daily in contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq where “accidents” and “errors”—that security anthropologists strive to reduce—result in significant numbers of civilian casualties and additional recruitment to opposition forces there.

By 1983 an accumulation of experience, arms, motivation and intelligence made it possible for the ERP to eliminate security force detachments from northern Morazán. For the remainder of the civil war the army mobilized battalion-size forces for temporally-limited incursions. Regions outside or on the margins of FMLN control in other parts of El Salvador were included in the Army’s Phoenix Program, in which the government offered civilians goods and services in an effort to win over hearts and minds, a step toward the creation of local Civil Patrols that would defend communities from insurgents and reduce the area in which rebel troops could operate freely.<sup>7</sup> But the Army considered northern Morazán too guerrilla-infested for inclusion in Phoenix, and, absent an international observer presence, treated it as a free-fire zone—shelling, rocketing and bombing without consideration for the large number of unarmed civilians residing there.<sup>8</sup>

The election of civilian president José Napoleón Duarte in 1984 set the stage for talks between the government and rebels and established the conditions for a recrudescence of civilian organization and a strategic softening of military-civilian encounters. Threats, captures and interrogations unfolded alongside clowns, candy, food distributions and medical and dental clinics, as the army sought to entice individuals in FMLN-controlled areas throughout El Salvador into becoming spies, collaborators and informers, an example of the “soft war” strategy currently used in the Middle East. But the ERP developed a *doble cara* (two faced) response, in which civilian supporters feigned cooperation with the army present, accepting its gifts and taking advantage of medical and dental services, and displayed their true sympathies once the army left and the rebels returned (see FMLN 1987). Insurgents and their supporters in Iraq and Afghanistan surely follow similar strategies, which Human Terrain Teams, through their interest in “tribal” relations and social networks, strive to identify and counter or neutralize.

Wartime social movement organizations—one developing in northern Morazán, the other implanted there with the return of Honduran-based war refugees in 1989—claimed interests in self-managed development and participative democracy. But in a war zone, marked by air force bombings, military invasions, and the capture and torture of civilians, these lofty ideals were wielded strategically to attract international support and as platforms from which to protest government human rights violations. They were less useful in shaping local and regional activity because the dangers of army infiltration and the need to protect information (Galeas and Ayalá 2008; Gibb 2000) led the ERP’s political section to exercise tight vertical control over purportedly independent civilian groups. Organizational development was distorted by the violent and unstable context and truncated by the



guerrilla command-and-control system (Binford 1999, 2010). The groups experienced serious difficulties once peace arrived and ERP authority was no longer backed by force of arms.

Most wartime inhabitants of northern Morazán supported the ERP and civilian organizations linked to it. The organizations supplied material support to people cut off from markets and protested abuses on the part of government forces, which refused to acknowledge a civilian presence and treated all inhabitants as enemies of the state. Moreover, concrete activities mirrored those pursued in the Christian Base Communities during the 1970s. For instance, many pre-war catechists continued to work with the church during the conflict. Thus I believe that a case can be made that the articulation of progressive Catholicism with the ERP's political project contributed to "insurgent individualism" among combatants, civilian supporters and even some refugees, for whom, in Greg Grandin's formulation, "collective action distilled for many a more potent understanding of themselves as politically consequent individuals . . . collective actions laid bare the social foundations of the self" (2004: 181). The stage seemed to have been set for a vigorous regional social movement once the armed conflict concluded.

### **Third Period: "A Perfect Storm of Failure and Neglect" (post-1992)**

That did not occur. The civil war ended in 1992 in a military stalemate and Peace Accords negotiated between the government and FMLN. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the desire of the United States to pull out of Central America in order to attend to more important matters in Eastern Europe and elsewhere played no small part in the process. Land reform, the FMLN's conversion to a legal political party, the demilitarization of civilian policing and other measures accompanied and followed the Peace Accords. The rebels demobilized and surrendered their weapons to representatives of the United Nations Observer Mission. In doing so they tacitly acknowledged the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of force. Almost 30,000 ex-combatants and their civilian supporters received land through a post-war Land Transfer Program (McReynolds 2002). But the FMLN's strategic disruption of transportation, its sabotage of electricity infrastructure and destruction of crops and machinery on the cotton, sugar cane and coffee estates of those big landowners who refused to pay protection money, debilitated the agro-export sector and, inadvertently perhaps, helped pave the way for the transition to a neoliberal economy based on finance, services and assembly plants (Robinson 2003).

The principal northern Morazanian social movement organization that developed during the civil war staked the future of alternative development on the cooperative sector, dissolving more than sixty local affiliates and incorporating as many members as possible into nineteen independent agricultural cooperatives. Soon the organization had become transformed into a regional NGO administering credit, literacy, and health programs

financed by international (mostly European) organizations. When northern Morazanian peasants were unable to repay loans, the terms hardened and interest rates increased. Following a string of financial losses in its agricultural loan program, the management transferred operations to more promising areas south of the Torola River. The cooperatives lacked the human and capital resources to cope with this situation. As a consequence, many subsistence-oriented cooperatives set up by ex-combatants and their civilian supporters as collective alternatives to economic individualism failed. Some were dissolved, others strived to preserve a collective spirit under adverse conditions in which member households struggled to piece together a meager living by combining a variety of shifting and unpredictable income sources. By the turn of the millennium, cooperative land had been divided up and individually titled.

During the first decade of the new millennium, northern Morazanians became drawn into international migratory circuits to the United States: cell phones became ubiquitous and cyber cafes and violent video games grew in popularity, mainly among youth; remittance financed-wealth was on regular public display in the form of new houses, vehicles, and expensive fiestas; and theft, backbiting, and invidious comparison seemed to be growing apace. International migration had become so normalized that most people viewed it as a “force of nature,” if not a divine force, beyond human intervention. Not tourism, binational (El Salvador-Honduras) food security programs, World Bank-style targeted poverty alleviation programs, or broader access to education were thought capable of stemming the movement northward, much less reversing it. Ex-combatants have proven less susceptible to the lure of international migration than others, in large part, I suspect, because they tend to be older, poorer, and too physically debilitated to make the dangerous journey. Many piece together a bare existence based on agriculture, tourism projects, petty commerce, artisan production, and occasional wage labor. A fortunate few, capitalizing on skills and contacts acquired during the civil war, now occupy staff positions in peasant cooperatives, municipal government or tourism enterprises, but wages tend to be low and the jobs insecure. Despite the lip service given to “alternative development,” “cooperatives,” “solidarity” and so on, struggles for social justice have been eclipsed by “immediate struggles”—to borrow from Narotzky and Smith (2006)—to stay alive.

## DOING ANTHROPOLOGY WHERE “NOTHING IS HAPPENING”

Close scrutiny of recent northern Morazanian history and social relations offers insight into the differences between securitized anthropology and a progressive, political economic approach. Security anthropologists, such as those who have joined Human Terrain Teams, hire on to projects that accord with the needs of their institutional superiors, whose imperial agenda drives

the enterprise. They enter the “field” with conflicts in full sway (Period 2); they are around neither for the build-up (Period 1) or the (usually disastrous) aftermath (Period 3). Contemporary northern Morazán represents the kind of relative peace and docility—for those who don’t have to struggle with making a living there—that the US Government, the US Military and (intended or not) security anthropologists work to implant in today’s theaters of conflict in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. Whereas the strategic employment of “culture” may represent a form of soft power—invariably wedded to hard power—any reduction in wartime physical violence is substantially offset by the postwar effects of neoliberal forms of structural violence and the related everyday violence which structural violence generates. For example, the international reconstruction monies that poured into northern Morazán during the years immediately following the 1992 signing of the Peace Accords was used to rebuild, and expand in some cases, the electricity grid, potable water systems, schools and roads, among other things. However, with basic infrastructure restored, state investment dried up to such a degree that in 1998 a USAID official, who presided over the dismantling of a formerly flourishing assistance operation, stated that investing in northern Morazán made little sense given the region’s rugged topography, poor soils, and underdevelopment.<sup>9</sup> According to information supplied to Vincent McElhinney by an official of the Inter-American Development Bank, “Morazán held the dubious claim of having received a full zero percent of nationally budgeted public investment in 1998” (McElhinney 2004: 164). Twelve years later in 2010, the only noteworthy investments in northern Morazán consisted of a half dozen small hotels and restaurants catering mainly to ecological and historical tourists and weekend “day trippers” from the San Miguel area seeking temporary respite from oppressive lowland heat and humidity.

McFate and other security anthropologists insist that their actions contribute to peace and political stability, prerequisites for the operation of international assistance programs that address the population’s basic needs. But “meeting needs” during wartime is usually a Period 2 hearts-and-minds strategy that, as in northern Morazán and elsewhere, comes to be placed on the backburner once the US Government and its allies consider a country or region sufficiently pacified for systematic resource extraction, intensified labor exploitation and/or social disposability.<sup>10</sup>

Historically most anthropologists have worked in places akin to contemporary northern Morazán, where at any given time social movements in open opposition to state policy are likely to be weak or nonexistent. Yet we know that, as in northern Morazán, long periods of overt political quiescence precede mass political mobilization. Under the circumstances, documenting contradictory social relations and the “internal and external conditioning” (Cohen 1987: 187–188) that maintains relationships within limits acceptable to hegemonic groups, as well as analyzing the sensitive nodal points that under particular conditions might disrupt a precarious equilibrium, assume political value and historical relevance.

With this we leave behind militarized anthropology and its articulation with the State and Capital in order to contemplate an approach (or approaches) to anthropology attentive to unseen and often unperceived possibilities. What might be the political merit of such work, and how might it be pursued? Absent strong, organized social movements, some version of historical realism, as elaborated by Gavin Smith, offers one strategy. Historical realism weds the study of historically-given fields of force to a social phenomenology that elucidates how social actors work from within those fields to reproduce and transform both the fields and themselves. The key concept is “hegemony,” as regards both a “looking back to historical conditions and attending to the reception of hegemonic forces” and a “looking forward and referring to hegemony in terms of the practical transformation of the social world” (1999: 244). This Gramscian ground has been tread, with different emphases, by Raymond Williams (1977), William Roseberry (1994) and others. The approach converges with Pierre Bourdieu’s work (1990a) in its rejection of dualisms that force us to choose between objective or subjective approaches, structuralism or phenomenology, determinism or freedom, and so on. Smith’s work is particularly useful for examining social process in places like northern Morazán because he effects an effort to re-materialize hegemony by departing analytically from the production and reproduction of social relations as against the cultural forms that, in his words, “crystallize around this process.” Smith argues that hegemony is a material process that begins at the point of production in the relations of production and the division of labor, even as it extends farther. Too often, anthropologists analytically cut cultural forms loose from their material moorings leading them (cultural forms) to take on lives of their own, the popularity of “cultural hegemony” being one problematic result (Rebel 1989).

Kilcullen embraces “the thrill of being where the action is” (Packer 2006). A more inclusive conception has action all around, whatever the appearances to the contrary. Nothing may seem to be happening, but the incompleteness of hegemony and the gap between appearance and reality holds out as possible “the formation of organized, collective social subjects with effective political will to struggle toward identifiable political goals” (Smith 1999: 240). Sometimes subjects have already begun to organize, in which case anthropologists may elect to work with them, jointly crafting collaborative projects that respond to the organization’s needs, without thereby subordinating research to its agenda (see Hale 2008, 2006a, 2006b; Speed 2006). By contrast, contemporary northern Morazán is representative of social fields that are not currently sites of open and organized class, ethnic or gender struggle. There, a strategy of accompaniment may be the way forward. “Accompaniment” (from the Spanish *acompañamiento*) implies that “I am with you in this journey, I accompany you on this road.” The journey is never straightforward and the destination cannot be foreseen with precision. But however well hegemony seems to be working, William Roseberry

reminded us that it is best conceived “not as a finished and monolithic ideological formation [i.e., a thing] but as a problematic, contested, political process of domination *and* struggle” (1994: 358, my emphasis). One never knows exactly from what direction the next social explosion will come, for which reason there is a place for an anthropology that documents the structures, strategies and material and nonmaterial resources of domination, on the one and, and the fissures in local, regional, national and international hegemonies that might be widened, giving rise to more open and direct forms of contention and a conception of the future radically different from the present (Binford 2008).

Also, progressive political economically-informed anthropologists play roles as intellectuals who, in the Bourdieuan sense, form a dominated segment of the dominant classes: high in cultural capital but low in economic capital. We should not overestimate the role of intellectual labor, especially compared to the work of grassroots or organic intellectuals. But neither should we gainsay the importance of seizing every opportunity to “name the world,” and in doing so, perhaps contributing in some small way to (re) making it—to the extent, that is, that those classifications become materialized through praxis. Notwithstanding the slippage between beliefs and reality, an analysis, an understanding of social process or a classification is more likely to “take,” as it were, if and when it is true to the underlying objective social relationships and mental *habitus*. In this way, “classes” as objective potential take form as corporate bodies endowed with organs of representation, an agenda and so on (Bourdieu 1990b: 129).

## NORTHERN MORAZÁN IN THE MAELSTROM

That said, it is unlikely that any intellectual analysis, whether foreign or local, will have a decisive or even significant effect on social organization in northern Morazán in the near future. Twenty years of neoliberal political economy has taken a significant toll on most regional inhabitants, whose imagination generally goes no farther than a kinder, gentler version of the capitalist system within which they are ensconced. Even the most progressive actors rile against *asistencialismo* (aid dependency), which they claim predominated both during and immediately following the war, and advocate for responsible investment and management of resources, whether locally-generated or foreign derived. This “self-help” orientation has a progressive side when it refers to collective activities, but too often the responsibility for both problems and solutions to them falls on individuals and households, often viewed as bearers of a “culture of poverty” that can be transformed through the benevolent intervention of the state in coordination with international actors: NGOs, the United Nations Development Program and others. With the socialist option removed from the table, FMLN government officials, The Segundo Montes Foundation, representatives of the Regional Program

for Food and Nutritional Security of Central America (PRESANCA) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (FOMILENIO) believe that with the right combination of training, programation, cultural intervention and effort, poverty can be reduced, nutritional deficiencies addressed, housing improved and educational levels raised—all without producing any fundamental change in national income distribution. Concern with poverty distinguishes post-war governments—and not only the FMLN government elected in 2009—from those that existed before the war. Yet the vehicles recommended to effect these changes are destined to fail because they leave unaddressed the social structures of accumulation that contribute to growing divides between haves and have-nots. In northern Morazán those divides are manifest through a small petty capitalist class based in agriculture (horticulture) and tourism, a fragile petty bourgeoisie sector of salaried professionals (technicians, government technocrats, service providers) and a massive and growing group of peasants and workers, many of whom become fully proletarianized only when they migrate to the United States. The social panorama is complicated by the dependency of many households on remittances sent by US-based members, which allow them to aspire to much higher levels of consumption than would be possible were they to rely exclusively on income generated in El Salvador.

The situation is bleak for at least the foreseeable future, but I firmly believe that it remains important to offer up the kind of critical political economic analysis that draws upon and incorporates the experiences of the majority of northern Morazanians and that reinforces the skepticism manifest by a minority (who argue that they have seen these programs before) and their belief that a qualitative change in socio-economic relationships remains a task of an unfinished social revolution.

## NOTES

1. This chapter draws on fieldwork carried out in northern Morazán between 1991 and 1998 and the summers of 2008, 2010, and 2011. Work during 2010–2011 was supported by grant No. 0962643 from the National Science Foundation, titled “From Wartime to Peacetime: Post-insurgent individuality in northern Morazán, El Salvador.”
2. The federal government eliminated the USIS in 1999, and its presence is sorely missed by the new, “culture-sensitive” counterinsurgency experts I discuss in this chapter.
3. The officer himself had been in the country but a short time. By way of emphasizing the seriousness of the crime problem, he explained that he had been robbed at gun-point of all his belongings between the airport and the city.
4. Or when Human Terrain System anthropologist Audrey Roberts was quoted in the 8 March 2009 *Dallas Morning News* to the effect that she “does not worry about what the military does with her information, even if it is fed into intelligence used by US Special Forces for killing or capturing insurgent leaders. ‘If it’s going to inform how targeting is done—whether that targeting is bad guys, development or governance—how our information is used is how

it's going to be used . . . All I'm concerned about is pushing our information to as many soldiers as possible” (cited in Price 2009).

5. David Price stated in a recent *Counterpunch* article that “there has been no independent assessment of data on the impact of HTS actually reducing ‘kinetic engagements’ with occupied people in Iraq and Afghanistan” and that Colonel Martin Schweitzer, who reported such claims to the media, admitted “that no such studies verifying these often repeated claims exist and that this claimed reduction is a loose estimate made by Col. Schweitzer” (2009). According to González, “there is no verifiable evidence that HTT’s have saved a single life—American, Afghan, Iraqi or otherwise. It appears that HTS [the Human Terrain System] has two faces: one designed to rally public support for an increasingly unpopular war, and the other to collect intelligence to help salvage a failing coalition” (2008: 21).
6. In their representative capacity officers of The Society for Applied Anthropologists (SfAA) and the National Association for Practicing Anthropologists (NAPA) either deny ethical problems with HTS or take a “cautious” position and call for further study, to the consternation of some members (Rylko-Bauer 2009: 1–2).
7. The original program represented the dark side of the Vietnam-era Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support or CORDS. Once duly processed and analyzed, information obtained through the allegedly innocuous CORDS was used to target individual South Vietnamese for incarceration, torture, and/or elimination in the shadowy Phoenix Program.
8. To take one example, the area around Marjah, in southern Afghanistan, was a free fire zone during the recent NATO assault to dislodge Taliban troops from this key strategic site. Thus far, this ongoing operation has resulted in the deaths of sixteen soldiers (thirteen NATO and three Afghan) but at least twenty-eight civilians, including thirteen children, according to the Afghan human rights commission. Associated Press writer Alfred de Montesquiou, reports that, “The civilian toll has raised fears that NATO may lose the support of the population even as it drives out the Taliban” (2010).
9. Interview with USAID official, San Salvador, June 19, 1998.
10. Northern Morazán falls into the labor exploitation “category,” although most of the labor is set to work in the United States, while the Salvadoran region serves a double role as nursery for future cheap labor power and human waste dump for those expelled from the United States for age, health or other reasons.

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## 4 Effective Politics

### Band Elections and Decision Making in a Northern Ontario Anishnaabek Community

*Krystyna Sieciechowicz*

*You're not the Indian I had in mind.*

—Thomas King (2003)

In the late fall of 2010, Canadian Native reserve leadership came under some very unpleasant critical scrutiny, purportedly for a lack of financial oversight, transparency, and accountability. This scrutiny was comprised of three not unrelated events, which occurred in rather quick succession and together worked to form the structure and argument for punitive external control over political decision making on Native reserves in Canada. My argument in this chapter is that the push for transparency on reserves is hardly about accountability, as there are already accountability structures in place through the Indian Act,<sup>1</sup> but rather that there is a strong perception in “increasingly conservative mainstream Canada” (Warry 2007) that Native leadership has to be reigned in.<sup>2</sup> This reigning in of native leadership, though it is couched in terms of a common sense requirement to have Native leaders accountable, effectively imposes neoliberal ideology onto reserve political structures and processes using the mechanism of audit culture (Shore and Wright 1999; Strathern 2000).

The imposition of neoliberalism (concerned as it is with institutional change) on reserves, is really about withdrawing state support from reserve social welfare programs and re-directing tax monies (Campbell and Pederson 2001: 1). Bourdieu called this “institutional bad faith” (1999: 205) where on the one hand the government makes claims of improvement of social conditions (through the discourse of transparency) de facto it is engaged in a “double game and double consciousness, to reject or to challenge the measures or acts that really conform with the official vocation of the government” (ibid: 205).

The elements of a neoliberalist logic at work are apparent in the events of October and November 2010. They are phrased in emotionally compelling arguments marshaled against the six hundred and thirty reserve chiefs and councils in Canada. The neoliberal arguments are not solely about transparency or accountability. They are also about making Native leadership conform to non-Indigenous ideals. What happened between October and November of 2010 is part of a directed onslaught to limit maneuverability and independence of First Nations in on-reserve decision-making.

After a short description of the three events, I will talk more extensively about the process of electing a chief and council that I observed in Northern Ontario in the late 1970s. The core of this chapter will discuss an ethnographic moment drawn from my work with the Northern Ontario Anishnaabek illustrative of how Anishnaabek values and ethics are threaded through externally imposed bureaucratic structures. The northern Anishnaabek have made the election of a chief and council (bureaucratic roles to interface between the Department of Indian Affairs and the Indian reserve) “their” process, imbued with Indigenous motivations. Through the years I have since worked on many other Anishnaabek reserves in Southern Ontario (Sarnia, Minjikaming, Beausoleil, Georgina Island, Hiawatha, Curve Lake, Aldverille, and Lake Scugog), in Manitoba (Saugeen) and in Northern Ontario (Slate Falls), and many of the elements that are apparent in the ethnographic example are equally visible in the practice of chiefship in these communities to this day. Chiefs and councils, though Indian Act requirements,<sup>3</sup> are thus Indigenous in the sense that they have been made so, and, this “Indigenous re-making” of Chiefs and councils roles’ is at the heart of the transparency/neoliberal alarm.

On October 1, 2010 Bill C-575, *First Nations Financial Transparency Act*,<sup>4</sup> was introduced by a Conservative member of parliament, Kelly Block. The bill stipulates that any monies paid from Federal funds to First Nations chiefs and councilors in the form of salary, travel, honoraria, and all other expenses must be published. In the event that the amounts are not disclosed by a First Nation then the Act would empower the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs to provide this information.<sup>5</sup> The Act can override the Privacy Act.

On November 21, 2010, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF), a right of center advocacy organization “dedicated to lower taxes, less waste and accountable government” (<http://taxpayer.com/about>), launched a media campaign in support of Bill C-575. The CTF campaign was backed by figures stating that, “Approximately fifty reserve politicians [were] paid more than the prime minister in 2008–2009.<sup>6</sup> Approx. 160 reserve politicians [were] paid more than their respective premiers in 2008–2009. Over 600 received an income that is equivalent to over \$100,000 off reserve.<sup>7</sup> One Atlantic Canada reserve politician [was] paid \$978,468 tax free in 2008–2009 (equivalent to about \$1.8 million off reserve)” (<http://taxpayer.com/node/13427>). These figures were quickly picked up by the mainstream press, and the search was on for the “Atlantic politician”.

The third event was the scapegoating of the “Atlantic politician.” On November 23, 2010, Councilor Halliday of the Glooscap First Nation was identified as the reserve politician with the highest salary. The press accepted the CTF figure without examining it further for reliability. Yet a Manitoba group was able to determine that the Councilor’s purported income included billings from his construction company carrying out various services for reserve enterprises.<sup>8</sup> Thus his income was overstated by at least \$700,000,<sup>9</sup> and the remainder of \$247,000 included honoraria, per diems and other reimbursable expenses (<http://netnewsledger.com/?p=5738>).

The damage, of course, was done. The public perception was that many reserve politicians were grossly overpaid from taxpayer monies, while their reserves languished in penury. In the House of Commons the Bill C-575 passed two readings and was submitted for review to a House of Commons Committee. This particular bill will probably never see the light of day which is the fate of most private members’ bills. They languish on the order paper and never get voted into law. Nevertheless, the efforts of the CTF, the Bill C-575 discussions in parliament, and the sensationalist stories of reserve politicians’ salaries have created in the average Canadian mind the sense that something is very much amiss. Three populist, uninformed Canadian taxpayer sensitivities (Warry 2007: 26) were aroused by this sequence of events. One is that hard earned taxpayer monies are being misused and squandered on reserves (with no supporting evidence). The second is the general misguided resentment stoked by the CTF that Native people do not pay taxes. In fact, they are only exempt on reserves and the exemption is a treaty right. The third is that Native people are irresponsible financially, even corrupt (with no supporting evidence). The remedy, apart from the neoconservative desire to dissolve the reserve system (Flanagan 2000) and to deny “Aboriginal peoples their difference” (Warry 2007: 44), is to transfer less funding to reserves and provide more oversight of the leadership. The intended result is to make reserve existence even more difficult.

The efforts of Bill C575 and of the CTF work in ignorance of the reality of the situation of reserves where Native people experience more oversight than any other group in Canada. Recalling Bourdieu’s “institutional bad faith,” the AFN pointed out that “by focusing on the exceptions, rather than [on] the predominant reality, and by locating the solutions within the Indian Act, rather than in a process that would see First Nations assume control over their own affairs, the CTF’s approach is doing more to harm First Nations than it is to address the archaic federal structures that purport to ‘do what is best for the Indians’” (Bourdieu 1999: 205) (<http://netnewsledger.com/?p=5738>). Moreover, “while all aboriginals want good government and transparency, they want the accountability and reportability *to be to First Nations governance* and allow them the rights of democracy in managing their affairs. They also want to be respected and allowed to advance self-government; even sovereignty” (<http://firstnations-manitoba.com/horizons/?p=831>; my emphasis).

The difference of opinion is over self-government, the right of First Nations to have their own systems of governance with their own leaders thinking and operating in ways meaningful to their own societies (T'Hohahoken 2005).

The recent literature on Native politics has a dual focus, some of it is on understanding Native political organizations (Kugel 1998; Banks and Erdoes 2004; Cobb and Fowler 2007) while another portion—intrinsically related to the first—is concerned with Native—White political interaction (Cobb 2006; Dombrowski 2001; Alfred 1995; Cairns 2000; Turner 2006; Episkenew 2009; Frideres 2011). Both streams deal with a macro level of analysis. What I find somewhat missing in this literature is an understanding of what Native political thought looks like in practice. Here I am following on the work of Borrows (2002) and Alfred (1999)—both are Indigenous men (one a lawyer, the other a political theorist) whose writings are replete with guiding stories from their own societies. Another source for understanding the daily lived practice of the political is found in Native literature where stories are wholly embedded in Indigenous thought and practice (King 1993; Vizenor 1998; Moses 1992; Grounds, Tinker and Wilkins 2003; Kelsey 2008; Christie 2009). What follows is a description of the practice of elections, that is, a description of the minutiae of social interactions that constitute election practices.

The Anishnaabek are required to have a chief and council under the Indian Act, but they elect them in such a way that they function as extensions of the community rather than of the Department of Indian Affairs. In practice, this means that they are conduits for what the community wants and needs and therefore cannot be seen as leaders. Anishnaabek elections, and one case study in particular from Mishkeegogamang,<sup>10</sup> are a study in how community members create positive reinforcement of Anishnaabek values; namely sharing, respect, watchfulness, egalitarianism and consensualism through the process of band electioneering. The engagement with all of these values during election time works to emphasize the difference between Anishnaabek and non Anishnaabek society, and in particular, functions as a latent criticism of vertical authority implicit in the Indian Act created Chief and council.

In Mishkeegogamang I observed and noted much political activity prior to the band election, but what I had looked like a lot of trees rather than a forest. I was missing an elementary approach to seeing what was going on. Later, on returning from the field I read “Livelihood and Resistance” (Smith 1989) and began to think of the issue of leadership in a fundamentally different way. In the Peruvian context, the issue was the insistence of a peasant community that productive farmlands had been taken away from them illegally by the creation of a local hacienda. The peasant community organized various marches and protests. Given their relatively powerless position vis-à-vis the political and economic influence wielded by the hacienda owners, peasant leaders could easily be identified and arrested.

Hence, the community-based solution was to deny the existence of leaders and cleverly disseminate decision making within the community as an ethos so that no one individual, or group could be singled out. The issue was to protect individuals from arbitrary arrest, detention and removal from the community. In the highlands of Peru, the strategy was to emphasize the community based nature of decision-making and organization of the various protests, rather than have these seen as the work of individuals (who would be externally labeled as agitators), then not only would individuals and families be protected, but the strategy made arrests, when they did take place, look more arbitrary and politically motivated.

The idea that a group would consciously deny the existence of leadership in its interactions with the state is thought provoking. It presented a possibility of looking at what I had observed in a northern Ontario Anishnaabek community in a very different light. And significantly, it permitted a decolonised view of Anishnaabek community politics. Rather than representing Indigenous community politics as factional, destructive, combative and destabilising (Fenton 1955; Clifton 1965; Nicholas 1965; 1966; Jorgenson 1972; Bujra 1973; Wyckoff 1990). The opposite could be argued: that in a thoroughly colonised setting, Indigenous communities actively seek to re-work key elected positions to be responsive to community values and needs. In sum, it shifted a negative (etically derived) representation of northern Anishnaabek politics to a constructive (emically derived) one.

Though anthropologists have long made the causal association between the presence of factional politics and colonial oppression in North American Indigenous societies (Jorgenson 1972; Talbot et al. 1976; McFeat 1983), I do think there are reasonable grounds not to engage in the language of factions and factionalism when discussing northern Anishnaabek electoral politics. In brief, the language of factions assumes a number of features. The most important of which is that factions (“crowds” or “bunches”) are oppositional (Lithman 1978; McFeat 1983). In some conditions factions may form around a temporary difference of opinion and can be rather short lived; some are of longer duration, their opposition being formed around upholding traditionalist or conservative practices versus embracing greater contact beyond the reserve (Weaver 1975; Nicholas 1965); yet others may degenerate into aggressive entities (Siegel and Beals 1960). The second is the notion that factions are fluid in their membership (McFeat 1983). The third is the idea that factions form in response to competition over limited resources available in a community (Lithman 1978; McFeat 1983). The discussion of factions gained its greatest traction in conjunction with discussions of culture change current in the 1970s and 1980s. The debate about how factions work in a society is an old discussion but one that has seen some dusting off recently (Wyckoff 1990; Chiste 1994; Brooks 1995; Mouser 1999). Most of the recent discussions deal with large-scale societies (Hopi, Iroquoian, Northern Plains) for whom factions may be an accurate depiction of political alignments.

However, in small scale societies, such as one finds in northern Ontario, the concept of “factions” does not fit the political activity that one observes on the ground. The primary reason is that conflict, or the idea of opposition, which is the central defining feature of factions, is an anathema to the northern Anishnaabek. Though conflict does occur in all societies, and it clearly does in Anishnaabek communities, to intentionally structure oppositional groups, however fluid they might seem, is seen as unwarranted in Anishnaabek society. One could go further and state that the formation of even semi-permanent groups is seen as problematic. The objective of northern Anishnaabek community members is usually to reinforce, underscore, and value the autonomy of the individual and her/his decisions over and above that of groups.<sup>11</sup>

One of the key reasons why group making is so unattractive is that it is counter to some of the core values associated with survival in Anishnaabek society. I have argued elsewhere, that the structure of Anishnaabek society is intentionally incorporative, as a survival strategy (1985) and to this end groups which do form, such as religious fundamentalist groups, are regarded critically if they behave too exclusively and tend to be short lived if they persist in being so. Thus one of the key features of Anishnaabek society is the importance of *incorporation*—despite differences of opinion between individuals—and the *value of access* to others—despite these differences of opinion. In northern Anishnaabek communities, the importance of access to individuals—however broadly defined—trumps exclusivity as a community value. This importance of access is evident in the ethnographic example that I give below.

There is another problem with the language of factionalism. This concept, as with so many others used to define elements of Indigenous societies, was applied rather unthinkingly to represent approximations of what was observed in the ethnographic context. A different example may make this point clearer. The example is the application of the concept of “band”—a corporate bounded group—to Native North American hunting and gathering societies. In so much of the early literature (Damas 1969; Rogers 1962), Anishnaabek society (the Northern Ojibwa) was referred to as a “band level society”. The term was useful to social evolutionists attempting to categorize societies of different complexity. However, apart from the fact that there is no word for “band” in the Anishnaabek language, the Northern Anishnaabek neither self organize into bands, nor are bands a useful unit for a society which values incorporation, fluidity in membership, flexibility and individual decision-making. In the mid nineteenth century there was a convergence of social science language and federal government administrative necessity. The word “band” was taken up by the federal government in the mid nineteenth century as a convenient unit of categorization when it began to define Anishnaabek, and other groups, for the purpose of making treaties. From the federal government’s perspective a band was an effective bounded administrative unit (encompassing a number of small social

groups) with a fixed membership, which could be counted and governed. The administrative unit however, bears no resemblance to socio-political units in Anishnaabek society. In the late 1970s and 1980s, throughout the northern part of Ontario, many of the social groups, which the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) had included together to form a single band, began to agitate for separate band status (as there was no other administrative category recognized by the DIA) in order to re-assert some semblance of actual group structure. For example, the community that I conducted my initial fieldwork in Wunnummin Lake was such a creation, as were at least fifteen others.

The problem with the concept of faction is of the same order as that of “band”. The term would seem to approximate the political associations observed in a community but given the values and practices of Anishnaabek peoples, factions are hardly an accurate descriptor of Anishnaabek political practice. Furthermore, the language of factions—and of bands—is inherently critical of Indigenous organization, derived as both terms are from an evolutionary understanding of world societies, wherein the apex of political achievement is constructed to be held by modern Western democracies. The presence of factionalism marks a society as having a weak political organization and incomplete form of political development. Here, one could point out that Anishnaabek society is based on consensual decision-making, which is based on the principle of maximal inclusiveness. The Anishnaabek are rather consistent in their pointed observation that their political practices are more “democratic” than societies with democratic systems.

It is these latent qualities in the term “factionalism” that mark it as redolent of colonialist thinking. Accordingly, given the Indigenous predilection for incorporation, flexibility in membership, fluidity, respect for the individual, and the problem with negative sub-textual meanings it is hard to see how factions could approximate Indigenous political activity.

The argument that I present here will be that Anishnaabek band council elections in northern Ontario, while required under the Indian Act, are rarely about selecting a chief and council but more about inscribing an egalitarian ethos into (rather than onto) a vertical structure. Thus, while a chief and council become ostensibly the visible Indian Act leaders in the community, the community-based process of electing them to these positions creates an awareness of the locus of authority as resting with the community members. In the example I give below I will show how a chief and council become leaders in name, because that is required under law, but *de facto* in order to be valued, they, the elected chief and council, must practice *conveying* community decisions, rather than initiating—or deciding—them on behalf of the community. Therefore, while the Anishnaabek community does not so much as deny the existence of leaders—as I will also show, they do have family heads and respected elders—but in terms of imposed leadership these are re-worked to the standards of the community and are stripped of all but nominal power or authority.



There are four principal terms used in Anishnaabek society to define those with power and/or authority. The terms are: “family head” (usually father or mother), “leader”, “chief” and “elder.” The terms need to be understood in relation to Northern Anishnaabek social and political organization and in relation to the state in order to see the nuanced changes that the terms have undergone over time. The Northern Anishnaabek, prior to signing Treaty No.9, were self-organised into *social groupings* of about twenty to forty people, these groups in turn consolidated at key times of the year, such as in late spring, in mid summer, or in early January, into communities of several hundred. The *social groupings* comprised a number of families, such that family heads, either a woman or man, made decisions about where the family would trap in the fall, hunt in the spring or fish in the summer. Though this would seem to be a fairly autonomous decision-making arrangement, much discussion between spouses, siblings, between generations and with other family groupings anticipated a decision. Families operated as economic units responsible for their own survival in relation to and in conjunction with all other family units. Co-operation, watchfulness, respect, and respect for autonomy marked economic and political decision-making. The early French Jesuits who came into contact with Ojibwa came to regard them as having “no government at all” (Thwaites in Schenck 1997: 71). Le Jeune famously declared that the Ojibwa “make a profession of not submitting to anything, either in heaven or upon earth . . . they are born, live and die in liberty without restraint” (ibid: 72). Smith characterized Ojibwa decision-making as “based upon consensus and egalitarianism . . . [and] a fear of those with power” (Smith 1973: 32). Given this rather flexible, and lateral set of decision-making requirements, people with overt political power were rare if not non-existent.

Family heads were identified by their proper names, for example “Masakeyash’s household . . .” and were responsible for making decisions to ensure their family’s well being. Leaders, *nahgahnew*, were individuals who took the initiative to lead in specific tasks such as a moose hunt, or they might be asked to teach a specific task, such as making snowshoes or building a canoe. Their leadership would be task specific only and rarely translated into more regularized authority. The term now conventionally taken to mean chief, *ogima*,<sup>12</sup> had a slightly different meaning prior to treaty in 1905. It was a term used to refer to non-Anishnaabek in positions of power (for example a Hudson Bay manager),<sup>13</sup> but after treaty it was used to mean a (treaty) chief. In the mid twentieth century the northern Anishnaabek appropriated the term for their own use and so the Grand Chief of Nishnawbe-Aski, the Treaty No.9 political organization, is the Kitchee (great or grand) Ogima of the organization.<sup>14</sup>

The one category of people who were recognized for their wisdom and knowledge beyond their own social grouping were elders, *kitchee-ayaa’aak* (pl). Elders garnered tremendous respect, some were great orators, others were medicine men and women, while others were political savants.

Kitchee-ayaa'aak imparted their knowledge and wisdom in complex ways, sometimes through visits, or at gatherings, and at feasts. One of the key things about kitchee-ayaa'aak was that they didn't so much as compel people to make decisions, but rather through allegorical stories, factual accounts, recollections of events and of individuals, described models for action. Nevertheless, it was always up to the individual to absorb the meanings of the lesson. Keith Basso writing about the Apache, in "Wisdom Sits in Places" (1996), described how elements in the elders' stories were like arrows finding their targets among those who felt guilt or for whom the stories held personal meanings. The stories told by Anishnaabek elders had a similar quality. In the small, individual social groupings kitchee-ayaa'aak were referred to as (my) grandmother *nokomis*, or *nemeshomis* my grandfather, because in most instances the elders were the grandparents to many in the group. Kitchee-ayaa'aa (s) is a more formal term and was used in larger gatherings as a mark of respect. With treaty signing noted elders were the ones most often selected to be treaty chiefs and in this way the traditional role of elder was initially collapsed into the role of chief.

In Anishnaabek communities, the practice of re-working the authority structure is not wholly a contemporary one, rather it is one borne of long years of observation and critical evaluation. The process of deciding who becomes the chief and council has been worked and re-thought at every election since the Anishnaabek of Northern Ontario signed Treaty No.9 in 1905. The determination of who should be a chief in particular, has changed dramatically over this period of time. The early chiefs *were* elders, in the Anishnaabek sense, they were mostly older men, they were always respected, they spoke only Anishnaabek, they knew their community histories well and they understood the social and political complexities of their group. They wore the term *ogima* honorably and well. However, by the late twentieth century the roles of elder and chief were effectively separated in most northern Ontario Anishnaabek communities.

The first Chief of Osnaburgh (Mishkeegogamang) was a venerated orator and a respected elder. He was aged and blind. His name was Missabay. According to Mishkeegogamang's oral history there was never any doubt who would be made the first Chief of Osnaburgh reserve, and be the first signatory to the treaty. Missabay's reputation for wisdom had been established long before. Hence, when the Treaty Commissioners wanted to insist on the importance of the office of Chief they consciously selected an individual of significant importance to the Indigenous community and to the Hudson Bay Trading Post. Photographs from the treaty signing show Chief Missabay dressed in black pants, a white collared shirt, a wide (perhaps woven) belt, a long black unstructured jacket, his head covered by a hat, leaning on a long pale wood staff surrounded by men sitting at his feet. The photograph was taken while he was talking, and those around him are listening attentively, some of the men are pulling on their pipes. The photograph, because it can only capture the material, is a study in contrasting

messages, while we know only a little of what he said, we know he was very critical about the benefits of signing a treaty.<sup>15</sup> The material aspects of the photograph are unmistakable: this is not a study of power or of wealth in the Western sense. Rather the photograph conveys humility and determination, and, if one studies Missabay's stance, and how people are arrayed around him, one can only conclude that this is a man of grace, knowledge, and someone that is deeply respected.

The photograph can be taken as a metaphor of our "reading" of Anishnaabek society more generally. I find that in many ways when we look at social or political features in Anishnaabek society we have to get past the material—the parts which are most valued as indicators of some aspect of social or political heft in non-Anishnaabek society—and look for the indicators of Indigenous values, which are no less evident but submerged under the weight of non-Anishnaabek analysis.

Not all the chiefs elected after Missabay were elders, many more were respected hunters, trappers, and fishermen with a strong knowledge of their territories. This change in chiefs was still "traditional" in the sense that the men elected were respected (task specific) leaders in the community. The problem for many of these men was that the respect they had in their community did not translate into respect from state institutions. One of the more egregious examples is the treatment of a chief in 1934.<sup>16</sup> In that year Ontario hydro began building a hydro dam to supply power to two gold mines north of Lake St. Joseph—Pickle Crow and Central Patricia gold mines. Ontario Hydro decided to build a dam at Rat Rapids, without informing Chief John Carpenter of Osnaburgh. Chief Carpenter heard about the activity from one of the trappers on whose lands the dam was being constructed, and went to investigate. On seeing what was intended, he asked the foreman to stop the work. He was told by the foreman that the work was too far advanced and in any case the people would be compensated for any losses that they would suffer.<sup>17</sup> The dam raised the water level of the lake by at least nine feet, destroying valuable trapping, hunting, fishing and harvesting grounds, submerging important campsites, destroying safe landing places, flooding houses and tent sites, and eroding burial sites. The problem with the dam was much greater than the actual construction—at every turn the office of the chief was ignored: the people were not notified of the rise in the lake levels, timber was cut on the reserve, hydro lines were strung across the reserve and storage facilities were built on the shore of the reserve without permission or compensation. At no point did the DIA intervene on behalf of the Anishnaabek of Osnaburgh. The office of the Chief was ignored and belittled by the very state institution that required a chief and council. In the 1950s this pattern of neglect and lack of consultation was repeated when hydro planned a water diversion from Lake St. Joseph into the Root River (Heinrichs and Hiebert 2003: 131).

A significant change to the office of chief came in the 1970s when younger men with less extensive experience on the land began to be elected

in northern Anishnaabek communities (this was true elsewhere in Canada as well). The younger Anishnaabek chiefs had two, perhaps three, distinguishing features. The one that was most obvious was that they were young, often in their thirties or forties. The other was that they were well-spoken in English. Many had been away from their communities for schooling, or work, and due to this exposure they also tended to be more assertive in meetings and more vocal about the needs of their community. At the same time they had an abbreviated knowledge of their community and its history and due to their inexperience they relied on guidance from their elders. The communities' experience with young chiefs was uneven, some spent too much time away from the community, some had trouble with reconciling the power they thought they had with the constant stream of instructions from the community, but most were quickly burnt out from the impossibility of balancing the pressure of community demands and needs against the seeming indifference and different agenda of the Department of Indian Affairs. The mid 1970s and 1980s saw a constant rotation of chiefs, with only a few being re-elected to a second two-year term. This was a critical time period; northern Anishnaabek reserves had large young populations with an abiding respect for traditional ways. During this period the criteria for the position of chief were a constant point of discussion and the decided preference was for individuals firmly rooted in their community's and society's values regardless of their age.<sup>18</sup>

My fieldwork experience exposed me to the difference between traditional elders, *kitchee-ayaa'aak*, and chiefs, *ogimak* (pl.). I was interested in working on land-use mapping, which was of interest to the Grand Council Treaty No.9 political organization. They guided me to the large community of Big Trout Lake, in the far north of Ontario, where I stayed for a few weeks, with an Anishnaabek social worker. Though the community seemed to be a good choice for land-use mapping I was somewhat intimidated by the fact that the band council was engrossed in purchasing its own airline, dealing with serious concerns over the quality of drinking water, concerned about inadequate and insufficient housing, and discussing construction of a new band council building among other things. Land-use mapping, though everyone thought it was an interesting idea and it would be good to have that information, was not a bread and butter issue. My interests were clearly more theoretical than practical. The social worker with whom I was staying was originally from Wunnummin Lake. Her cousins were still there, and she thought that I would fare better there, considering what I wanted to do. When I spoke with one of the councilors, he agreed, in fact he had already arranged for the next charter to drop me off.

That is how I came to land at the dock of the fly-in community of Wunnummin Lake, about seventy kilometers south of Big Trout Lake. As I unloaded my oversize pack onto the empty dock, I glanced past the beach at the homes tucked between tall black spruce trees and wild oleander. All was quiet except for the fact that at my back the float plane was preparing for a

noisy take-off. A rush of small children greeted me with nervous bravado, running up to me and just as quickly away. Behind the children was an older man, he walked up to me purposefully, shook my hand, barely glanced at me, turned and walked away. I hitched up my rucksack and sleeping bag and prepared to follow him. As I left the long dock, a young woman, around whom many of the children gathered and were holding onto her long skirt, came up to me and said "come". I followed her to her home in the center of the reserve. She pointed to a room and said that I could leave my things there and that I would be staying with her. I did not encounter the older man with whom I had shaken hands for another two weeks.

Once I was settled into her house, Jemima McKay, the woman with whom I was staying, introduced me to her father-in-law, who I understood to be the person through whom I would arrange anything and everything that I needed in conjunction with my work in the community. And so who was the first older man? Later I learned that he was an elected official, a councilor. The community of Wunnummin Lake was too small in population to have a chief and council, it only had one councilor. This community with a population of just under 300 had an Indian Act elected official whose functions were rather ill-defined, but obviously included greeting visitors, while James McKay was the person to whom one went to for advice and guidance. The home that he shared with his wife was the focal point of the community.

The difference in the roles of the elder McKay and the councilor was in the way they approached their relationship with the other individuals in the community. The elder McKay home was always full of people, either visiting, listening, talking, cooking, sewing moccasins or looking after grandchildren, the sense was that their home was open to the community. Food, ideas, and information were shared. The councilor on the other hand behaved very differently. He saw himself as an entrepreneur. He tried on several occasions to initiate small entrepreneurial activities such as making the living room of his house into a café, or collecting money from community members towards making a pool hall, but all of these projects were looked at as one person's misconceived self-aggrandizing projects and not what the community needed. No one criticized him outright but neither was there more than lukewarm support for his individualistic efforts. The elected role of councilor seemed to fit in with his individualistic interests, and as long as his activities did not threaten the general fabric of social life his projects were accommodated and he kept being re-elected councilor which could be seen as the small community's association of micro-capitalist thinking with the Indian Affairs position.

I had been mapping land use and occupation for a year in Wunnummin Lake, with the help of a team of young Anishnaabek from various communities curious to understand what I was doing, but the real reason why they attached themselves to the mapping project was to learn about the hunting and trapping activities of the older men in the village. Eventually I was asked if I would do the same mapping in other communities. The Grand Council Treaty No.9 was supportive of expanding the project and I

was invited to work in a number of other communities including Mishkeegogamang. I arrived in Mishkeegogamang with two of my co-workers in the early spring, snow still covered the ground, and the dirt road encircling the reserve was muddy and deeply rutted. We arranged appointments to speak with trappers, hunters, fishermen, and harvesters. The mapping process was long; a single map could take a whole day, and it was exhausting. Through the work I became well versed in the location of family trapping, hunting, fishing, and harvesting grounds. I knew who trapped and hunted with whom, which families were active on the land, and which were less so. The work also gave me a road map of the kin connections in the village.

In my experience, band elections are a very undemonstrative public forum for revealing Anishnaabek values, such as sharing, respect, watchfulness, consensus, incorporation, and autonomy. Much of the literature on Canadian aboriginal reserve elections sees them as the cumulative result of the action of shifting, indeterminate factions. However, here I will show that individual action, choice and decision-making have more meaning in the electing of a chief and council. Individuals as part of families do carry the interests of the family, but the respect for an individual's autonomy is such that an individual's decision is respected within the family even when, or especially when, it is different from that of others. I have seen many times a man say about his brother's or cousin's view "That's what he thinks" without a discordant note creeping in to his statement. The system of decision-making is consensual and accordingly disparate views and opinions are incorporated and present in consensus decisions.

Four days before the band election in Mishkeegogamang, I was visiting with Roy Kaminiwash, a man in his late twenties, in his home. We were pouring over kinship charts I had collected and I was interested in sorting out some kinship discrepancies as told to me by related people. Roy talked about the politics of families. He paused, his head shaking in enjoyment of the moment. He looked towards the doorway at a middle-aged man who had just come in, and raised his chin in recognition. Taking his time the man said that he had seen old Peter and silence followed for what seemed to be at least two minutes. Without looking up from the kinship charts Roy said he'd seen the visitor's boat on the lake, early in the morning. The man said they'd brought back some whitefish. There was more silence and he left as quietly as he had come in. "He came about the election" Roy explained. I knew better than to assume the visit was just about the few words the man had spoken: there were at least three things going on, this man was from a family that Roy and his family rarely spoke with, that was significant; "seeing" old Peter meant that he had spoken with him and if Roy said this visit had been about the upcoming election, seeing Peter must figure somehow in tallying who was voting how, so this was significant; and the last bit was that the visitor had been out fishing and said that they had caught whitefish probably enough to give away. Fishing, or the mention of the lake was somehow significant.

Over the next three days while carrying on with mapping land use, I observed the external features of community politics. It became apparent that the people who were in the running for election—and there was quite a few in the running for chief and council—were not the ones going house to house canvassing support. Those running in the election did make speeches in the Band Council office or at the elementary school, but beyond that bit of required politicking, they stayed close to home and their normal routines. It was on the contrary community members, family headmen, that were engaged in visiting for a few minutes at a time, chatting out front of the Bay store, by the clinic or on the steps of the Band Council office. It all looked unremarkable, calm, undifferentiated from any other day's chatting or visiting, until one thought about who was visiting whom.

The day before the election I was at Joe and Maria Kwandibens' house. They were a couple in their fifties and very much respected. I was there mapping their joint land use. Over the three or so hours that I spent with them I counted at least five people that came into their house, stood in the doorway, listening to what we were doing, waiting to be acknowledged. One man said he had seen Robert Wassaykeesic, another that he had talked with Charlie Fox by the Bay store and so it went. Every piece of information was unhurriedly accompanied by a comment about fishing, the lake, water levels; sometimes it was about the road, which ran through the reserve and was being re-built to accommodate the weight of heavy-duty trucks from the new base metals mine, sometimes it was about the clinic. There had been some trouble with a nurse. The individuals who were visiting were all men, and all well respected in the community as were the names of those they mentioned, head men in their own right. The topics they touched on were always the same. They were: the lake, road, and clinic. These were also the critical issues that engaged the community in discussions with Indian Affairs. As I understood it, there was little disagreement in Mishkeegogamang about the culpability of Indian Affairs regarding the changing lake levels, its fiduciary responsibility to hold hydro accountable for compensation for the 1935 flooding, safety problems with the road and the quality of nurses at the clinic. Mention of these issues in nearly every exchange was a firming up of the community's resolve to have these issues pursued by the new chief and council.

Band elections are a requirement of the Indian Act—regardless of whether they take the conventional form or have been exempted to follow traditional principles (Otis 2006). Mishkeegogamang at that time had 650 people, so it would have a chief and five councilors. The Indian Act originally conceived of elected councils as the principal means by which the DIA's interests would be conveyed to the community and certainly not the obverse. In practice, the chief and council are the sole decision-making entity on any issue impinging on the reserve community. Nevertheless, the point that I am making here is that how they make decisions is far beyond the reach of the Indian Act. Though a band council structure is supposed

to be “top-down” in decision-making, over the years, the community of Mishkeegogamang has been able, through a long process of experimentation to elect band councils, which formulate decisions from the “ground up”. The re-thinking of how a chief and council should function has meant that the community selects specific skill sets and orientations in those who they elect.

These skill sets and orientations are generated from within Indigenous governance. Local, non-Indian Act, Indigenous governance is a complicated structure of family heads (both male and female), respected hunters, fishermen and trappers (including women), and younger men (primarily) that had gained a college or university education in Thunder Bay or elsewhere. The composite structure is very lateral and governed in the sense that decisions are made at the family level on the basis of the well-articulated concepts of respect, equity, sharing, awareness, watchfulness, incorporation, and consensus.

In Mishkeegogamang, the Band election system looked like an electoral system in the sense that there was a slate of individuals, and six men would be selected through voting.<sup>19</sup> Everything else about the election was controlled by the previously mentioned Indigenous precepts. Roy Kaminiwash was quite explicit that electing a chief and council was all about getting individuals who “would be good in office” which meant they would be a conduit for decision-making, rather than be the decision makers; they were to be good listeners and would understand the intricacies of what was said; it meant they would not favor their own families; and it meant that outside of the community they would be assertive and vocal in securing concessions from the federal government. Through the various informal pre election discussions, it was made clear to those in the running that they were to be no more than representatives, and, those who won acknowledged this point in their humble victory speeches. In sum, Anishnaabek elections are all about making sure that power—a much feared commodity—is not acquired through becoming a chief or councilor, rather that in a diffuse state it rests with the community. The only thing a chief and council gain by winning an election is the authority to convey community decisions.

Electioneering in this and in just about every other Northern Ojibwa reserve is complicated and highly contingent. The process of determining who should be elected is inordinately time consuming but remarkably smooth and effective in addressing local concerns and reconciling these with externally imposed agendas. The visiting by individual headmen, or by respected individuals from other families—which was quite a mix of age groups—was all about making respectful statements about temporary alliances formed and reformed with those they had “seen”. Visiting people in their homes was particularly important because that was where women were and in this way they learnt as much as the men did, and in the ensuing family discussions new political arrangements developed.<sup>20</sup>

This pattern of visiting and “seeing” established who the front-runners could be. In some exchanges a teasing remark could seriously knock an



individual's chances. The alliances between those doing the visiting, some of their family members and other heads of families would largely hold up on election day. Just the same, a very strong individualistic ethic meant that a community member could not deliver votes, nor in fact would he or she want to. So on one level, the visiting established the front-runners. At another level—and this was key to the electoral practice—was that there was a large contingent of community members who “floated” up to the day of voting. The objective of the electors as Roy Kaminiwash pointed out was “not to let any one person have too many votes” and to make sure no extended family gained too many representatives on the council. Individual community members were not so much undeclared as continually shifting their vote in response to a perception of how the votes were adding up. In their chats and observations they made their best guess as to who might be the favourites and they were instrumental in making sure that anyone of the six who were favored would just squeak in to office with pretty equal vote numbers. This latter point was almost as important as who would be elected. Joe Kwandibens when asked why a close vote was a particularly good vote result, looked surprised that it could be any other way. It was Roy Kaminiwash who knew the value of majority voting to Euro-Canadians who provided the taunting “well, we’re just more democratic than you are . . .”. Behind this taunt lay the reality of Indigenous ideology of not wanting to permit differentiation that was as yet undeserved.

Elections also functioned to distribute access to authority amongst families. Each of the candidates did not stand alone, but was seen as a representative of a family, accordingly getting too many elected from one extended family was not seen as desirable for the community as a whole. Economic benefits might be channeled to one segment of the community. The objective was to spread out the family representatives on the council with as equal a vote as possible. Voting and electing was all about maintaining balance in the community.

Who would be elected, by how *narrow* of a margin, the issues that would form the slate's primary focus and the distribution of whatever benefits that might come to the reserve—such as new housing, some work in construction, compensation for the road widening or for the lake flooding—were all decided by community members and recognized by the elected members as their responsibility to carry out.

The focus on the political in typical, everyday interactions and the realization that so much positive effort was expended to maintain equilibrium and relative peace between families, to neutralize individual animosities and to compartmentalize a host of problems with external state institutions, frees one from resorting to unhelpful categories about the local context, but neither does it romanticize it. An analysis vested in the politics of everyday actions allows the ethnographer to view everyday exchanges, regardless of how mundane or banal, as practices of value (Smith 1989). It gives wonderful relief to that which had been flattened and erased by a

jaded, politically compromised social science vocabulary. At the same time by focusing on everyday exchanges, visits, and casual conversations outside the band council hall, one could see the clear connection between an overt tool of subjugation such as the Indian Act and the political in everyday practices. This is particularly important to see since so much of the community members' efforts in this particular election were directed at de-fusing conflict, at maintaining a balance within the community, of incorporating as many views as possible, of not talking about the Department of Indian Affairs and all the ills it had imposed on the community, and at not making overt what their practice was clearly doing. This focus on the expression of the political in everyday activities helped me understand what I heard and saw in the days before the election in Mishkeegogamang.

Roy Kaminiwash was well versed in social science language and on occasion parodied it: "you say we use factions . . ." he once said to me. "I don't know what they are. We don't use factions. We just think and make sure it turns out alright." This was a broadside critique of the faction approach but more so it was an indefatigable defense of the effectiveness—and precision—of insisting each individual come to their own decision. This also meant that in this community those who disagreed vehemently would leave the village for a month or so around the time of the election. This is not quite consensual politics, which I also think has been too simplified as a process in understanding Indigenous decision-making, but approaches its ideal as closely as humanly possible.

To Roy Kaminiwash and others in Mishkeegogomang the process of visiting, seeing and balancing worked because through this particular process those who voted controlled the result, and, those elected. There was, to use non-Anishnaabek language, a transparency in the voting. People were not surprised to see who was elected. The only surprise was in finding how narrowly they could get the margin between those elected, and that takes political skill. The election was also not about making leaders; clearly the process of determining who would be elected was about making representatives and retaining the leading, decision-making, determining to the social networks of individuals within families. Political strategizing—"effective politics"—in local elections is about subverting the very real power imbalance within which reserves are situated. Many communities in Northwestern Ontario have achieved this quietly, insistently and their systems of chief and council work reasonably well, in the absence of real self-governance.

Since the 1980s chiefs and council have become incrementally more answerable to their own people than to Indian Affairs. This is problematized by neoliberal politicians as a lack of transparency, and accountability, which is risible given the constant oversight by the Department of Indian Affairs. So, if accountability is not the issue, then what is? The consternation the CTF was able to provoke by misrepresenting the salaries of chiefs and councils speaks to a different issue, and that is a realization that Indigenous self-governance is well on track and somehow needs to be restrained.

The point that is rubbing neoliberals the wrong way is that over the past fifty years the Department of Indian Affairs has had to acknowledge that successful community growth begins with decision-making at the community/reserve level and not vice versa. Moreover, much of this community growth has been supported with federal tax monies guaranteed through treaties. The growth has encompassed not only the building of schools, community centers, roads, houses and other forms of infrastructure, but along the way each of these has taken on an Indigenous flavor or been made to support Indigenous values. Though it is obvious how a local school can do this through the incorporation of elders' knowledge in class planning, through local language classes, through the use of learning circles and so on, it is a little less obvious how roads do so. However, in their naming—in memory of respected elders, or for mythic characters—they too form a tangible daily reinforcement of the Aboriginal difference, one that grows ever so subtly in its value, magnitude, and contemporaneity. The neoliberal attack on reserve accountability should be seen for what it is, “unmarked identity politics”<sup>21</sup> (Lipsitz in Clifford 2000: 97), that is, an attack on all that annoys neoliberals about Aboriginal society and especially continuing financial commitments made through centuries of treaty-making. Indeed, the neoliberal position is vested in “Whiteness” wherein Native leadership is constructed as the symbolic bulwark of Aboriginal difference.

The final point I would make here has to do with the pride with which Roy Kaminiwash and his friends took in calling how close the election would be. It was symbolic of “knowing” one's community. It stood for the persistence of Indigenous values and that these were impervious to external pressures and in some significant way were resisting and persisting positively. Good and effective politics—in other words the practices in the electoral process—were all about—to quote Smith—“consciously grasp[ing] the reins of history to resist the conditions of their existence” (Smith 1989: 16).

## NOTES

1. (Indian Act R.S., c1–6 s1). “Currently, elected officials on First Nations [reserves] report spending to the federal government but don't publicly release the” figures”. (<http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Politics/2011/03/03/17486726.html>). Jean Crowder, a New Democratic Party (NDP) member noted in Parliament that on the Indian and Northern Affairs Canada website, among other statements on salaries, it states unequivocally “The Department does not, however, disclose information regarding the compensation for individual Chiefs or council members to the public due to legal considerations including the Privacy Act, case law such as the Montana decision . . . .” See (<http://openparliament.ca/bills/40-3/C-575/#page=2>). Legally, disclosure of salaries is a privacy issue.
2. . Another NDP member of parliament, Pat Martin a disgrace because it assumes “First Nations are corrupt and need ‘Big Brother’ looking over their shoulders . . . .” Retrieved March 2, 2012 from: (<http://cnews.canoe.ca/CNEWS/Politics/2011/03/03/17486726.html>).

3. The Indian Act stipulates that every band will have one Chief and one councilor elected per each 100 band members. Also, a band may “not have fewer than two councilors and no more than twelve, and no band shall have more than one Chief” Section 74(2) (Indian Act R.S., c1-6 s.1). Thus a reserve of 400 persons will have a chief and three councilors and a reserve of 2000 people will have a Chief and twelve councilors.
4. <http://openparliament.ca/bills/40-3/C-575/>).
5. The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) sees the Bill as promoting irresponsible myths about First Nations and the AFN “is working to counter underlying myths associated with this Bill and support the development of true reciprocal accountability mechanisms”. (<http://www.afn.ca/index.php/en/policy-areas/parliamentary-relations>).
6. The figures are grossly misleading. While the Native “salaries” include travel expenses and per diem costs the prime minister’s salary is after tax. “AFN’s recalculation of the original figures provided to the CTF by INAC [Indian and Northern Affairs Canada] confirms that *no First Nation elected official in Canada earns more than the Prime Minister*” (<http://netnewsledger.com/?p=5738>) (my emphasis).
7. The Assembly of First Nations’ figures indicate that the average salary for First Nation elected officials is \$36,845 (<http://netnewsledger.com/?p=5738>). The figures given by CTF were doubled to attain the off reserve taxable equivalent. There is no recognition by the CTF that First Nations are exempt from taxes on reserve as a right due to treaty promises.
8. Winnipeg Free Press, November 24th, 2010. (<http://www.winnipegfreepress.com/canada/outraged-chief-slams-release-of-salary-stats-110334259.html>).
9. The Manitoba group asked the simple question “was the \$700,000 all paid to Halliday or to Halliday Construction & Excavating? If the latter, then Halliday should not have reported money paid to the company as his remuneration as the company may have salaries and business expenses from which he did not benefit. It may actually be a reporting procedural error of the band . . .” (<http://firstnationsmanitoba.com/horizons/?p=831>).
10. The reserve community of Osnaburgh changed its name to Mishkeegogamang First Nation in 1993. Mishkeegogamang meaning “swampy lake” refers to Lake St. Joseph on which the reserve is located.
11. In some of the older literature (Landes 1937; Hickerson 1967) this characteristic respect for autonomy was viewed negatively and labeled “atomism”. More recently Lovisek et al. (1997) were able to demonstrate with extensive reference to archival and ethnohistorical sources that this analysis was a “distortion of Ojibwa lives “ and that “[n]umerous aspects of Landes’ portrayal of the Ojibwa are not supported by historical evidence” (Lovisek et al. 1997).
12. Among the Chippewa and Ojibwa in southern Ontario and in parts of Michigan there was a long established history of chiefs called *ogima* (hereditary, war or civil chiefs). There was also another category of lesser chiefs known as pipe bearers. (Smith 1973: 18–19). During the treaty-making process it tended to be quite arbitrary which of these chiefs would be made a treaty chief and the selection often depended upon their perceived acquiescence to the new political order imposed by treaty.
13. The word for “government” is *ogemauewin* which underscores the notion that *ogima* originally defined non-Anishnaabek individuals with power.
14. The term chief is used by all Indigenous political organizations in Canada.
15. “Missabay, the recognized chief of the band, then spoke, expressing the fear of the Indians that, if they signed the treaty, they would be compelled to reside upon the reserve to be set apart for them, and would be deprived of

the fishing and hunting privileges which they now enjoy.” Commissioners Report, Osnaburgh House, July 1905. Archives of Ontario. C275-1-0-2-S7600.

16. From fieldnotes, 2006.
17. The Hudson Bay Company was paid \$17,000 in compensation for flooding damage to their post and buildings, whereas of the 300 or so community members who had lost homes, campsites, trapping and hunting grounds, only eighteen individuals were paid a total of \$845 for the loss of their cabins on the reserve. Indian Affairs was compensated \$1,425 for the loss of timber on the flooded acreage and \$100 compensation for the flood damaged Council House. Lake St. Joseph had not been surveyed before the flooding hence any calculations of flood damage were approximations and by most accounts were an under representation of the actual damage (Heinrichs and Hiebert 2003: 127-129).
18. In 2010 Chief Connie Grey-Mckay was the youngest member on council, she was 48 years old, and the average age of the councillors was fifty-eighty.
19. Until the early 1980s the electoral slate was primarily composed of men. The present Chief of Mishkeegogamang is a woman.
20. The role of women in decision-making is not to be taken lightly. I attended several band council meetings in Mishkeegogamang where the men assembled in the band council room to talk, but with remarkable regularity they would leave the room to confer with their wife, sister, or mother who were listening in on the deliberations in the adjoining room. After a few minutes the man would return to the band council room to make an additional point. In the 1990s women began to be elected to band councils.
21. James Clifford quoting George Lipsitz (1998) notes that “opposition to the special claims of racial or ethnic minorities often masks another, unmarked, ‘identity politics’, an actively sustained historical positioning and possessive investment in Whiteness. This defensive response, most aggressively mobilized by the Right, in fact spans the political spectrum” (Clifford 2000: 97).

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# 5 The Soviet Revenge

## How the Unrecognized Soviet-Style Mechanisms of Contemporary Finance Capitalism Cause Crisis and Catastrophe in the West

*Don Kalb and Oane Visser*

### INTRODUCTION: UNRECOGNIZED REVENGE OF THE SOVIET ECONOMIC SYSTEM?

In 1798, the Dutch United East India Company, the VOC, was finally dismantled and nationalized by the Patriots. One of the first “multinational corporations” in history had become a symbol of corruption and oligarchy at the end of a long period of financialization of the Dutch economy that started with the (Dutch inspired) setting up of the United Kingdom as the new hegemony of the global capitalist system in 1688. The rebellious Dutch now ridiculed the VOC as *Vereniging Ondergegaan door Corruptie*, “an association destroyed by corruption”. The seventeen Lords who had ran the enterprise since its inception, *De Heeren Zeventien*, had become synonymous with oligarchic closure and rottenness.

In an almost analogous contemporary emplotment, Simon Johnson, the former Chief Economist of the IMF, in a book entitled *13 Bankers* (Johnson and Kwak 2010), analyzes the current equivalent of the seventeen Dutch Lords (but not their nationalization). It focuses on the small circle of key financiers enjoying similar oligarchic influence over the late capitalist global financial markets centered on Wall Street, as well as unparalleled private leverage over the state-finance nexus of the US government.

The financial crisis has caused a swift decline of neoliberal intellectual hegemony, leaving us with a rather uncertain collection of visions on the current state of affairs. Most policy proposals and arguments focus on imposing more regulatory control on the financial sector (by states or other controlling agencies) and on calls for a new ethic or mentality, whether inspired by sustainability, corporate responsibility, or “soft law”. Most observers correctly state that the incentive structure within the financial sector must be changed to limit excessive risk taking and short-termism. However, while all this makes some sense, we note that there is a dearth of new intellectual paradigms to enable a fresh, fundamental analysis of the current trajectory of Western capitalism. Many critiques of globalized

financial-sector dominated capitalism remain firmly grounded within a pro-capitalist discourse, portraying current neoliberal capitalism as just a slight aberration of a by definition sound capitalism that, as Adam Smith had warned, might just need some stronger moral policing. Terms like “turbo-capitalism”, “casino capitalism” or “jackpot capitalism” have quickly become common terminology in more mainstream publications since 2008, indicating that we have rediscovered the moralist side of Adam Smith in addition to the Smith of utility maximization. A stronger fatherly hand plus a bit more state and capitalism can steam ahead again. There is little scrutiny on offer of how the combination of financialization and globalization is dramatically changing the system from within, in particular, as we suggest, by accelerating social inequalities, tendencies toward oligopolization and oligarchization, and producing “state capture” and “public debt-peonage”; processes that are not unlike the social decay of the United Provinces in the eighteenth century alluded to above.

This chapter tries to contribute to a rethinking, not by studying the phenomenon of financialization and globalization head on—which has been done well by Harvey (2010), the late Giovanni Arrighi (1994, 2000), and Jonathan Friedman (2008a; 2008b), with whose general claims we largely agree—but by making a side step: we use a comparison with the planned economy of the Soviet Union in order to argue that the actual workings of the neoliberal, globalized economy at the eve of the 2008 financial crisis, with its dominance of the financial sector, show some striking resemblances with the workings of the Soviet economy at the eve of its collapse. State capture by enterprises “too large to fail”; a large “virtual economy” and shadow system;<sup>1</sup> the inability of supposedly public agencies to get insight into core economic and financial operations; the short term orientations of actors going against economic viability; and a “mystification of societal risk” are some of the family resemblances that will be discussed. To be perfectly clear, we are not arguing that late soviet and late capitalist systems are in fact somehow empirically similar. What we do suggest, however, is that analogical mechanisms of networked political power were playing out in the hidden abodes of respectively “state-planning” and the “allocation of capital”, supposed to be the scientific control centers and the driving engines of the respective systems. These mechanisms were flanked, as we shall see, by formally identical mythologies of high science and endless material expansion, and the systematic cultivation of public silences, including the active repression and silencing of more historically and empirically realistic forms of knowledge.

The mainstream view in the West of the Soviet economy as characterized by an all-powerful state was based on superficial observations of the early Soviet economy under Stalin. Western scholars of socialism have repeatedly shown that the ideological idea of a totalitarian and strong state was seriously mistaken, not only on the field of culture (Yurchak 2006) but also and especially in the field of the economy (in general see Verdery 1996). The

Soviet economy was neither adequately planned nor well controlled (Kornai 1986; Grossman 1977; Burawoy 1985). Rather it was riddled with contradictions: ubiquitous negotiations on all levels, informality, and a huge shadow system. Nevertheless the view of the all-powerful state remained dominant in public opinion in both the West and the East. Similarly, in contemporary financialized capitalism, an abstract and ideological view of the economy, rooted in an eighteenth century ideal type of individual rational actors navigating anonymous market signals, making optimal decisions in the allocation of their savings and thus helping society to prosper by the pursuit of selfish gain, has remained dominant. It took the current crisis for it to disclose its own shadowy underbelly: the shaky basis of its claims to objectivity and the degree of monopoly-power over the state and the Western public.

We contend that in the contemporary West, beneath the radically different layer of ideology and formal institutions (“the market” plus “democracy” instead of the “socialist party-state”), an analogous constellation exists with a largely virtualized economy (based on quantitative indicators and modelling) on the one hand and an informal shadow economy on the other. This analogous constellation was in both cases cloaked in the public rituals of high-science (quantitative indicators, extremely complex modelling), which gave it an aura of realism and rationality, but lead in fact to similar cognitive perversions among managers, bankers, ratings-agencies, analysts, Gosplan-statisticians, and politicians.

We will argue that if one looks beyond the discourse of market versus state, two fundamental similarities in both social economies can be discerned, which explain the unstable constellation of virtual production and shadow economy, state capture, and the related distortions and perversions. These two similarities are: the weakness of horizontal countervailing powers and the attendant absence of a diversity of institutions and discourses; and the closely related absence of active democratic information, deliberation, and public control. In short: the checks and balances have been dangerously weak in both systems and public spheres failed to function independently on both sides. On the institutional level this translates into a lack of transparency and realism. Thus we will argue that the perverse incentives and structural weaknesses as observed in the Soviet productive system by authors like Kornai (1980) and Grossman (1977) are not inapplicable to the financial engines of neoliberal capitalism in its globalist phase as well.<sup>2</sup>

If we are right in this it means that the whole edifice of markets versus hierarchies loses much of its significance. Whether market based or hierarchy based, hierarchical monadic power and information structures in both systems lead to the corruption of both. The consequence is state capture, “regulatory capture” as well as the actual capture of civil society, the public sphere, and democracy by special interests upon which the whole “general public” and its cognitive universe has become dependent.

The comparison will suggest that the problems underlying the financial crisis are more fundamental than broadly assumed. They are also not merely located in the financial sector but in the structure of society at large. In fact they signal a moment of transition in the world system that will not be easy to manage for Western policy makers, just like the earlier Dutch-UK transition, however much they will try to regulate the banking sector in the future. In this potentially terminal and in any case dramatically transitory respect there may also be a stronger analogy with the Soviet case than one would suspect.

### **THE REAL FUNCTIONING OF THE PLANNED ECONOMY: INFORMAL STRUCTURES**

The common sense conceptualization of the Soviet economy, as characterized by a powerful state with strong control over its enterprises and their managers, which uni-directionally determined what and how much enterprises would produce is incorrect. This view ignores the informal relations that existed between managers and planning agents, and within which managers had substantial influence on the formulation of planning targets and prices. Plans, though “decided” top-down, were made based on information and proposals processed “down-up” by enterprise managements. This led the Hungarian Imre Vajda to speak of “commands written by their recipients” (Nove 1980: 95).

Behind the formal, impersonal and hierarchical planning structures, existed the more informal level, with economic transactions embedded in social and personal relations. Grossman (1977) and other authors such as Berliner (1957) convincingly argued that the planned economy could not function without the “second or shadow economy” of informal relations which oiled the machinery of the planning apparatus. In addition, later studies by sociologists and anthropologists, have stressed that formal structures and informal relations were (and still are) very much interwoven in the (post-) Soviet space (e.g. Ledeneva 1998; 2006).<sup>3</sup>

### **COLOSSAL CAPITAL AND STATE CAPTURE**

The large size of enterprises was a well-known characteristic of the Soviet Union, with only one or a few companies producing a certain product. In 1990, industrial enterprises in the SU were over five times larger than in Western Europe measured in number of employees, and if construction and agro-processing were excluded the difference would be more extreme, with enterprises in for instance machine building and metal working over thirteen times larger (EC 1990: 36). By the end of the Soviet period almost three-quarters of the Soviet manufacturing employees worked in firms with

more than 1,000 workers, and roughly one-fifth of them in companies of over 10,000 workers.

The negative effects of the large size of enterprises in the SU have been extensively documented by scholars of socialism, especially with regard to the agro-food sector (e.g. Lerman et al. 2002). In the course of the Soviet era, enterprises continuously became larger, enterprises were transformed into *kombinaty*, and such enterprises were integrated into centrally managed industrial complexes or *ob'yedineniya*. Although a lot of evidence pointed to the inefficiency of this continued enlargement, there was no debate about reversing this process. On the contrary, when enterprises performed badly, the universal recipe was the take-over by a more successful firm, resulting in further enlargement. Even managers, who could more directly observe the negative effects, strove for enlargement of their enterprises. They had a personal incentive to do so, as being director of a larger enterprise meant more prestige, more influence on the plan and the state, and better chances for their further career (Kuznetsov 1994; Nove 1980: 82). The Soviet state could not allow bankruptcy because usually there was just one such a factory in a country or even in the whole Soviet bloc and large economic regions depended on their survival.

In the West, although full monopolies have been rarer, the problem of financial organizations simply being “too big, too complex, and too interconnected to fail” has been powerfully forced into public awareness over the last two years.<sup>4</sup> Now it turns out that processes of “state capture” for which the Soviet and post-Soviet countries have been strongly criticized as one of the crucial obstacles for further social and economic development, have not been uncommon in the West too. While in the SU the problem extended all over the productive economy, in the contemporary West it is especially pertinent for the financial sector (though not exclusively so, see the problems with letting the car industries collapse). This difference reflects, of course, the difference between a “productivist” socialist industrial economy and a capitalist one driven by global finance and liquidity.

As the functioning of whole Western societies has been absorbed in the dynamics of financialization, the sector itself has become ever more oligopolized. Through mergers and takeovers, Western financial corporations have become uniquely concentrated, a process that accelerated in the last decade. There are only three major Wall Street Investment banks these days (five before the collapse of Lehman Brothers and the integration of Bear Stearns into J.P. Morgan). These five/three are arguably the actual engines of financialized and globalized late capitalism, the ultimate “market-makers” in Philip Augar’s (2005) wording. This group of five/three is dominated by just two of them, Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan. Both have disproportionate influence over the global banking scene as well as disproportionate political influence over the American state. Historically it was J.P. Morgan that served as the anchor for the US financial regime, and was in fact the cradle from which the Federal Reserve was born. In the last

two decades Goldman Sachs has overshadowed the state-influence of J.P. Morgan, and has been more of an “innovative” market-maker worldwide, in particular also with Mortgage Based Derivatives. It has seen a whole row of its top executives serving important functions in the state from the early nineties onwards, the most visible of which were Robert Rubin and Hank Paulson. After the repeal of the Glass Steagall Act in the US (1999), deposit-taking commercial banks were allowed to start to play in the Investment Banking league too. Some European banks, such as UBS, Barclays, ING, and Deutsche Bank, started to operate in particular niches in the investment banking field, just like numerous smaller “investment boutiques”, but all remained critically dependent on the performance and market-making capacities of the five/three established Wall Street giants. Indeed, the repeal of Glass Steagall seems to only have reinforced the oligopolistic tendencies, of which in particular Goldman Sachs profited.

Parallel with the increasing tendency toward oligopoly in investment banking and the growing size of integrated banks, their share of total capitalist profitability soared. In the 1970s and early 80s the US financial sector never earned more than 16 percent of total profits, by 2004 it was claiming over 40 percent of the profits of corporate America (Johnson 2009). Goldman Sachs and J.P. Morgan strove for profit levels on their own equity of 20–30 percent while profitability outside the banking sector was frozen at around 7 percent (Augar 2005). Earnings and bonuses in the financial sector peaked, outgrowing the incomes of any other population segment of Western societies. At the same time, the financial elite successfully lobbied for minimal taxes. In the City of London, investment banker Nick Ferguson publicly questioned whether it was not unfair that he paid less tax than his cleaner-woman (Peston 2008: 20). The public debate and protest this triggered in places like the UK and the Netherlands was largely in vain. The fierce competition between global cities such as New York, London and Paris assured the continuation of low tax regimes for financial corporations and their specialists. Though the contribution of financial operators to the tax bases of small finance centers like the Netherlands and the UK has been quite substantial (around 10 percent), corporations and workers in the non-finance sectors have been taxed much more heavily than operators in the financial markets, even though the latter’s earnings and profits have massively outgrown all the rest.

One could argue that state capture was what made the inexorable dominance and wealth of a core group of financiers possible in the first place, in other words a process that commenced in the 1990s, the heyday of neoliberal pro-market thinking.

The handful of global financial operators, who made their profits by excessive risk taking, insured their investment risks via Credit Default Swaps and other Collateralized Debt Obligations with an even smaller handful of “insurers of last resort”, in particular AIG. AIG, now nationalized by the Obama administration, became in effect the heavily underfunded welfare

state for global financial capitalists, guaranteeing their assets against unforeseen all-over-the-board deflation. That deflation, however, was not at all foreseen because the lack of reliable modelling of correlations and the lack of historical data basically meant that all modelling was ultimately based on assumptions of continued growth in all or most sectors of the economy, including housing and banking.

After the nationalization of AIG, billions of US state injections in AIG immediately flowed into the global investment banks, including non-US banks such as ING, as part of contractual obligations. After the short experiment with the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, Western states decided they could not let any more dinosaurs go out of business as the whole global financial system and the financial systems of multiple individual countries would collapse. AIG was in fact the most important of all these institutions and had to be rescued at once (one day after Lehman was allowed to collapse). While Goldman and others dumped their greatest risks onto AIG, AIG in the final instance dumped them on the State Treasury. Similar processes have been even more pronounced in smaller highly financialized countries such as Switzerland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK (even though their banks were eventually saved not just by their home states but also by the US Federal Reserve acting as the single global central bank and pumping 3.3 trillion dollars into the system in order to keep it liquid). In the Netherlands the balance sheet of the largest bank, ING, was three times GNP. This outstrips the importance of any industry in the Soviet Union. The most dramatic example was of course Iceland, where the liabilities of the main banks were ten times GNP.

The ratings agencies have been imagined as a bulwark against the financial sector's speculative behavior based on a combination of excessive risk taking and state capture by finance capital. They were thought to analyze and evaluate risk with reliable precision. This, of course, did not happen. The first implosion of the banks was caused by the supposedly least risky assets on their entire balance sheets, which the AAA rated "super senior risk" (Tett 2009).

The models of the ratings agencies, just like the models the investment banks used, could not deal with all the unpredictable correlations involved in a full deflationary crisis, as analysts conceded. Moreover, since mortgage derivatives were such a recent innovation, there were no reliable time series to feed their models with.

More crucially, ratings agencies are paid and owned by the very investment banks and investors for which they do the work, and they are therefore a full part of the system, not quite the independent watch dogs the public imagines them to be. The rating of escalating numbers of derivative products during a financial expansion was immensely lucrative. By 2005 it already counted for half the earnings of Moody's, for example (Tett 2009: 119). Moreover, since the ratings agencies were dealing with just a small oligopoly of banks, they were very vulnerable for pressure "from above". Tett writes that the investment banks "constantly threatened to boycott the agencies if they failed to produce the wished-for ratings" (ibid: 119). The ratings

agencies, just like the accountancy firms a few years earlier in the fraudulent Enron and Worldcom collapses, postured as handmaiden of an imagined “objective” state but had in fact become part of the financialized machine, just like parts of the state itself. They were as much gripped by greed as any insider, and exploited their position as “flex-organizations” (Wedel 2004) on the blurred boundaries between state/public and private sector.

In August 2008, just a month before the great implosion, in a letter accompanying a commissioned report on the US banking sector for Hank Paulson, Minister of Finance, Jerry Corrigan, a former New York FED chief now working for an investment bank, wrote that “elevated financial statesmanship” was needed in the banking industry, but he lamented that “there appeared to be precious few such bankers left” (Tett 2009: 268). Not more than a month later, the absence, as well as the urgency, of such “elevated financial statesmanship” finally combined and occasioned what one should perhaps call “open state capture” by big finance.

The financial crisis of 2007–2009, brought the fact of state capture into the open by at once forcing Western states, in a few days time and without any democratic deliberation at all, to use hundreds of billions of future tax incomes to re-capitalize the whole system without much pay-back or roll-back. AIG was allowed to be nationalized, as well as some big but less crucial players in smaller Western countries, but after the money grab the financial institutions on the whole have allowed very little say to politicians in return, nor, tellingly, have politicians openly pressed for it (though in the UK and the EU more than in the US). Indeed, these were largely the same political personnel who had previously given the banks free reign.

In an almost exact replay of the US predicament of October 2008, the EU in May 2010 was pushed to write out a similar cheque of 750 billion Euros ostensibly to “stabilize” the euro and “show solidarity with the Greeks” and other nations on its periphery, in reality, to quote Karl Otto Poehl, the former deeply conservative President of the German Bundesbank, “to save the (Northern) European Banks and the rich Greeks” (Reuter 2010). Captured states took over or guaranteed banking deficits and liabilities under the utterly misleading credo of “aid”, and shifted for a short while into a neo-Keynesian mode without making any strong claims on the bankers and the beneficiaries of financialized growth in return. They were rapidly confronted with degrees of state indebtedness that were higher than in the crisis years of the late 1970s that led to the first wave of neoliberal restructurings. Public indebtedness in the West is now projected to creep up to some 115 percent of GDP by 2015. Public and private debt together, everywhere in the developed world, has now already reached circa 200 percent (up from around 80 percent in 2000 in the UK and Europe; Financial Times 2011). The ratings agencies that had failed so willingly during the financial crisis promptly started threatening smaller vulnerable EU states with lower ratings and higher interest rates to be paid to finance capital. Finance capital thus immediately provoked competitive budget cutting by the strongest states in the EU such as the Netherlands, Sweden,



Germany, and the UK, who easily outclassed the capital-poor peripheral states in the competition for liquid capital that was now on. This signals the capture of the Western state phase 2, and the end to the EU as we thought we knew it. Instead of further fiscal and monetary centralization, including the issuing of EU bonds (as finally in December 2010 the German SPD proposed), Northern EU states traveling ever further to the Right responded with the petty identity politics of deservingness: the Greeks were essentially lazy and corrupt, the Portuguese were dependent, the Irish were gamblers, and the Spaniards and Italians should finally forget about their siesta and become as efficient as the Dutch and the Germans.

Thus, despite profound anger, the wider public has been unwilling to recognize the hard fact of state-capture, and has instead allowed itself to be deflected by moral outrage over apparently isolated legal scandals in the markets, morally unjustifiable bonuses for individual bankers paid from tax money, and the international identity politics of hard work, “aid”, and deservingness. As a consequence, nationalism and identity politics hangs as a smoke screen over the analyses of and responses to the financial crises and their further ramifications—not unlike in the late days of the Soviet Union (see Kalb and Halmai 2011).

State capture in the West was hardly recognized until recently except for some radical academics (Arrighi, Sassen) and alter-globalization voices (e.g. Hertz 2001). In fact, if you put “state capture” in your internet search engine you will see that the World Bank and other global institutions reserve the concept exclusively for poor countries in the Global South and the countries of the former Soviet Union. The concept is meant to explain a lack of economic performance, openness and transparency among corrupt countries that are dependent on the export of a single crop, commodity or mineral. We would argue that the one-sided growth of finance in the West in the last thirty years has produced similar de-differentiations of a prior more complex and variegated social and economic ecology in the West, and made core states ever more dependent on one single sector, giving it ever more prestige and power. Indeed, Simon Johnson, a former IMF Chief Economist calls them openly “banana economies” (Johnson 2009). Any study of the “liberalization” of finance over the last three decades highlights the prevalence of “regulatory capture” (Kay 2009) as big finance was allowed to write its own operating rules under Greenspan’s mantra of the-market-knows-best. But beyond regulatory capture, we argue that it makes analytic and political sense to talk about state capture by finance *tout court*. Or as Willem Buiters, a former member of the monetary committee of the Bank of England wrote, finance was “almost a law unto itself” (Kay 2009).

## VIRTUAL ECONOMY

Individual greed and corruption have mostly been painted as exceptions or personal excesses in both financialist capitalism and the Soviet system. In

reality, they are intimately linked to fundamental characteristics of both systems: the general short-termism and the spread of a virtual economy. Pressure for expansion in an economy where the productive base is obsolete (SU), or increasingly under-invested and “liquidated”—and where a growing pool of liquidity chases a limited number of real assets (West)—stimulates managers to create virtual production, that is “paper-based” wealth.

In the Soviet Union short-term production increases were generated artificially by creating production figures (or at least statistics suggesting that) to fulfil state quota. As Nove (1980: 49) notes, the SU was known as being “obsessed with the future, being ever ready to sacrifice the present to it, as may be seen by the high rate of investment and the priority of producers’ goods. But, paradoxically, *given* the adaptation of ambitious plans for growth, the choices made and decisions taken reflect above all immediate concerns.” Despite the ideological orientation on *pyatiletki* (the five-year plans), both managers and officials were in practice increasingly oriented on short-term performance. As Nove (1980: 49) stated at that time: “They are in trouble if they do not raise the production in *this* year’s plan and it is easy to see that longer-term orientations can conflict with this objective.” This was especially acute at the enterprise management level. Yearly plans were sometimes adjusted top down in December of the year to which it applied (ibid: 40). Manager’s time-horizons were strongly affected by the likelihood of not keeping a position for long.

The focus on quantitative indicators of performance further stimulated short-term opportunistic behavior, including outright corruption by whole enterprises. Firms secretly kept their surplus production (production above the quota established by the planning apparatus), and did not include it in the accounts for the state (Granick 1954: 132), in order to insert it into the officially registered output in times when an enterprise would otherwise be unable to meet the plan, or to exchange it for shortage goods within the shadow economy. Through such informal barter, enterprises were able to obtain unregistered inputs or spare parts. Humphrey (1998) called the hidden production the “manipulable resources.” These resources could be used by the enterprise management to load on or load off from the registered production at strategic moments to gain incidental enterprise level bonuses [and, mostly hidden personal favours or career perspectives] for good performance while avoiding that the state came to know the actual production capacity and would set permanently higher production targets. In sum, “[a]ccounting secrets were the best hidden secret, despite the many indicators, the actual state of affairs remained mostly obscure” to the planning authorities and society at large (Broekmeijer 1995: 81).

The lack of insight in the real economy, and subsequently the limited ability to monitor, was true on all levels. The problematic labor performance of Soviet employees was well known. Alcohol and lacking motivation were increasingly widespread. The central apparatus had little insight in the real productive capacity of enterprises. Managers of these enterprises in turn had very limited insight in the real functioning of the units within them, as unit

heads, and employees in turn, had an incentive to hide their real performance and capacities. The SU was a patchwork of shielded fiefdoms rather than an integrated modern bureaucracy of the Weberian-Prussian type.

In the West a different though comparable virtual economy was created through business reports and favourable stock exchange values (often through fraud, see Enron, Worldcom, Ahold, Goldman Sachs, and the \$8 billion dollar law suit launched by AIG against Bank of America in August 2011). Most corporations, under pressure of shareholders to show short-term improvements without the necessary base of investments, often extended their quarterly reports during the 2000s. Whereas enterprises initially only made prognoses of profit per share and turnover, now they mostly felt obliged to predict these figures in detail, separately for all their divisions. This spectacle of three-monthly figures, analyses and predictions gave a strong incentive to design “manipulable resources” by way of creative accounting practices. This was structurally not unlike the situation in the Soviet economy, even though in the West they would rather invent or overvalue assets and capacities than hide them. In general one can doubt the robustness of key valuations in banking, where profits as a rule tend to reflect the up and down of book values rather than actually realized “sales”. These are virtual valuations that are dependent on the mere ebb and flow of liquidity in the system: ebbs and flows that are in their turn steadily manipulated by the big finance itself. This, of course, is what financial derivatives are ultimately about.

## MYSTIFICATION OF RISK

The virtual economy in both the SU and the West was not only virtual because of unrealistic production and/or profit figures, it also gave misleading signals/information about risks. In the Soviet Union, managers and their enterprises did not feel the effects of the risks they took. The state normally did not allow enterprises to go bankrupt. In the case of enterprise failure the state simply increased subsidies or forced a more successful enterprise to merge with it. As a consequence, it seemed as risk, bad performance and failure did not exist. Both enterprise managers and state officials kept pretending that the economy functioned well, and that misleading production plans and figures reflected the real economy. Enterprise failure and stagnating production were compensated by increased lending. However, the debts of the Soviet and East European states with Western institutions grew enormously. By the early 1980s the debt burden became so large (over 90 billion dollars in the case of the SU, 40 billion for Poland, 25 billion for Hungary etc., the GDR by 1989 paid 60 percent of its yearly export incomes to West German creditors) and the prospects for generating sufficient export income in an increasingly hyper-competitive world economy to ever pay it back became so negative, that Western banks and

states refused to provide additional loans. As a consequence, state-elites were forced to start serious economic accounting, which then in fact led to the end of “really existing socialism.”

In the West, especially in the US and UK, as in the SU until the credit stop by the West, an internationally declining manufacturing sector was hidden by increased international borrowing. Risk-taking in the financial sector as well as in society at large increased sharply in the 1990s and 2000s (see the levels of indebtedness and leverage), but, as in the Soviet Union, managers and their companies rarely took responsibility for risks. Risk was spread throughout the whole economy via financial engineering. What happened through complicated bureaucratic state procedures in the SU, eventuated via complex financial instruments in a deregulated global economy in the West. Bankers became ultra creative in their efforts to slice, dice, redistribute and literally hide risk.

In the 2000s a crucial new, but hidden feature was added to the financial system that further multiplied risk. It was only in 2006 that reporters, in particular Gillian Tett (see Tett 2009) of the Financial Times, started to alert the wider public to the existence of escalating global debts that were literally hidden away in what Tett called the “shadow banking system.” Credit derivatives based on mortgages had been introduced in 2001 and had been booming. These liabilities, however, were immediately shifted from the public balance sheets of banks into “off balance sheet vehicles”, which, by 2006, were hiding some 20 trillion dollars in debt from public scrutiny (it would double in the years until late 2007, coming close to yearly US GDP). These debts went far beyond what could be warranted by the capital bases of the banks; some of them were taking on a hidden leverage of twenty-five or thirty times their own equity while their official leverage remained well within the Basle rules of 10 percent. In a G8 meeting in Washington in April 2007, some months before Lehman brothers would collapse, state officials from the G8 were interviewing hedge fund managers, who, as the unregulated part of the global financial system, were supposed to be the ones causing risk (recall the drama with LTCM in 1998), but one of them explained in no uncertain words to the officials that; “it is not us you should be worrying about—it’s the banks! It is the regulated bits of the system you should worry about” (Tett 2009: 190–191). Officials didn’t yet get that regulated banks had been operating a huge covert system that was going to blow up soon. The ticking time bomb was the increase of interest rates, which would inevitably come. As it happened, it came in response to staggering speculation by the same actors in oil and basic commodities (“futures”), partly a “flight to safety.” This speculation was driving up basic prices for all economies in 2007–2008 and creating the first generalized global concern about insufficient food supplies and famine all through the system for the first time since the 1960s.<sup>5</sup>

The immediate cause that triggered the financial crisis was the interest on sub-prime mortgages, which was going up exactly at the moment that

housing prices started to fall, driving mortgage holders into insolvency. It turned out that not only banks had pretended to be more liquid and reliable than they actually were; house owners, too, had pretended to earn more income than they actually did (often invited to do so by brokers driven by perverse incentive structures). The Soviet joke of workers pretending to work while the state was pretending to pay them translates in the Western context as: “Debtors pretending they can pay off their debts and banks faking that they have the money to lend.”

### **ORTHODOXY, MODELLING, AND “PUBLIC CAPTURE” BEYOND THE STATE**

In the SU perverse processes could not fundamentally be corrected within the existing institutional framework. The system also notoriously made citizens complicit in the maintenance of its lies (Verdery 1996). In the West, the silencing of society regarding the enrichment, excessive risk taking and state capture by the financial sector, needs more explanation. The dominance of the financial sector was not only a result of the powerful lobby by the financial corporations with their enormous market concentration—more than 400 ex-senators as lobbyists on Capitol Hill—but it was also enhanced by the way the orthodoxies of neoliberalism, “market fundamentalism” in George Soros’ words (2009), were taken over by state elites, regulating and rating agencies, as well as the media and large parts of academia in the last three decades.

Quantitavist alchemy, framed in opaque jargon, based in extravagant mathematic models and cloaked in the aura of high science allowed endless manipulation by the high priests of economic growth, and certainly served to humble and silence the public. In the Soviet Union the real mechanisms behind such planning statistics, models and decisions were completely obscure, and in fact depended on a process of “iteration, bluff, counter-bluff and misinformation between planners and enterprise managers, in which central planners routinely assumed that real production costs were less than enterprise managements claimed they were, and enterprise managements tried, in turn, to ‘second guess’/influence what the prices were going to be by manipulating production costs” (Kitching 2001: 69).

In the West the operations of hedge funds and banks in the late 1990s and early 2000s were increasingly characterized by similar phenomena: statistics, modelling and decision-making with little grounding in reality, among others because time series on a globalized financial world run on derivatives simply did not exist, even though the Value at Risk models pioneered at Morgan Stanley suggested otherwise (Tett 2009). It seems that the controlling agencies in the West were more naïve in their monitoring of enterprises than the Soviet state. Key persons in controlling agencies kept an unlimited believe in the indicators and models provided by the financial

sector.<sup>6</sup> Thus controlling institutions and rating agencies further contributed to myths of objective control with two figures behind the comma. Some others, including top commentators as Martin Wolf of *The Financial Times*, later acknowledged that they had been overly naïve. We are not suggesting that the independence of the press in neoliberal capitalism is as constrained as in the Soviet Union with its army of censors. But with regard to the economy, the media did play a comparable role: orchestrating silence and instilling ritual loyalty to reigning mythologies. Signs of fundamental flaws of the system were presented as mere instances of individual greed, fraud or corruption and were pictured as excesses that could be dealt with by legal means. The status quo was largely left undisputed. Recall how Gorbachev focused ultimately just on worker alcoholism and the corruption of individual managers when he was supposedly doing glasnost and perestroika of the system as such.

As a result of insufficient hardnosed scrutiny through the mainstream media, politicians, trade unions and NGOs representing the population outside the financial sector have found it hard to address core problems within the global financial system such as state capture and speculation. Instead one of the functions of neoliberalism was to keep national publics frantically focused on their own particular performance within the global leagues for competitiveness. This further weakened the power of the public (in particular labor) *vis à vis* capital, and served to distort basic perceptions of society and economy in nationalist ways, both by experts and by the public at large.

The neutralization of civil society and institutions also included think tanks and universities, which became increasingly dependent on external money and monitoring institutions focusing them on incremental expert knowledge rather than critical holistic or structural insights, again not unlike in the SU. The intellectual style conformed increasingly to quantitative and closed-model approaches of society as dominant in neoclassical economics. Methodological individualism and methodological nationalism (despite strong critiques on both) were winning out against competing relational ontologies in political science and sociology, to some extent even in anthropology, not to speak of economics itself. Narrow policy-oriented knowledge framed within the academic consensus was favoured over democratic contestation and deliberation fed by a diverse ecology of universities, research groups, intellectuals, and intellectual styles.

We emphasize again that we speak of state capture as a purely sociological fact. It was only predictable that in the course of a thirty-year period of financialization, the state-finance nexus of core Western states would increasingly be controlled by the wielders of liquid global capital and would allow the latter to extend its circuits into new institutional and social arrangements. Such arrangements were at best weakly controlled by countervailing forces in economy and society because such potential forces had been seriously weakened by the neoliberal solution

to the 1970s crises in the first place. Turner (2008) has described how Western states and publics had become all but dependent on low interest rates and associated steady house price rises in order to compensate for real wage stagnation (see also Harvey 2010). The housing-finance nexus in countries like the US, the UK, Ireland, Spain, Greece, and the Netherlands has consistently added some 1 percent to economic growth, among others through serving as an extra consumption fund for senior citizens. Without this, relative wage stagnation outside the top incomes could never have been kept off the public agenda. But even the staggering rates of private indebtedness in the West over the last twenty years have hardly been publicly discussed before banking liabilities were pushed on the sovereign account and the whole construction started to crack before our eyes. Civil dependency and complicity was not restricted to the Soviet case. The mechanisms in the West were different, but over time they helped to produce not entirely dissimilar formal outcomes of public silence and paralysis.

Indeed, the ostensible contemporary effort of states at fighting back the financial class and re-regulating the sector is not more than a jumbo exercise in commodity fetishism delegated to the commodity fetishists themselves. It concentrates solely on the circulation of finance and ignores the crucial sociological flip side of financialization: social inequality, oligarchization, and the diminution of the democratic power of citizens over the economy, whether in the declining core or in the expanding periphery (see also Reich 2010). In the rich countries of the OECD since the mid 1970s, the social wage has consistently declined in relation to the “capitalist wage”, and is now all over the board some 10 percent lower. Thus, in the OECD, while actual mass purchasing power was diminishing, a pool of some 5–10 trillion dollars on a yearly basis (circa 10 percent of OECD-GDP) has become available for speculation purposes on behalf of the actual owners (“paper-owners”) of the rich economies. While some 1.5 billion new workers were brought into the circuits of capital since 1989, tripling the global proletariat in the system, downward wage pressure became both intense and largely automatic and internalized. After 2000, it was in particular China that played a perverse role. The relative income of Chinese labor vis a vis capital, in particular, has consistently deteriorated, weighing heavily on global wage standards (Fung 2009). This is an experience that sharply contrasts with earlier East Asian industrialization processes, which always used to generate “wage-catch up” with the West in the past. It also generated the Chinese controlled global liquidity that served to inflate the values of Western paper-assets, while it pushed Western controlled chunks of global capital into its risky but super-profitable excesses. These and similar interlocking logics of class, crucial as they are for understanding the current predicament, lie fundamentally outside the purview of mainstream concerns (see also Kalb and Halmai 2011).

## CONCLUSION

The theoretical edifice of markets versus bureaucratic hierarchies has been essential for neoliberal thought and its apparent opposite, state socialism (and by supposed derivation: social democracy), in the twentieth century. A comparison of late socialist and financialized capitalist social forms helps us to think beyond that figure. Both organizational forms, over time, have tended to generate opaque and oligopolistic structures of power at the behest of hardly controllable “insider-classes”, including the associated self-referential and mythological cognitive structures and public rituals, which have led to various forms of state capture and the decline of the public sphere. These processes of decay are associated with deepening social inequality and increasingly open oligarchization.

At the height of the postwar period, in the late 1960s, John Kenneth Galbraith (1969) argued that capitalism had acquired a refreshing capacity for long term planning that had finally allowed it to overcome the stagnation and cyclical popular impoverishment of the interwar years. Such planning had been predicated, he argued, upon an increased measure of collaboration with labor and an expanded influence by capital over the “new industrial state”. This planning was required by the massive outlays of capital—territorialized industrial-cum-urban complexes, what Marxists at the time called “monopoly capitalism”—with validation periods often going beyond two or three decades. In those years theories of “convergence” between capitalism and “really existing socialism” were circulating, and Galbraith had acknowledged their plausibility.

In the opening years of the neoliberal onslaught on the welfare state in the West, the late seventies and early eighties, Galbraith’s new industrial state was the object of scorn by Milton Friedman and others for its being captured by insider interests, like the Soviet Union. We argue that the liberalization and globalization of capital out of its fixture with territory, labor and industry in the West, has clawed it back into its original predominantly financial and liquid form, as discussed by Arrighi and Friedman. And we conclude, ironically, that state and public capture by capital has returned with a vengeance: this time without any obligations to territory and labor and with a form of planning predominantly dedicated to its global flow and the capture of states and publics rather than to territorialized accumulation. The major exception to the latter is China, which remains a neoliberal anomaly except for its staggering inequality and has not for nothing become the new workshop of the world—with massive industrial-cum-urban outlays.

The fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1992 have been widely celebrated and commemorated in the West as the ultimate evidence of the universal validity of the premises of “democratic” capitalism (e.g. Fukuyama 1992), and the obsolete nature of leftist and statist thought. This ritual prolongation of cold-war forms of



ideo-logic in the last twenty years has served to further liberate finance, further deregulate the West, discipline and capture national publics and states, and spread its version of finance-driven capitalism around the globe. All the while pundits have been pointing at the Soviet collapse as the ultimate legitimation for capitalist excess. The Western world had done itself a service if it had studied the functioning of the Soviet system as well as its own evolving financialized social structures in a less cold-warrior like way. It could have learnt from the informal and opaque mechanisms, including state-capture, that had been so much part of the Soviet fall and which, after the socialist pretence had been abandoned, were so openly and unashamedly expressed as oligarchy and kleptocracy.

## NOTES

1. We use “virtual economy” in two senses: first in the original meaning of “virtual production” arising from the literature on the Soviet economy (see below); secondly in the meaning given it by Carrier (1998), as an economy of symbols and signs on paper and TV screens with an inevitably unstable referent to a “material economy out there”. See also Gaddy and Ickes 1998 for use of this notion in the Russian (post-soviet) context.
2. Kornai himself recently seemed to admit so much. See <http://blogs.ft.com/maverecon/2009/10/kornai-on-soft-budget-constraints-bail-outs-and-the-financial-crisis/>.
3. After the fall of the planned economy these informal relations came even more to the fore (See Ledeneva 2006; and Spoor and Visser 2004).
4. This is not only true for the financial sector. Through mergers and take-overs the “big three” car companies (Ford, GM and Daimler/Chrysler) have become so large that according to their own estimates, roughly 10 percent of all employees in the US are dependent on the “car-complex”. The US government had little choice but to bail them out to avoid a countrywide gulf of lay-offs.
5. Ben Bernanke, head of the US Federal Bank, stated in 2006, “the management of market risk and credit risk has become increasingly sophisticated. . . . Banking organizations of all size have made substantial strides over the past two decades in their ability to measure and manage risks” (Johnson 2009: 10).
6. The rising food prices in turn have led to global land grabbing and increased speculation with land. In post-Soviet Russia the rapid financialization of agriculture is particularly striking, with former collective farms being turned into agrohholdings of an unprecedented scale, which are listed on stock exchanges (Visser, Mamonova and Spoor 2012).

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Part II

# Histories



# 6 To Die in the Silence of History

## Tuberculosis Epidemics and Yup'ik Peoples of Southwestern Alaska

*Linda Green*

History does not refer merely . . . to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do

—James Baldwin (1963)

### INTRODUCTION

In what follows I explore some of the processes that are implicated in the massive social transformations that have taken place for Central Alaska Yup'ik peoples (including Cup'ik speakers) of southwestern Alaska over the course of the twentieth century. The violence and trauma in its myriad forms that circumscribed the twentieth century for Yup'iks reworked not only individual lives, but altered in the process much of the connective bonds of kin and community life, the collective basis of indigenous well-being. This chapter highlights the social consequences of the tuberculosis epidemics that have been largely overlooked in understanding contemporary Yup'ik lives. I suggest that in fact it was a watershed moment that must be understood alongside of and in relation to two other major transformations for Yup'ik people in the first half of the twentieth century; missionization and the introduction of merchant capital. In this chapter I point to some of the historical ruptures and dislocations that are critical to any understanding of the seemingly inexplicable disparities in the social and economic circumstances for some Yup'ik peoples at the beginning and end of the twentieth century.

### A MATRIX OF VIOLENCE

I want to bring attention to a violence that has largely been normalized and examine its crucial relationship to impunity. The violence of which I speak is a violence that has left in its wake the almost total obliteration of a mode

of life for indigenous people around the globe.<sup>1</sup> It is a violence that leaves its victims standing, albeit weakened. And what has been lost is a point of view, a way of being, inextricably tied to its material base and spiritual foundations. This violence is not an unintended outcome of a social project, but rather is intrinsic to that very process. Such violence is so naturalized that most assume that the victims of this violence are actually its beneficiaries—rescued as it were from their isolated, primitive ways. And even those who may harbor doubts understand the outcome as inevitable, redeemed in their minds perhaps, by its imputed rendering of equality and freedom. This civilizing myth, as Zygmunt Bauman (1991) has noted, is deeply entrenched in the self-consciousness of Western society.

The aggravated assault on indigenous peoples has often been carried out through processes of dispossession, dislocation, and partial assimilation (Hoxie 2001). A historical understanding of how these processes are produced is crucial. In an article entitled “Pandora’s History” Gavin Smith (1999) explores the paradoxes that belie a rapprochement between anthropology and history in attempts by both disciplines to give voice to the unspeakable. Smith urges us to think through those silences, to peer into “those subterranean passages where silence resides”, to interrogate the ways in which they may link up the events of official history. Thus, an examination of history also entails an interrogation of an erasure of history alongside the complicity of that erasure—of ordinary people’s suffering, not just in physical terms, but the emotional, cultural, social parameters of that suffering.

The erasure of history, however, is not total, but rather partial—in both senses of the term—one that blocks any real understanding of the full extent of people’s suffering, while simultaneously setting the stage for an engagement with a particular kind of history, one that serves power. William Roseberry (1999) characterizes this as “hegemony as history, that is the way in which those in power actually pose and then define the questions around which struggles are fought (Gramsci 1971). And it is here in these ruptures that violence against a people is often rendered invisible. Moreover without explicitly naming this violence, challenges to the status quo become mostly muted. Impunity in these instances can be thought of as something more than a lack of accountability in its legalistic sense, but rather as a social process that is enabled in part by a characteristic mixture of silence and memory among its victims and historical amnesia and widespread indifference on the part of the dominant society (Green 2008).

## TRANSFORMING THE TUNDRA

Yup’ikx people—or sub-Arctic Eskimos as they were commonly known—were at the end of the nineteenth century a semi-nomadic people who traveled in small kin groups over the vast tundra by dogsled, boat, or on foot.

These resourceful people survived the harsh environment of the Far North with skill and grace. A people, who by necessity, moved seasonally and widely across the debouchments of the Yukon-Kuskokwim River delta, some 30,000 square miles, to hunt, fish, gather foods and trade items necessary for survival (Haycock 2002). The tundra for the Yup'ik, was not a vast empty space, but a crucial site for the production of social relations and cultural well-being, as the land provided them not only their material sustenance, but embodied the very essence of their lives. Recent mapping and oral history projects with elders in the Delta (Chevak Traditional Council 2000) for example, have revealed the tundra alive with local history—of birth, battles, burials, myths, and ceremonial sites. I am not arguing for a romantic notion of the Yup'ik as Noble Savage. The Yup'ik people experienced famines, disease, warfare, violence; all sorts of human and natural calamities, on a fairly regular basis, yet, they lived their lives, as best they could, on their own terms.

My interests lie precisely in those aspects of the social transformation in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta villages that may not at first seem obvious; the extent to which social relations and social ties were reworked in Native Alaskan communities, even as native people remained in place—on the tundra and with seemingly unchanged access to subsistence. Yet, the enormous changes in social conditions with the arrival of outsiders made the continuation of the old ways of living and living together increasingly impossible.

In the southwestern Alaska case, the assault was not on land per se, nor ostensibly labor, but on a constellation of social and material practices, crucial pieces of the organized matrix of their lives and livelihood, that slowly eroded their ability to survive with dignity. I want to index three such important and interrelated events: first, the introduction of merchant capital through the commodification of their subsistence species—wildlife and fish—that reworked Natives' relationships to their landscape and each other through social rearrangements of their productive activities, secondly, the arrival of missionaries and teachers—often one and the same—who spearheaded fundamental changes in their gendered, social and spatial relations as well facilitating the internalization of their imputed inferiority and lastly, the reworking of Yup'ik lives and social identity in the context of the tuberculosis epidemics.

Until the late nineteenth century the peoples of southwestern Alaska had only limited and sporadic interactions with outsiders,<sup>2</sup> mostly because the natural resources most sought after at the time—seals, walrus, gold and furs—could be procured elsewhere in relatively more accessible regions of Alaska. By century's end, fur traders began establishing trading posts along the Kuskokwim and Yukon Rivers and Moravian and Jesuit missionaries were traveling to and soon living in native settlements, establishing a permanent presence on native lands and in native lives.

Some of the changes introduced—trapping for cash or barter alongside of the introduction of the small engine, sugar, white flour, alcohol, and



tobacco—increased their dependence on a cash economy (Napoleon 1996). Yet, they were drawn into a cash economy, only partially and sporadically, which created both a dependence on outside resources that could never adequately fulfill their ability to meet their daily needs for social reproduction, while simultaneously precluding most alternatives. Moreover, it altered the connections between them. In his account of changing economic relations among people in the hinterlands of Labrador, Gerald Sider summarizes a similar transformation by observing that “the tensions produced between autonomy of work processes and the imposed constraints to produce under merchant capital” reworked positions of power and authority as “traditional” leaders coordinated the relations of their production and social reproduction in new and often deleterious ways (1986: 36).

With the crash of the fur trade in the 1930s Yup'iks by necessity were thrown back onto their own resources to survive, but in a context of profound social and economic change. Both before and after the collapse of the fur trade a succession of episodic epidemics occurred—small pox, measles and influenza—which together left Native groups decimated, physically, socially and economically (Napoleon 1996). In many cases whole kin groups perished and in others the sole survivors were young adults. Subsequently, most Yup'iks were increasingly lured in from the tundra—although often under duress—with the assistance offered by missionaries; schools for their children and Western medical care that seemed all the more necessary as the power and legitimacy of the shamans had waned in the face of such disease and death. The long, slow death march from tuberculosis for massive numbers of people in the ensuing decades was simply the final phase in their dispossession and dislocation from each other and the landscape of their lives, as the social and economic fabric was shredded.

## WHITE PLAGUE

The 1930s were not only remarkable for the devastating impact of the fur trade collapse, but also because one out of every three deaths of Alaskan Natives was from tuberculosis (Fellows 1934). In the mid 1940s some 10 percent of the native population—4,000 people—had active tuberculosis. By the 1950s it was estimated that one out of every thirty indigenous Alaskans was in tuberculosis sanatoria remaining there for an average of two years, mostly outside of Alaska's borders, with waiting lists for hospital beds often extending over two to three years (Comstock 2001; Chance 1990). Also, in the 1950s more Native babies and small children died than lived.

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta was the site of continuous tuberculosis epidemics for the first half of the twentieth century with not only the highest morbidity and mortality rates of all other indigenous groups in Alaska, but whose rates even surpassed those of the mid-nineteenth century urban slums of Europe and the United States.

The State's tuberculosis control program in Alaska initiated soon after the end of World War II is understood in medical, public health, and international health circles as a success story of considerable magnitude in the treatment and prevention of the disease among the aboriginal population. This is, in one sense, quite true. Yet it is also a story of innumerable silences, contradictions and paradoxes that have had enormous implications for the well-being of Alaska's indigenous peoples today.

A commonly held perception is that it was the Russian explorers who introduced tuberculosis into the Native Alaskan population in the eighteenth century (Fortune 2005). Thus tuberculosis was thought to be a sad but inevitable consequence of modernity, following a trajectory much like the introduction of Old World diseases into the New World by European colonizers that literally decimated the indigenous populations of North, Central and South America. Yet, the historian Paul Kelton (2007) has argued that devastation wrought by infectious diseases in the southeastern United States in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not due simply to aboriginal peoples' lack of immunity to European and African introduced germs, rather their epidemiological significance lies in heightened vulnerability of indigenous peoples to infection and death as a result of colonization.

In the Alaska case smallpox, measles and influenza were certainly introduced from outside its borders, but the case of tuberculosis is perhaps more contentious. Recent historical and scientific data have suggested that tuberculosis may have been endemic in Alaska for several thousand years prior to Russian colonization. Some scientists have hypothesized that the semi-nomadic lifestyle of native peoples with their seasonal locales for fishing, hunting, spring and winter camps and the small number of individuals living together, coupled by the large amounts of time spent out of doors, limited the opportunities for its spread. Further, Native peoples long physical exposure with the organism, postulated to be low in virulence, may have allowed most of those affected to heal their lesions spontaneously through fibrosis and calcification (Fortune 2005). Yet, in either case, whether endemic or introduced, one of the significant impacts of early Russian occupation was to create the ecological and epidemiological conditions that allowed the tuberculosis bacilli to flourish in the eighteenth century in the port towns of the Aleutian Islands, the Alexander Archipelago and the Seward Peninsula, major sites of Russian settlement.

In the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, however, it was not until the late nineteenth century with arrival of the outsiders that dramatic changes took place in the daily lives of the Yup'ik people: resettlement of seasonally nomadic peoples into more concentrated villages changed the way they practiced subsistence and their relationships with each other. It reworked kin and gender relations as men were encouraged to move out of the men's houses—the *kasmin* or *quigiq*—into nuclear family structures, changing how power and authority were organized between and among men and women and between the young and old.

People moved out of their semi-subterranean dwellings into above ground houses that were inadequate, structurally, socially and economically. Moreover, the vast tundra, the site where meaningful social relations were produced also became a space of their confinement. Yup'iks began to live in between two cultures—one slowly being hollowed out and the other where they took their place as marginalized people as Western education, Western medicine and Christianity disrupted people's understanding of the meaning of their lives. The social conditions were ripe for the tuberculosis bacillus to flourish.

Yet, government decision-makers, medical experts, and missionaries viewed these changes as positive signs of progress and assimilation of Native peoples. Paradoxically, these very changes that on one hand made survival easier and more predictable, also created the conditions that simultaneously increased the chaos in their lives as individuals and kin.

#### **IMPOVERISHMENT VS. THE BACILLUS: NARROWING THE FOCUS OF INTERVENTION**

The German biologist Robert Koch identified the tubercle bacillus as the causative biological agent in 1884, thus beginning the quest for effective pharmaceutical therapies. Yet, even before Koch's discovery the causative social agents of tuberculosis were widely known; a familiar litany of poverty-induced maladies: malnutrition, depressed immunity, chronic stress, limited access to potable water and sewage, inadequate housing and close, crowded living conditions (Farmer 1999; Lewontin 1993). Over the course of the twentieth century the majority of Western medical resources and public health policies privileged the treatment of individual cases over the social causes of the disease (Dubos 1952). Although tuberculosis affected all social classes, it did so differentially. Racial, class, and gender configurations have long been key determinants in disease morbidity and mortality as well as health care provisioning. In the early decades of the twentieth century African Americans, Native Americans and immigrants had some of the highest infection and death rates of tuberculosis in the continental United States, widely understood as a result of their impoverished living and working conditions. Yet, their opportunities for care were both limited and most often punitive. The causative agent of their social inequalities was explained as cultural difference, obscuring the political, economic and ideological underpinnings of capitalist social relations in which they were embedded. Moreover, the high morbidity and mortality rates among the poor, particularly people of color, became further justification for their discrimination.

In the early decades of the twentieth century the upper classes diagnosed with tuberculosis were treated with the "rest cure" in private sanatoriums where a nourishing diet, rest, exercise and fresh air were deemed essential for any likelihood of remission or cure. The working class—African

Americans, Native Americans, and immigrants among them—were confined to state-financed institutions where they underwent a “work cure”, therapy based on the idea that the poor with tuberculosis should work for their keep (Bates 1993).

The rise in TB in the newly industrialized societies of Europe and America was followed in every case by a long period of gradual decline among certain groups of people. Although the trend in TB was not continuous over the course of the twentieth century the general movement of TB mortality in the West has been downward for most of the last 100 years. And that decline was largely independent of medical intervention. By the time effective treatments of TB were discovered following World War II, the disease was no longer the dreadful killer it had been for most populations. In the United States racial differentials, however, tightly tied to class divisions became further entrenched as these effective therapies developed. Although tuberculosis continued to decline among all US citizens, rates among African Americans and Native Americans remained relatively high. With the development of effective treatment in 1943 energies turned increasingly toward treatment of *individual cases*. By the late 1950s tuberculosis was regarded as a disease well on its way to being eradicated and little interest remained in attacking the disease at its social roots. The illusion of conquering the “disease” through treatment became the preferred public health model rather than advocating for affecting the underlying causes of vulnerability (Farmer 1999).

## RESEARCH, DIAGNOSIS AND THE PROVISIONING OF CARE

By any measure the American public health response to the ongoing and intensifying tuberculosis epidemics during the first five decades of the twentieth century in rural Alaska was extremely slow. Federal and territorial officials responsible for native health and well-being were well aware of the magnitude and severity of the tuberculosis problem among Alaskan Natives as early as the 1920s. Missionary and teacher reports and three successive federal health commissions—1920s, 1930s, 1940s—that toured Alaska, documented over that thirty year period the continuously deteriorating health and living conditions of Alaska’s aboriginal peoples. Although the problem was well-documented little was done to address the growing crisis. The scarcity of financial resources was most frequently cited as the constraining factor. What little health services were provided for Natives in the 1930s and 1940s, for example, seemed to have been done, in part, of fear that the White population was in danger from exposure to the diseases of Native peoples, most particularly tuberculosis, further reinforcing a milieu of fear among White settlers in which Native contagion was thought to be intrinsic.

After World War II, in 1947 and again in 1948 fact-finding teams from the American Medical Association were sent to Alaska. In both cases their reports concluded that the resources available to stem the tide of tuberculosis among the Native population were wholly inadequate. The 1948 team noted that ten times as many Natives died of tuberculosis than Whites even though Natives made up only one third of the population.

The 1948–1950 Alaska Territorial Biennial Health Report listed 5,509 people with active tuberculosis cases in their case registry. With only 300 beds in all of Alaska for tuberculosis patients—most of which were newly converted beds at the former military hospitals of Skagway, Seward and Mt. Edgecumbe, near Sitka and with a waiting list of hospital beds numbering between 3,000–4,000, the majority of the people with active tuberculosis were left in their rural communities to die.

In the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta where tuberculosis was particularly rapacious, a ten bed hospital was opened in Akiak in 1930, a small village on the Kuskokwim River also the site of a major fur trading post. The hospital was closed in 1933 concomitant with the collapse of the fur trade. In 1940, a forty-bed hospital was opened in Bethel across the river from a newly built US military airstrip, which at the time was a strategic site to the Pacific theatre war effort during World War II. Yet, in 1950 when that Bethel hospital burned to the ground by an accidental fire, the US Bureau of Education, the over site agency at the time for federally mandated Indian health care, decided not to rebuild the hospital, but rather to refer patients to the Dillingham hospital, over 150 miles to the south, accessible only by boat or dog team. The decision was made in the midst of a tuberculosis epidemic that rivaled the now legendary White plague of mid nineteenth century Europe.

In 1954 there were over 100,000 tuberculosis beds in the lower 48, many of them empty. Hospital census were falling as many patients were being discharged because of the success of combined chemotherapy treatments—particularly with the combination of streptomycin and para-aminosalicylic acid (PAS) both discovered in the mid-1940s, and isoniazid (INH) in 1952—that could be administered on an out-patient basis. It was only then that the hospital beds became available for Alaska's indigenous peoples. Thus Alaska's indigenous peoples were prescribed a regime of care in the 1950s that was hospital-based, including debilitating surgeries that were according to several of the thoracic surgeons who preformed them, mostly palliative, even as outpatient chemotherapy became a standard protocol in the continental United States.

In 1954 the Parren Commission visited Alaska for the second time and concluded in its report that the current resources available were woefully insufficient to stem the tide of Native mortality and morbidity from tuberculosis. What Dr. Thomas Parren, the chair of the commission and former Surgeon General of the United States, did discover on that second trip to Bethel was that a successful outpatient treatment regime was already

underway. Even today that initial experiment has been almost entirely erased from historical memory except by people in Bethel and the small village of Nunapitchuk.

In 1952 Dr. Beryl Michelson, a White Bureau of Indian Affairs physician sent to establish a clinic in Bethel in lieu of rebuilding of the destroyed hospital, teamed up with Michael Chase, a twenty-year-old Yup'ik man from Nunapitchuk, to launch a home-based treatment program for ten people with active disease using streptomycin and PAS. These people had been deemed to have tuberculosis too far advanced to warrant care. However, under this outpatient treatment regimen within a three month period their lung x-rays showed dramatic improvement. Dr. Michelson had instituted the program without authorization after the physician in charge—Dr. Edward Hynson, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Juneau, had denied her request to begin outpatient care. Soon after Dr. Parren reported Dr. Michelson's experiment to Dr. Hynson, she was relieved of her duties in Bethel and told she would never practice medicine among Alaska Natives again.

Mr. Chase said the reason he became involved is because as a young boy he watched as both his father and older brother die of tuberculosis, helpless to intervene. Moreover, he understood all too well the deleterious social effects of their deaths on family and community life. Mr. Chase not only gave the streptomycin injections and administered the PAS pills daily—some twenty-four each day to each person, but he organized the community to provide the daily necessities for rest and cure—provisioning of firewood, water, washing clothes, cleaning the houses, food. This was the last time, he said, that the community really came together for each other.

The 1954 Parren Report urged that ambulatory chemotherapy care be carried out in the Bethel region and a very minimal program was launched. Within this changing social context two successive tuberculosis control measures in particular are credited with “stopping the dying” over the course of next two decades: first, the long term confinement of vast numbers of people with active (infectious) tuberculosis to sanatoriums for periods of up to several years; and secondly, intensive surveillance of village populations to monitor out-patient based chemotherapy both for the treatment and prevention of tuberculosis. Together these measures are complexly linked to the furtherance of Yup'ik people suffering, as the strategies simultaneously alleviated their morbidity and mortality from tuberculosis, yet their suffering was rendered invisible.

## PARADOXES OF THE SANATORIUM CARE IN THE MID-1950S

The removal of family members from their homes and communities, both adults and children had long-term social consequences for those individuals, their families, and their communities. Most of the people who were sent to hospitals outside the state were monolingual in their indigenous

language and most had never left the region before. Many had invasive and debilitating pulmonary surgeries. The majority of patients were hospitalized for over two years. Many never returned home, and all too frequently family members were never notified what happened to their loved ones. They were in effect “disappeared”, to borrow an apt phrase from the Latin American context. The recent discovery at the former tuberculosis sanatorium, Mt. Edgumbe in Sitka, AK of over 100 bodies of people encased in concrete and stashed in two World War II ammunition bunkers perhaps best exemplifies a kind of woeful disregard for the mostly Alaskan Native patients and their families. Although their presence had long been rumored in Sitka, the bodies were only “discovered” because the State Department of Transportation wanted to widen the airstrip and the bunkers were in the way (AK Dept. of Transportation 2000).

Those who were hospitalized spoke of their experiences with a mixture of fondness for the doctors and nurses who cared for them and a lingering sadness and self doubt over the effects of their absence from their villages and families. Yet, their narratives include a profound sense of loss and shame. At the heart of their experiences with tuberculosis seems to have been profound silence on the part of both public health officials and the people themselves about the social consequences of separations/disruption/loss/death, that is the physical, psychological and cultural chaos produced in people’s lives. The stories that follow dramatically illustrate this paradox.

I had occasion to interview one of the Indian Health Service (IHS) physicians who worked at the Bethel hospital in the mid 1950s soon after it was rebuilt, following the dismissal of Dr. Michelson. This physician flew out to the small newly created village of approximately 100 people on the edge of the Bering Sea. The doctor described the people as being mostly monolingual and in his words “just moving up from underground”—that is from the traditional sod houses to the cheap BIA box houses there were entirely inappropriate for the sub-arctic winters, which were not insulated sufficiently for the sub-zero winters nor were there adequate resources for heating. A plane had been sent to pick up a woman in her early 30s with active tuberculosis—a call had just come to Bethel that there was a hospital bed available in Tacoma where her husband was already hospitalized. She was living with her three children in a tent. She packed up her few possessions and was on the plane within an hour. In his interview with me the doctor cited this as an example of the extreme confidence that “Eskimo” people had in Western medicine. Later in the interview however, he mused, “perhaps, if we had given them adequate housing the TB would have gone away on its own”.

I also had the opportunity to interview two of those three children as adults, from the village who were left that winter without their mother and father. The boy, Sam, was eight-years-old at the time they took his mother away. At the time of our interview he was fifty-eight-years old. During the course of my fieldwork when I was asking most everyone in the village of

600 people if they would be willing to tell me about their experiences with the tuberculosis epidemics, Sam refused. Some days later he sought me out at the small room where I was staying above the village store. He cried during most of the next two hours that we spent together. Sam said that his uncle had to hold him back forcefully that day they put his mother on the airplane. He remembers screaming for her not to go. His older sister tried as best she could to take care of him and his little sister, but mostly they lived without adequate food, clothing, and shelter. Most of his relatives also had family members either dying or hospitalized. Sam's mother stayed at the hospital for three years, when she returned to the village Sam had already been sent away to boarding school. By the time he returned home from school that summer, she had died. His father never returned from the hospital. Sam presumed he too had died.

Another woman, Mary, from the same village was at the time of our interview in her early fifties. Mary told me that when she was three years old her mother was sent to the hospital. She then lived with her grandmother whom she came to think of as her mother. Mary was seven years old when her own mother returned home. Mary recalled how terrified she was of this stranger/mother because she thought she was a White nurse who Mary associated with injections. Mary's mother's hair had been cut short and permed, she was wearing lipstick and Western dress. One of the first procedures upon entry into tuberculosis hospitals was to cut women's hair ostensibly to rid them of hair lice, but it also served to refashion and Westernize these native women's bodies. During our conversation Mary confided, as tears streamed down her cheeks, that when she was thirteen her mother died and she had not understood, until now, why she never mourned her death. In fact she did not even attend her funeral.

## SURVEILLANCE AND SUICIDE

By the 1960s the tuberculosis epidemic was winding down and fewer people were confined to hospitals as outpatient chemotherapy-based treatment became more widely available. The year 1968 was the first that there were no reported deaths from tuberculosis and the first year since the 1940s that no native children were hospitalized (Comstock 1972).

Tuberculosis control surveillance was—and continues to be an important feature of public health case management and new case findings. Surveillance included a TB registry, tracking of compliance with medications, periodic visits by physicians or public health nurses, home visits, village-x-ray teams, sputum exams and local people serving as chemotherapy aides. And with such small numbers of people coupled with their geographic isolation it was quite possible to track individual lives, even without today's sophisticated technology. But here public health officials seem to have been unseeing and silent as another epidemic was unfolding before their eyes.



Dr. Robert Krause, a psychiatrist/anthropologist at the University of Kentucky worked in some of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta villages in the early 1970s doing life histories with men and women in their early twenties, who a decade or so earlier as children, had borne the brunt of the tuberculosis epidemics. These young adults had attempted suicide. Dr. Krause related this story to me from the perspective of a young man whom was being treated for severe depression and attempted suicide.

The boy's mother was alone with a "houseful of kids" after his father had been sent to the sanatorium. This boy was the oldest, but he was too young to hunt and fish for the family. The family's well-being was dependent on handouts from other community members. Other kids in the village, he recalled, made fun of him and his siblings because of their ragged clothes. When his mother died he tried to climb into the grave with her. The boy was ten years old at the time.

Simultaneous to the decline in active tuberculosis disease and deaths, there was a serious and disproportionate rise in social-behavioral problems and suicides among young Yup'ik people. In the early years some of the people committing suicide did so with Isoniazid, the TB drug, which at the time was widely distributed to villagers across the Delta, as the Center for Disease Control was conducting drug trials on the efficacy of the drug in the prevention of primary infection (Comstock 2001). And Dr. Krause suggests that many of the reported accidental deaths were/are "suicides masquerading as accidents" (Interview 2003). In fact, between 1964 and 1989 the rates of Native suicide in Alaska rose by 500 percent. So even as the state created the all-seeing eye through surveillance, it failed to recognize the skyrocketing rates of Native suicides. Silence on Yup'ik suffering prevailed on the part of a host of state and public health officials as well as tribal leaders. This contributed to and was crucial for the continuing exercise of power over people's lives. This silence is embodied by the utter failure to pay attention to the social consequences of the vast changes taking place both large and small. Thus, silence lies at the heart of both of these epidemics; silence among those charged with providing Native Alaskan people comprehensive health care. Although many of the former Public Health Service physicians who worked in the Delta in the 1950s expressed real concern in retrospect for what they had seen, at the institutional level, the connections were never reworked into policy and practices that both acknowledged and alleviated that suffering and trauma. This silence also prevailed among ordinary people whose multiple traumas were hidden in guilt and shame.

"Is it our fault we got TB?" was a question put to me by a 90-year-old Yup'ik woman. This was not a naive question, but rather one that reflects a long history of silence in many rural communities about the tuberculosis epidemics. Many Native people seem to think of themselves to blame. Silence is often a common reaction to social trauma. Shame and self-blame are often psychological and emotional responses among survivors, as many

of the victims of trauma are stunned into silence, as they try as best they can to cope with their world turned upside down, without any of the familiar certainties to hang onto (see Hayden 1997). But as John Berger (2007) has noted shame is not only about individual guilt but rather over time it will corrode one's capacity for hope, unable even to imagine a future for oneself and one's kin.

The tuberculosis epidemics fractured the fragile social bonds among kin and between community members in a myriad of ways both subtle and not, that served to reinforce notions of their imputed inferiority which included only their partial assimilation alongside their intensifying vulnerability (Sider 2006). Tuberculosis was but one facet of a one-two-three punch over the course of the twentieth century: missionization, the partial commodification of the subsistence practices, and their dispossession and dislocation from each other and the meaning of their lives.

Although the epidemic of tuberculosis and the epidemic of suicides seem to be disparate disease entities—one an infectious disease, the other often an outcome of a cluster of behavioral/psychological problems—in this particular instance my point is to posit an association of common causes between them. The historical links between the internal colonialism of the early twentieth century, the tuberculosis epidemics of mid-century, and the epidemic of suicides of contemporary times have left a legacy of devastation that continues into the twenty-first century.

## THE NEXT CENTURY UNFOLDS

Today the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta is home to some 25,000 Yup'ik people living in fifty-six small, geographically isolated villages. The largest village has an estimated population of 1,200 people and the smallest a population of 100. The Yup'ik people make up the largest population of all other indigenous groups in Alaska, yet the Y-K Delta remains the poorest region. Moreover, the Yup'ik people have the highest rates of unemployment—by some estimates 75 percent of the active workforce is without steady employment—and there are only a handful of regularly paying jobs in each village. Most people have no productive work to do day after day after day and must rely on the state and federal social service system for the cash to survive. Even though they are mostly confined in their everyday lives to specific parcels of land, further restricted by state-imposed hunting and fishing regulations, as well as the intensifying consequences of global warming, most people do continue to practice some degree of subsistence, but from a sedentary existence. They go by boat, four-wheeler or snow machine to hunt, fish or collect berries and grasses. Yet this too is becoming prohibitive, as gas for their vehicles in the summer of 2009 was \$7(US)/gallon. Increasingly, even as their dietary mainstay remains their subsistence foods of fish and fowl, the local village store has become essential to survival. Yet, it is filled with mostly toxic substances—frozen fast

food, soda, chew, and candy—that are literally killing them, albeit slowly, as hitherto unknown rates of cardiac disease, type 2 diabetes, and cancer have soared over the past half century.

Yup'iks have some of the highest rates of suicide, violent deaths, domestic violence and sexual assault in the state. Most village people live in substandard housing; many lack running water, access to clean drinking water and sanitation. Even among those villages where a sanitation infrastructure exists, many communities and households do not have the monetary resources to keep them operating adequately. And what is slowly being revealed is that the Y-K Delta has been a site of extensive sexual predation and assault by Catholic clergy over the last half century.

I bring these matters to the fore rather starkly to highlight the outcomes of social and economic policies and practices whose manifestations we call “poverty”. And in many cases poverty, rather unconsciously, is commonly understood as an ascribed status, intrinsic to a population rather than historically produced. In the Yup'ik case the production of their poverty can be traced across the contours of the twentieth century. Yet, the violence, suffering, and trauma—the utter immiseration—that circumscribe Yup'ik lives remains mostly unacknowledged and thus inadequately attended. With hope securely locked away in Pandora's Box, a century of violence has left Native peoples with little to hang onto except each other and it is in those contradictory spaces where the Yup'ik of Alaska continue to struggle for their dignity and their lives.

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## NOTES

1. I am referring to those cultural practices tied to social, political, and economic activities which are now mostly reside as trace memories of what once was. I am not arguing, however, that indigenous peoples are totally bereft of meaningful social relations and social resource among and between kin and communities that are based in part of those very memories.

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## 7 Not the Same Old Stories

### Labor Anthropology, Vulnerabilities, and Solidarity Struggles

*Belinda Leach*

In the past 150 years the most sustained confrontation with capital has come from workers through their organizations. Yet the hard won gains of workers in many parts of the world—among them the right to associate, shorter workdays, health and safety regulations—achieved by the mid twentieth century, have been systematically stripped away with the rise of neoliberalism. Led by the examples of Ronald Reagan’s firing and then decertification of all American air traffic controllers in 1981 and Margaret Thatcher’s victory over the British miners in the 1984–1985 strike, governments and employers have repelled most of workers’ recent efforts to influence the conditions of their work lives. Unionization rates are lower than they have been for generations in countries around the world (Rampell 2009).

Winnie Lem has admonished anthropologists for pondering questions of difference, identity and fragmentation and clinging to notions of cultural difference that fuel nationalist and ethnic differentiation at the expense of attention to questions of class and solidarity. She argues that “processes of class formation under capitalism have been pushed to the margins” at exactly the time when “questions of solidarity have become more important” (Lem 2008: 212). There is the sense among many analysts, anthropologists included, that class is the same old story and one that no longer needs to be told (Lem and Leach 2002). The new and exciting stories are of difference and identity.

In the 1990s I carried out research with Ontario steelworkers and their families who were confronting the everyday implications of the restructuring of the global steel industry. That research revealed that difference and identity were indeed critical; they operated as ideas that were a key force in undermining attempts to achieve solidarity within a coalition of unions and community organizations. I argued that there was a serious incongruence between the interests of some union leaders and the broader interests of those they claimed to represent. As workers took on the positions their leaders promoted, they distanced themselves from other working-class groups. Rather than reconciling divisions within the working-class as the attempt at a broad-based coalition promised, those divisions were reinforced, playing into neoliberal economic and social agendas (Leach 2002).

How can anthropologists engage effectively with questions of solidarity? Sharryn Kasmir (2009) has called for the development of a labor anthropology. Following the example of Andrew Herod's (1997; 2001) concept of a labor geography, she makes a critical distinction between an anthropology of labor that documents the lives and struggles of workers under capitalism, and a labor anthropology that "sees our discipline from the point of view of labor and asks how our work might be relevant for labor struggles throughout the world" (Kasmir 2009). Constructing such a labor anthropology will require careful attention to the kinds of disjunctures that emerged in my fieldwork with steelworkers, and arose more recently in my research with autoworkers,<sup>1</sup> raising yet again difficult questions about the failure to accomplish solidarity.

Gerry Sider has argued that "what is strategically at stake here is a need to recognize the extent to which the working class has been and is pitted against one another, for its own and external reasons and causes, and yet still retains the capacity to understand and to struggle, always necessarily in new ways, against its subordination and its exploitation" (1996a: 79). He argues for an historical ethnographic method that has as its goal "ultimately rooting our struggles in the complex contradictions and tensions *within* working-class culture, and not simply between the working class and those who dominate and exploit them" (Sider 1996b: 115).

In this chapter I explore some of the issues that potentially face a labor anthropologist concerned to support working class struggles, but not to paper over schisms that in fact operate to undermine those struggles. This is a critical issue confronting politically-engaged anthropologists, and an area where labor anthropologists can make a major contribution. Our particular location—as fieldworkers privy to contradictory ideas and actions, *and* as social commentators with a sophisticated analytical toolkit—allows us a position from which to contest the frequent tendency among social scientists and others to homogenize "the working class", and to unravel the contradictions and tensions and their implications for a left project under contemporary conditions.

Over a decade of research in the highly volatile and ever changing automobile industry in Ontario has revealed just how difficult the achievement of solidarity actually is. Yet this empirical finding runs counter to (at least) two, dominant, interlocking hegemonic stories that frame the industry and bolster a notion of solidarity among its workers. The first of these stories describes who autoworkers are: White, male, and unionized assembly workers. The second imbues auto unions with unquestioned solidarity, of a kind that other unions may only wish for. But other stories emerge from my fieldwork that belie these hegemonic ones. In this chapter I argue that for solidarity to be possible those old stories need to be disrupted. In the world of auto work, the old stories rely on scalar mechanisms that temporally select particular aspects of autoworker histories, leaving other aspects hidden and silent, and that spatially manipulate where contemporary struggle will be located. Both of these

perpetuate exclusive notions of auto work which deny how historical and contemporary change in the industry, as well as in the world outside, has altered the workforce and the labor process. Both construct a static formal culture of auto industry work that leaves people politically paralyzed. I conclude that to destabilize the hegemony of the older ones, new stories that incorporate all temporal and spatial scales need to be told.

## STORIES OF SCHISM, LAMENTS FOR SOLIDARITY

As president of her union local at an automobile parts plant in a rural Ontario town, Janet Griggs led a successful plant occupation in 1999. At that time, a climate of insecurity and distrust, cultivated by new management, came to a head. Fifty-seven workers had been issued permanent lay-off notices, and the union learned that the company planned to move 200 jobs to Mexico, in violation of the union contract. In a carefully planned and executed operation, twenty-five workers, including the leaders of the union local, occupied and secured the plant during the night. The next day their co-workers along with people in the community stood outside, first in astonishment, then in support, and later joined by busloads of union members from other towns and cities. Management were kept out of the plant until they agreed to revoke the layoff notices and provide job security for the workers, without threat of closure, for a period of two years.

The victory was sweet but short. Although the conditions for ending the occupation included an extension of the union's contract with the company, the recall of the laid off workers, and the protection of 400 or so jobs for the duration of the contract, the threats soon began again, and as soon as that contract ended, at the end of 2001, the company announced the plant would close and production would be moved to Mexico. Janet worked hard and bravely on behalf of her members—her neighbors and co-workers for over twenty-five years—during these months of uncertainty. She lobbied the local mayor and town councilors to intervene in the company's decision, to no avail. She engaged with representatives of the national union; first to convince them to try to stop the company's move, and when that failed, she pressed them to insist that the company enhance its severance package and take a generous approach to those workers who were within just a few months of their official retirement date. During our conversations she expressed shock at the lack of interest in such matters by the national union staff, who seemed to her (and to many of her co-workers) to be simply in a hurry to tie up the loose ends of the plant closure and move on. New rumours began to circulate, this time about the motives of the national union leadership, who were reported to have made an agreement with the company allowing them to organize its new plant, some 200 kilometers away. Janet and her now mostly unemployed co-workers felt that their national union had betrayed them.



Similar to Lem (2002), who points to the “silent collusion” of anthropologists with the racial prejudices of their research subjects, labor anthropologists must consider carefully the implications of bringing to light—or alternatively of not doing so—stories that are revealed when solidarity fails. We clearly face a quandary when our research exposes thorny issues and practices whose effect is to undermine and inhibit solidarities. How should we proceed? Eager in an abstract sense to support working-class struggles but pulled by the nature of fieldwork itself into local individual and collective social worlds, we face the major challenge of representing our findings in a fashion that refuses to do further violence to those we know, but at the same time advances a better understanding of the conditions that undermine solidarity. Another autoworker’s story provides further dimensions to the solidarity puzzle.

Jenny McNeil had worked at a unionized auto assembly plant for sixteen years when she talked to me about her first days on the job. Assigned to a line, her job was to use a heavy-duty rivet gun. She was supposed to be trained in its use by her team leader and co-workers, all of them men. But they did nothing to show her how to use it. The recoil of the gun into her shoulder over her first several weeks at the plant has left her permanently injured. She later discovered that there is a way to hold the gun to avoid its recoil. But rather than tell her about that, her co-workers—her brothers in the union local—stood by as she endured entirely preventable pain and lasting injury.

For Gerry Sider, the critical way out of the dilemma in which labor anthropologists and others find themselves hinges on the nature of the relationship between history and contemporary practices. Arguing that “working people spend a lot of time thinking and worrying about their changing situation”, in his controversial essay in the *Radical History Review* he makes what at first seems to be a rather startling statement: that ‘working peoples’ very notion of their common class situation *centres* on their sense of change” (1996a: 77). This is, of course, very far from how class consciousness is usually understood focusing as it does on ideas of continuities and similarities within the working class. But Sider’s suggestion that we need to focus on change, and on internal difference and contradiction, makes more and more sense to me. Sider speaks from his own research that concerned a failed unionization drive where “union building never fundamentally addressed how the social relations of work and daily life were so rapidly changing, not just for aging workers *but for others also*” (1996: 110, my emphasis). He suggests that the union should have tried to mobilize, or at least to discuss publicly and root organizing efforts not just in workers at the plant but in “larger patterns of changing relations” (ibid).

But as Janet Griggs found out, unions have relatively narrow frames for action, partly because of their insertion into a codified, restrictive legal framework, and partly because of their particular historical learnings of what constitutes success. Like Sider’s historian friends, unions retell the

same old stories, often highlighting what workers share while failing to reflect contemporary realities of disruption, disarticulation, and change. The old stories encourage the reuse of old strategies, which as Sider says, are “the primary reason we hang on to them” (1996b: 117). The failure to find, or often even to seek, new strategies is one of the most common critiques of labor organizations by their critics on the left. The old stories and old strategies become hegemonic, repeated over and over, making only certain kinds of connections transparent (Smith 2004: 221–24) while papering over contradictions and tensions and in fact narrowing the potential for broader solidarities and forms of action.

The stories of failed solidarity in the auto industry presented here, and the earlier example of steelworkers failing to work in coalition, raise difficult questions for those who put faith in solidarity as one of the strongest potential weapons available with which to confront capital. Perhaps most troubling are those questions about how working-class people are driven by capital’s and their own strategies and practices of division, and become complicit in their own disunity. Although it could certainly be argued that evidence of divisiveness has been present in the auto industry for a long time (as Sugiman 2001, for example, describes), I contend that they have taken a particular form in the context of more recent Canadian auto industry attempts to restructure in response to global economic change and the acute crisis of the past two years. The changes in the industry that I describe below both create and rely on vulnerabilities within a dispossessed working class (Kasmir and Carbonella 2008). These vulnerabilities include fragile bodies, a competitive and often hostile work environment, the greater need for work and pay where the social safety net has shrunk, and the ever-present threat that capital will simply relocate. All of these vulnerabilities resonate in the lost opportunities for solidarity described above. They could, however, be put to work politically to demonstrate how change and vulnerability actually bind people together, in other words, to form the basis for solidarity.

#### **CHANGE IN CANADA’S AUTO INDUSTRY: SELECTIVE TRADITIONS AND TEMPORAL SCALES**

Processes of change in the auto industry weave together the labor process and the organization of work, gender, and location. Canada’s automobile industry has historically been concentrated in southern Ontario and to a lesser extent Quebec, but despite limited geographical breadth, the industry has been the major driver of both Ontario’s and the country’s economy, and is the largest single industrial employer. Despite the recent crisis, it continues to be of major importance (CAW 2010) at least in part because four new assembly plants have located in southern Ontario in the past twenty years, one within the last couple of years. The industry that developed the

symbol of North American prosperity and individual achievement and freedom emerged in Southern Ontario from a particular political and economic conjuncture. The industry lent to the region its sense of technological sophistication and impressive productivity. A skilled, well-paid, and almost exclusively male auto assembly workforce in the three major American companies was represented by a strong and confident union (Yates 1993). In the pre- and immediately post- World War II decades, most of the parts that went into vehicle assembly were produced in-house by core autoworkers. Over time, a parallel sector emerged, producing automotive components in small plants that were originally owned by GM, Ford, or Chrysler. This sector was more geographically dispersed than the assembly plants, reaching into the towns and villages of rural Ontario to find a hard-working, often female, and much less well-paid workforce. Stephen High (2003) has documented how the subsidiary parts sector grew partly from the attempts of the US automakers to avoid the increasingly strong unions and associated high production costs in the Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit areas. Notably, parts workers have never been part of the hegemonic narrative of the auto industry in Ontario, although the companies they work for are increasingly major players in the picture portrayed in the media.

The history of the parts industry, growing with the expansion of assembly production, is largely unwritten. Histories of Canadian auto work take the assembly plants as their subject and it is these that provide the basis for popular and hegemonic understandings of the industry, selectively using historical materials to construct a formal culture of auto work that is embraced by auto unions and the popular imagination. These histories report how women workers were eliminated at Ford in the early 1920s, because the exploitation of women as a cheap labor force was at odds with the industry's high wage policy intended to encourage the loyalty of working men (City of Windsor n.d.). Pamela Sugiman (2001) has shown how both women and Black men were eventually hired in the Canadian assembly plants, only to be segregated in particular areas of the plants, doing what was deemed to be suitable work. For Black men it was the foundry, in work that White workers did not want. Women were considered suitable for lighter tasks in the plant, but had to struggle to keep their jobs after they married until the UAW challenged the companies on this policy in the 1950s. Sugiman argues that auto employers constructed difference within the working class on the basis of race, gender, marital status and skill. But her archival research and interviews with retirees shows also that despite employing a rhetoric of equality, the union (the UAW until the Canadian wing broke away in the 1980s to form the Canadian Autoworkers union [CAW]) failed to challenge company policy on gender and racial segregation and discrimination (Sugiman 2001: 36–49). This meant that structural inequality became normalized within the industry.

Ignoring the histories of women and rural workers in auto parts and Black (and immigrant) workers' role in assembly, the hegemonic construction of

the Ontario autoworker as a highly paid, urban, union-focused, White male obscured the exclusions and differentiations of gender and sub-region, race and citizenship that already existed in the early decades of the industry. In the process these exclusions served to reinforce the power and strength of the White, male unionized autoworker, but left other kinds of autoworkers outside the dominant story that is used in the present, diminishing the possibilities for action and solidarity.

Within the assembly plants the forms solidarity took were both evident and effective. The auto industry holds a special place in the historiography of Canadian labor in terms of the power of collective action. The strike at the Ford plant in Windsor in 1945 won for workers there and across Canada the right to an automatic check-off of union dues from their wages; a victory that became codified in Canadian labor law. This strike is often held up to demonstrate the power of organized labor, perhaps more specifically powerful auto labor, to affect the economic, social, and cultural lives of workers far more broadly. It is a key moment in the hegemonic narrative of auto work in Ontario; a specific instance where class struggle tipped the balance of power in workers' direction, opening up possibilities for many of the gains realized by workers more broadly in the following couple of decades. It also contributed directly to the idea that within an auto union local, solidarity can be taken for granted.

But workers in parts plants have also demonstrated solidarity. Despite the attempt in the early years of the major automakers to get away from costly union contracts by moving parts production into areas where they expected to find little interest in unions, union organizers followed closely behind, and soon most workers were part of a union (High 2003: 100–109). Indeed, as well as the audacious occupation led by Jenny, women auto parts workers were instrumental in other hard-fought labor struggles, including the infamous twenty-three-week Fleck Strike in the rural town of Centralia in 1978. It is notable that rather than serving to expand the construction of autoworkers in Ontario, the Fleck strike is identified as a key moment in *women's* consciousness of union power.

In the last couple of decades the industry has changed dramatically, in ways that should have the capacity to put paid at last to the old autoworker stories. Unlike the older American-owned urban assembly plants, three of the four new ones in Ontario are Japanese-owned and non-union, and three are in rural and one in a rural-adjacent, suburban location. The location of these new plants, together with international competition and chronic overproduction problems, has spurred the ascendance of multinational specialist parts producers that use just-in-time production methods to overcome competitive pressures.

Changes in production practices, especially the offloading of parts production to these specialized companies, have exposed—at least to some observers—the harsh face of social differentiation within the industry. While as I have pointed out, autoworkers were never only male, White,

and unionized, early twenty-first century Canadian automobile production workers are far more likely to work in parts production than in assembly, to lack the benefits of a union, to be members of racialized groups, and to be located in rural or rural-adjacent facilities. In some plants about a third of production workers are employed through temporary agencies. Many of the new autoworkers are fervently anti-union. The twenty-first century autoworker looks rather different from the hegemonic image that has persisted.<sup>2</sup>

In the new plants, managers use various labor management techniques to achieve consent and discourage organization. Magna and Linamar, Canadian-owned multinational parts producers, represent divergent approaches. Magna, with plants in the semi-rural towns outside Toronto, promotes a corporate paternalism that obscures class divisions and encourages a form of cross class alliance where, because they own stock in the company, everyone who works there is encouraged to view themselves as having equal stakes in the success of the company (Lewchuk and Wells 2008). Linamar, based in Guelph, is well-known locally as a tough employer where people get fired for what workers perceive to be small infractions; the kinds of things a union would certainly not put up with. But at about \$20 an hour, the pay is relatively good.

These various guises of work, among many others, highlight the unevenness of the new organization of the auto industry in Ontario. The auto parts labor force is dispersed (Yates and Leach 2006) in rural, semi-rural and often disadvantaged locations; in smaller plants, where particular demographics provide different pools of labor—women, new immigrants, dispossessed rural workers—to target, who effectively compete with each other for scarce jobs. Furthermore, there is great variation in hourly pay in parts—from the \$10 minimum wage to about \$23/hour—and in relative job security as well. Some parts plants locate close to the assembly plants, where workers make about double the pay of parts workers. Assembly plants continue to drive the industry because, in the face of tough international competition in parts, they help secure parts suppliers and much needed jobs. And they continue to be the focus of Ontario's auto-related identity. But overall they employ far fewer workers than the parts plants. And in both union and non-union parts plants the social relations of work are very different from those in assembly.

The drive to reduce costs at every level of production in the industry has resulted in the strategy of outsourcing, cheapening the cost of parts because it banks on competition between parts makers that use the cheaper forms of labor—non-union, temporary, women, and racialized workers—that parts plants employ. Just-in-time production is associated with the speed-up of the labor process. Parts plants are often organized around cell systems which displace work-related hostility from management to co-workers, exacerbated when co-workers within a cell can be identified as “different” on the basis of gender, racialization, citizenship, status as permanent worker

or “temp”, or even place of origin (Leach 2008, Gibbs, Leach and Yates 2012). At Janet’s workplace, as workers lived with the threat of losing their livelihoods and the organization of just-in-time production forced them to police each other’s pace, workers on the shop floor lost trust in each other. Slower workers became pitted against faster ones, and sometimes an individual’s pace of work was associated with a racialized identity. Over a few years before my fieldwork took place, Janet’s workplace had degenerated into a hostile environment where physical and verbal fights between workers, and between workers and managers, were common.

Eighty-five percent of new investment in auto parts in Ontario has been in rural areas. This “spatial fix” (Harvey 2001) facilitates just-in-time production by avoiding the traffic congestion of the urban areas. It allows firms to take advantage of incentives to locate in rural communities that are suffering from the loss of major employers and for whom the farm crisis deepens (Winson and Leach 2002). There is also the attraction of tapping into a labor force that is “not predisposed to union membership” as one rural economic development department puts it, and which has a strong, often agrarian-based work ethic. Many of those who now work in rural auto parts plants do so as a result of the shift away from agricultural employment. Jenny had grown up on a farm that was as she put it “lost” in 1981, that is, the bank foreclosed on the loan. Lacking the kind of social and financial stability once associated with farm ownership, she is a good example of the “new” workers—rural, female and effectively dispossessed—being drawn into the auto industry.

Plant level changes are supported by provincial and federal policies that facilitate just-in-time production. They include loosening labor laws and regulations that affect trucking, as well as avid state attention to maintaining traffic flow at the US border. Moreover, new technologies permit “flexible production platforms” that are sufficiently cheap that one company openly predicts it will use its facility in a rural community for only five years.

Work in auto parts reveals many of the major changes from earlier times for the industry and, importantly, parts workers’ conditions of work represent a shift in the balance of power in capital’s favor. New organizational practices employed in auto parts protect capital, and given the way the industry has bounced back after the recent crisis, they are clearly quite effective. But these shifts and continuities are not bringing about changes in the dominant images of autoworkers. As the new organization of work closes off many possibilities for collective action, the selective historical construction of the autoworker inhibits solidarity across and within auto workplaces.

## **A FRAGMENTED INDUSTRY: SPATIAL SCALES OF STRUGGLE AND THE POLITICS OF JUSTICE**

The result of all of these changes is the fragmentation of work and workers in the industry through deliberate and less-conscious strategies of

differentiation that operate industry wide. The numerical dominance of unionized auto assembly workers in the past was a major reason why the hegemonic construction of the White, male, unionized autoworker, and the unquestioned solidarity among autoworkers could sustain their hegemony. The consequences of the shifts in this industry—for working-class people, disempowerment, and ultimately for solidarity across spatial scales—are profound. The twenty-first century Ontario autoworker is most likely to be making parts or in non-union assembly work, is lower paid, often racialized and female, does not belong to a union, and is very often rural. The new organization of the work results in unstable and insecure work lives for auto parts workers, as Janet Griggs discovered. These changes signal the demise of the traditional auto assembly worker, but popular understandings, as well as scholarly ones, shift more slowly.

Also addressing change in the auto industry, David Harvey has written about how workers' local interests may be in opposition to struggles taking place around more abstract, global social issues (1995, 2001). Discussing the militant struggle that he was part of in Oxford, UK to retain auto industry assembly jobs, Harvey dares to raise the issue of environmental justice, which he says was suppressed in the debates around the plant closure. Harvey outlines the dilemma that intellectuals face: how do we support local struggles that are ultimately bad for the planet? But how do we not support them when workers' livelihoods, and indeed their lives, are at stake? We could say that Harvey is trying here to tell the new story and to displace the old one that had been favored by the local union and its most vocal supporters. He raises this problem publicly only after the fight has been lost; that loss attributable to factors far from environmental concerns. For Harvey, Raymond Williams' idea of militant particularism helps in understanding the local-ness of the struggle that took place, where the broader issues of global environmental sustainability were kept out of the frame of struggle. Questions of solidarity resound in this story: what is the relationship between workplace solidarity and global solidarities around livelihood *and* environment? How can solidarities rooted in decades of strong local struggle accommodate global and more proximate change?

For Harvey and for Williams this is a more complex issue than simply connecting the global to the local. Gavin Smith, also drawing on Raymond Williams, describes such a disjuncture in political terms as that "between what is desired to be known and what needs to be known" (1999: 163). This seems to me to be a key point behind the failure to change our stories: the hegemonic stories obscure what needs to be known. Smith stresses that for Williams, militant particularism is "a first way of thinking" that must not end there. For engaged anthropologists, conversations with a range of actors make it difficult to overlook the gap between this first way and the global issues that lurk at the wider horizon, that is the complex dynamics of struggle being played out at different scales and "not just at the level of the local fieldsite" (Smith 1999: 81). The stories of failed solidarity at auto

plants in Ontario, when set alongside the broad changes taking place in the industry, demonstrate how struggles are waged in both a local and a larger context. Without attention to the shifts in the auto industry that are beyond what is happening locally, it is difficult to see how the story of auto work and autoworkers is changing in quite fundamental ways. This resonates with Sider's critique of unions' failure to address the broader patterns of changing relations. It leads to serious consequences for our capacity to understand workers' experiences of change, in Sider's terms, and how that change in turn affects workers' capacity to engage in social collectivities. It points to the need to keep what is going on at multiple temporal and spatial scales inside the analytical frame.

In *Spaces of Hope* David Harvey (2000) insists that all levels of scale—from the individual laboring body, in its capacity for exploitation and for resistance, acting as a moral agent, and in concert with others, to the global—need to be addressed. Harvey argues that class politics are constructed at different spatial scales and, conversely scale is a result of political struggle. That point is critical here. The politics of justice is frequently a matter of scale. Which particular institution—the federal state, the province, the union, the women's caucus—takes responsibility for an identified issue, depends on how legitimacy is constructed. Thus through political struggle scale is manipulated, and through scale political struggle is contained or expanded. Scale is thus crucial to hegemonic and counter-hegemonic strategies. Herod and Wright (2002) argue that the state typically tries to construct particularly thorny issues as local problems, in so doing minimizing their potential to generate broad support and interest, and denying its own responsibility for them. In contrast, counter hegemonic agents—unions, women's organizations, and so on—try to globalize issues and maximize them.

While this appears to be a logical dialectic, fieldwork of course shows us that the world is not so simple. Unions are contradictory counter hegemonic agents, since they must work within a formal legal framework (Leach 2002). Moreover, unions themselves also attempt to localize and minimize some issues. My research with workers in one of the newer assembly plants has shown how women's issues were delegitimized as "real" union issues. One tactic used was for "brother" union members to insist that the women's caucus was the appropriate place for discussions of particular issues. Thus within the union itself, the scale at which a particular issue is addressed is a site of contention, and this affects the capacity for solidaristic action.

Institutions—the state and unions—reinforce this process by fixing scales through administrative and sometimes legal procedures. Certain issues must be addressed at the provincial level (rather than federally) while others can be addressed only at the local workplace through collective bargaining, but not in sector-wide negotiations. Union executives accomplish this by refusing to include certain issues on meeting agendas and through by-laws that establish provincial, national, and local



responsibilities. What is especially important is that the struggle to “fix” issues at a particular scale becomes a disciplining force, and not just in the actions of employers to keep workers in their rightful, subordinate, place. Fellow workers on the shop floor also use scale to subordinate women and resist broader structural change, as Jenny discovered. Male co-workers demonstrate clearly to women assembly workers that their bodies are not up to the job. Jenny’s body reminded her of this every day. When union bargaining committees refuse to take on childcare-related demands—despite men’s obvious parental obligations—women are shown that childcare is an issue to be addressed by women, rather than being taken on as a union issue. These actions operate to differentiate men and women, and when women’s needs are not met they demonstrate also that women are not welcome at the workplace.

In such a context, dangerous sexist practices that enact cleavages among workers are constructed and addressed as local problems rather than systemic fissures. Jenny’s experience as one of very few women in a male-dominated industry reveals how the introduction of women’s labor may be received, even in a unionized workplace. Women and their labor continue to be constructed as different, subordinate, and exploitable. The frailty of the laboring body reveals in very stark ways the continuing violence of the labor process, despite decades of activism around workplace safety. The labor process can still locate a form of violence perpetrated by fellow workers, with management in tacit collusion, as for Jenny. Violence and repression against vulnerable workers become ways for unions and employers to push back against competing scalar claims. For employers, this is a way to contain those claims. And it works very effectively because the injury to the individual, and the individual body, always has to be addressed first.

Jenny spoke quietly of “working in pain”, but she was also able to muster the resources to insist that safety and injury issues are systemic. She had been active in the union for years, taking on major leadership roles. As she spoke she used the language of labor-management relations. She described herself (and others) as an “injured worker”, the political construction that creates the literally physical site—the body—for struggles over scale between union and management. Typically, management claims that injuries result from individual worker negligence, while the union claims that management’s practices (of speed up, or failure to maintain equipment, for example) demonstrate systemic disregard for all workers’ safety and health. Where does Jenny’s injury—the result of her co-workers’ acts of omission—fit in this scalar struggle?

Activist women like Jenny seem to be particularly aware of the need to construct their class politics to operate at multiple scales. They work in the union women’s caucus and at local, regional and national levels. As well as being a leader in her local, Jenny presented training workshops for union members from across the province and the country, and like many

other union women, also gave her time and material resources to local women's organizations.

## SEEKING SOLIDARITY

These multiple forms of political activity resonate with Harvey's take on temporal and spatial scale and political action:

[R]eal political change arises out of simultaneous and loosely coordinated shifts in both thinking and action across several scales. If I therefore separate out one spatiotemporal scale for consideration, in order to understand its role in the overall dynamics of political change, then I must do so in a way that acknowledges its relation to processes only identified at other scales. (Harvey 2000: 234)

They also push us to consider the scale of our ethnographic enquiry, to be effective labor anthropologists through our capacity to investigate and analyze at multiple scales, not simply the local and the present.

My research in Ontario's auto industry supports Sider's idea that workers constantly contend with change, both on the job and in connected ways in everyday life, with quite dramatic implications for solidarity. The historiography of the already-mentioned 1945 strike at Ford in Windsor, Ontario famously highlights the delicious irony of strikers parking their cars to form a blockade around the car plant. That particular moment, where capital's product was turned against it, encapsulates for labor historians and others the power that autoworkers have had in Canadian society. Changes in the auto industry have brought about different ironies that nicely but more sadly symbolize the systemic shifts that have taken place. Janet had leased a car through the leasing company of the American automaker that had originally owned the plant where she worked, for which it had continued as a supplier. When the plant closed she phoned the leasing company and told them to come and take the car away. Without her auto parts job she could no longer pay for it. She was forced to turn her car, not against capital, but back to them. Living in a rural town without public transportation, this had a tremendous impact on her life.

Across Ontario similar small, individual actions, symbolic of changing social and economic relations, are being played out every day. Fine-grained studies may guide us to locally-specific practices and responses, as in this case, but we need also to pay attention to how local actors engage with people and processes over a broader political-economic canvas. For new solidarities to crystallize, we need to be clear that an event such as this is but one of many, similar and dissimilar. By celebrating single moments of struggle and lamenting single acts of capitulation in our particular field sites we may be missing the whole process of cultural

production, those “components of reality over which we have no control, but which are nonetheless relevant to the successful achievement of our goals” (Smith 1999: 260).

Hegemonic ideas about work in this region are based on postwar economic prosperity for White, male industrial workers, yet frequent change is more likely the historical norm for most workers here, that is those who were not male and White. This means rethinking the idea that we live in an especially turbulent time, since it denies the turbulence that has always been a feature of working peoples’ lives. Illness or injury, economic boom or bust, whims of fashion, or of capital and its local management—all these and more bring about rapid and often unexpected change in workers’ lives. Seen in this way, past events—instances of change, conflict and occasionally solidarity—inflect cultural memory and are inscribed on the bodies of contemporary workers. Denial of certain peoples’ histories and of change as a persistent feature of peoples’ lives, silences those whose story is not told through the hegemonic construction, since strategies for activism and solidarity fail to account for their realities. It paralyzes them, but it also paralyzes those whose lives come closest to the dominant representations because a static hegemonic construction fails to account for the changes they are experiencing. This makes the same old strategies and stories of resistance and solidarity as useless and irrelevant for them, under the contemporary working conditions in the industry, as they are for those outside the dominant frame.

In *Confronting the Present* Gavin Smith (1999) argues that we need to recognize the *overlapping* processes of social reproduction that emerge from the contradictions within capitalism and result in “inner conflicts and double binds” (264) for those caught up in those processes. He goes on to say that the

prevailing neoliberal hegemony engages people in social practices of survival that involve profound inner conflicts, a personal authenticity that denies the very social relations on which it relies for legitimacy and a deep burying of our intimate knowledge of the victims we choose not to see. (Smith 1999: 264)

“[T]he victims we choose not to see” invokes women workers in Mexico who long for the benefits of auto parts jobs and then fear being murdered on their way home from work, and Chinese auto parts workers whose cities are polluted by discarded electronic detritus. It includes co-workers in auto firms across North America vulnerable to layoff because they have low seniority, and women across Ontario whose low wages force them to remain with violent partners so that their children will have somewhere to live. More abstractly, in line with Harvey’s concerns, it includes every person on the planet affected by the pollution from millions of cars.

The plant occupation that Janet Griggs led reinvigorated workers' trust in each other, if only for a relatively brief time. It took the majority of workers in the plant by surprise—those who had not been directly part of its making. Some told me they had been horrified at first by what they saw as a crude tactic, but after the fact they were quick to acknowledge that it was effective.

How lives, places, and work are changing and how contemporary change interweaves with a particular regional history, and is then represented or not, are critical factors in inhibiting or enabling potential solidarities and radical change. Our understandings of histories affect how change is apprehended. Hegemonic cultures of work that ignore certain elements of workers' histories while glorifying others, circumscribe both actions and activists. In a similar fashion, what intellectuals do, say and write is critical, and relies on the capacity to look simultaneously at the present context, the wider horizon, *and* back into history, but with a commitment to confront, rather than mask, schism and contradiction. My intention in this chapter has been to insist that these kinds of contradictions and tensions be engaged with rather than put aside, since they are critical to a labor anthropology that supports solidarities that both transcend *and* respect the particular. We need to carry our ethnographic stories with us, and to tell them in ways that contribute to disrupting the old stories and creating new ones. But we also need *to allow them to change us*, and to change our intellectual and activist strategies.

## NOTES

1. This research has been supported by grants from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. My thanks to Gavin Smith for his, as always, insightful comments on an earlier draft of this chapter, and to Charlotte Yates for continuing conversations about solidarity and the auto industry.
2. It is interesting how the persistence of this construction has come to haunt workers in the industry. At the height of the economic crisis that centered on the Detroit Three automakers, media reports persistently referred to the \$75/hour autoworker, pointing fingers at the role of greedy unionized workers in the industry's crisis. Rarely explained, but implying a hourly wage to be compared, for example, to the minimum wage of \$10/hour, this figure in fact includes the "total labor costs", that is *all* labor-related charges, including pensions, benefits, statutory rights, and payroll taxes like the Canada Pension Plan and Employment Insurance (CAW 2010). The CAW estimates the actual average hourly wage of a unionized assembly worker to be about \$45/hour.

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## 8 Native Livelihoods and Capital Punishment in the Carolinas and Labrador<sup>1</sup>

*Gerald Sider*

In criminology as in economics there is scarcely a more powerful word than “capital.” In the former discipline it denotes death; in the latter it has designated the “substance” or the “stock” of life: apparently opposite meanings. Just why this same word, “capital,” has come to mean both crimes punishable by death and the accumulation of wealth founded on the produce of previous (or dead) labor might be left to etymologists were it not the associations so striking, so contradictory and so exact . . .

—Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*,  
(Verso, 2003) Introduction, p. xvii

He goes on to note that capital punishment intensified dramatically in the 1970s in the five nations most prone to use it, and relates this to the concurrent intensification of capitalism. Significantly, this is the same starting point for the epidemics of substance abuse, domestic violence, and youth suicide among both Australian Aborigines and Inuit and Indian peoples in the Canadian subarctic, who are one of the foci of this chapter.

### I EXPANSIONS

The task before us is to understand currently possible confrontations with capital, and the capitalist state, in newly useful ways. These confrontations will help to expand our usual sense of the historical dynamics of capital and capital-allied states, so we know a bit more about what we confront. The point is not to ask where capitalism is going, but rather *how* it is getting there, for our confrontation most immediately is with the *how*, not yet the *where*.

For this task we suggest three expansions in our understanding of the historical dynamics of capital, as Marx explained it. These are what we say they are—expansions, not denials or replacements—and they will help us to understand confrontations both with capital and with its bartering

bride, the capitalist state. For reasons of space, these expansions can only be very briefly indicated to prepare the ground for the major task at hand, which is to look at very different kinds of engagements with domination than are usually considered.<sup>2</sup>

The historical dynamics of capital are embedded in the continual production and transformative reproduction of inequalities. We are, necessarily, dealing with not just appropriation and exploitation but with an expansive range of inequalities in the organization of production and daily life, without which capital could not continue.

The first expansion useful for understanding confrontations is the reality of the fetish—the reality of the illusions capitalism and the state hide behind. A fetish, for those who have turned away from popular Judeo-Christian-Islamic theology, is an image of a god that people take as the real thing—the image of the US as a democracy, for example, dearly held by people without the vast funds required to buy an election or rent an elected official afterward. Marx was using “fetish” to criticize the idea that commodities have a reality of their own, and can relate to one another independently of the labor that went into their production—a very useful critique of an illusion. But the idea of race as bounded categories of people is also an illusion, there being no underlying reality, but it is an illusion that produced for most of the twentieth century a non-White infant mortality rate at least three times greater than the White infant mortality rate, so it both is, and is not, an illusion, a fetish.

Race, among its other manifestations, has been a gift to capital by the state’s laws and practices, and an extremely useful gift at that. A statue of a God is only a statue, but statutes actually kill. Point One: the reality of the fetish.

Point Two: it will help to shift our emphasis from Marx’s focus on production—crucial to his understanding of how the components of capital work—to social reproduction. This is the issue of how capital, and especially the people it both uses in different ways and discards when they are no longer useful, make it to tomorrow if, when, and how they do.<sup>3</sup> Social reproduction for the working class and for disposable people is how the question of tomorrow, and the struggle to get there, becomes both embedded in, and a denial of, today.

Point Three is rooted in the usefulness of a major expansion of Marx’s notion of “primitive accumulation”—by which term he refers to the initial, or primary, accumulation of the material basis of production: land, for example. The term also is used to refer to the people who, having lost the material basis that they once possessed for their own production, become “free” to sell themselves as workers to emerging capital: to those who now hold the material basis for production.<sup>4</sup> In this chapter we will be dealing primarily with people whose hold on their forces of production is not broken but trivialized. It does not matter if you can still trap beaver or arctic fox if no one is buying the pelts; if you can still grow corn on your few



acres, but the cost of making the crop is above its sale price. Yet as people have the ground cut out from under them, in the cases we address they still maintain, for one reason or another, their collectivity, their political and social existence as a people rather than as individuals. They are all peoples who have long been, who now are, and who are likely to remain, intensely vulnerable to the domination and exploitation by the state as well as by capital; people who now lack the numbers for the massed confrontations with the state and capital on which so much seems to depend.

It is from these few and vulnerable peoples that we may learn something useful about confronting capital, about making the spaces, places and relationships for an at least partially viable everyday life. A continuing everyday life does not depend upon the sun coming up both today and tomorrow, but on the capacity of people to evade, live with, and remedy the excruciating imposed chaos upon which continuing domination depends.

### THE BELONGING OF SMILINGS, TURKS, AND OUR CONCEPTS

In the US in the 1960s there were widespread and massive urban uprisings, called riots, mostly in northern US cities. Urban (and town-based) African Americans had suffered a century of episodically brutal violence since the end of slavery, along with the routine violence of rent-gouging by landlords, price-gouging by stores where they could shop but not work, diminished life-expectancy for children and adults and, in the concentration-neighborhoods to which they were confined, massively unequal urban services, from schools to non-code-enforced housing, to street-cleaning and garbage collection. A very substantial number of victimized people rose against these practices, while another considerable number did not.

To explain why this was happening just then, it was wrongly thought that the primary activists in these urban uprisings were the large numbers of relatively new migrants to northern (and Western) cities, recently driven out of southern agriculture by the death-throes of small-scale farming. Subsequent research, however, showed that the majority of the active participants in these rebellions were third generation in the cities, and the new migrants mostly stayed indoors.<sup>5</sup>

While the policy-making elite in the federal government still thought it was the new migrants that were “the problem,” several programs were developed to find out who in particular was being driven out of southern tenant farming, where they were planning or hoping to go, and if some help with relocation costs, locating new housing, and job training could induce a substantial number to go to what were deceptively called “regional growth centers”—i.e. small southern cities—rather than migrate north. The underlying idea, explicitly, was that if assistance could place in southern cities some people who were forced out of farming (not “leaving,” as it was called)<sup>6</sup> these migrants to southern cities would eventually attract

a significant number of friends and relatives, and the “flow” of migrants would be “diverted” away from northern, riot-prone, cities. Implicitly it was assumed that oppressed people could be more readily controlled in the small southern cities, particularly if they were effectively placed in low-end jobs. To make a pun on “Fordist” illusions of regulation, this would be “Pintoism”—the small car version.

For about a year, in 1967–1968, I was hired three days each week as a consultant by a research and placement program, the North Carolina Mobility Project.<sup>7</sup> This work took place along with my civil rights organizing, primarily voter registration and election organization,<sup>8</sup> so I had two presences in a substantial part of the region where I worked. My job as a project consultant was to comb the poorer rural areas to see who was being driven out, where they were planning to go, and if job training and assistance finding housing might induce them to stay in the urban areas of North Carolina. I was wonderfully free to explore the issues as I saw fit, partly because the people who financed the program were desperate to discover and control what was happening, and partly because the people who worked in and ran the project had major commitments to civil rights and social justice.

To find the poorer farmers I drove down small rural roads until the road turned into dirt, and at the end of the dirt road I would often park my car and walk down the path to the last of several cabins past the end of the road. When I got to talk to the people there, if they did not seem too upset by the emergence of a stranger within their distanced social world, I would introduce myself with my full name and by saying that I was working for a government aid program. We were, I said, trying to figure out how to help small farmers or their grown children move away to get other kinds of work, but only if that was what they wanted to do. If they wanted to talk about that possibility for themselves or for people they knew (a safer way for them to open a discussion) we could.

I said all that very slowly, with lots of pauses and quietness interspersed. In this chapter I am just trying to indicate what I wanted to communicate after a quiet and simple “hello” in the local style, followed by a respectful silence. Frequently, if there was going to be a conversation, I would be invited inside, and a chair would be taken down from the peg in the wall where it was hanging, dusted off, and offered to me.

I can not emphasize enough the delicateness of the situation and the vulnerability of the people I contacted in places like this, so far into the countryside, partly because this so deeply shaped the social world that some tried to communicate to me, and partly as a suggestion to anthropologists that their ordinary methods of field research, including both questionnaires and their self-aggrandizing fantasies about “participant observation” are so arrogantly intrusive that they often preclude anything but the most trivial and superficial engagements with vulnerable local people.<sup>9</sup> By way of illuminating some aspects of this delicateness, the long-term quiet and non-

inquisitive perspective that can help both us and the people we are with, and especially some of what a respectful appreciation of the delicateness of the encounter and the vulnerability of the people, the following is a story about the opening onto the issues addressed in this chapter.

In one encounter, at the far end of the path beyond the end of the dirt road, I met a father with two sons in their twenties, in a small cabin, still farming with mules in 1967. The sons were quite tall, looked very strong, had missing teeth and other signs of serious poverty, including clothes with multiple patches and unpatched rips, and were somewhat assertively cautious, as well as curious, about my appearance in their midst. One of the sons was wearing bright red nail polish on all his fingers. I spent some time wondering what was going on in this distant place, and realizing my own vulnerability if the apparent strangeness deepened. I never sure how contagious was the violence of the very domineering White power elite, so I always tried to understand, or to think I understood, what was happening and why, and here I could not.

Months later, when I (and the people I worked with) got to know this family better, the son who wore the nail polish was told by a Native American in the project that he surprised me. The son said that his mother had died several years before, and that day he was missing her a lot, and he looked through her drawer and found her nail polish, and put it on to remind him of her, to bring her back a bit.

Ouch.

This far into the country you do not ask too much if you want to be told anything important. All I asked by way of introducing myself after giving my name, and my purpose, was the customary southern rural greeting: “How’r you doing?” This greeting is routinely used, and routinely calls forth the stock answer: “Doin’ fine.” If I could then be just a bit assertive and intrusive, for example if they expressed an interest, for themselves or more cautiously for one of their unnamed neighbors, I would ask, “What’s happening around here?” At the small tenant farm with the two sons, in the midst of a lot of quietness, in response to this more intrusive question I eventually got to ask, I was given the first version of a new way of looking at southern processes that differentiate supposedly different “races,” and that provide the context where people participate in reproducing their own socially constructed difference.

The discussion of what was happening, at this and other homes, often became framed by identity—not just their identity, but also the identity of their neighbors. I would be told such things as “Well them Whites . . .” or “Us (or them) Colored . . .” or “Us (or them) Indians . . .” Particularly in areas where there were Indians in the vicinity—and twenty miles or so counted as the vicinity, for seemingly isolated people often have a quite broad grasp on their surroundings—the answers would often continue: “but down across that swamp there, or over beyond them piney woods there’s them Smilings, or them Redbones, or them Haliwa—a separate but Indian

people in Halifax and Warren Counties—or them Turks,” and so forth—a multiplicity of extremely localized, unique, special, and separate identities.

At the far end of beyond, especially where there were also people recognized as Indians, there was almost always a fourth “race,” both in social and in state-recognized legal terms: a separate people with their own, usually one or two room school, because they could or would not go to either Black or White schools, or to Indian schools if they were there too, with their own churches, their own cemeteries, and especially their own settlement area. All these separate people claimed, among themselves and in public, an Indian identity that was both partially recognized and until recently significantly contested. In recent decades many are winning a state-recognized Indian identity while at the same time being pulled more intensely into larger social formations. Now just about all the roads to and through these settlements are paved; school attendance is enforced and schools are more integrated. In the 1960s, with dirt roads and the possibility of often barely viable very localized employment, small and localized churches, and very small and localized schools, separate neighborhoods were more readily maintained. Such localities were sufficiently separate that there would be recognizably different speech patterns between places less than ten miles apart.

People in the surrounding communities in the 1960s made two pairs of comments about each of these separate, special peoples: they keep to themselves and they work extremely hard, both largely true; they mostly marry each other; and they stay out of the economy—they grow what they need, they barter for what else they need and sell a bit of firewood or eggs or pigs for the cash to pay their taxes and get necessities—these last two as much ideology as reality.

Forty years later, in 2007, when I was down in the Carolina borderlands and talking with a Lumbee Indian friend, I mentioned the Smilings, a separate people whose community is adjacent to the Lumbee, and he told me that soon after finishing a teaching degree in Pembroke State College in the late 1950s (then almost entirely a Lumbee Indian College) he had been the principal of the two-room Smiling school, the sole high school teacher, and that he was still close to the elderly pastor of one Smiling church. I was soon at this church for services and into the community. Shortly thereafter I was asked by people who have been called “Turks” if I would come down to South Carolina to meet and to work with them in their struggle with the state of South Carolina for legal recognition as Cheraw Indians of Sumter County. The so-called Turks had heard of my earlier work on Lumbee Indian status-recognition and Lumbee rights. A chance encounter with their Executive Chief, when I went to Sumter County to research Smiling origins, led to this invitation, and to introductions into the community.

Sumter County, in central South Carolina, is the origin point for three of these separate, special peoples then called Redbones, Turks [now Sumter County Cheraw], and Smilings.<sup>10</sup> Smilings migrated in the early twentieth century just across the border into North Carolina, where they live adjacent

to Lumbee Indians. Redbones and Turks—henceforth Sumter Cheraw—remained in separate locales in Sumter County. All three peoples emerged as socially recognized separate peoples in the early 1800s, along with the early expansion of the turpentine industry, although they have much earlier origins in the colonial-era fragmentation of piedmont and coastal-plain native societies. All three groups have deep roots in coastal native peoples in the colonial period who came under massive assault, so that individual and collective survival depended upon a long period of social disappearance as visible “Indians.”<sup>11</sup>

Piney woods turpentine production and pinesap collecting was one of the major industries of the nineteenth century Carolinas. It had a serious problem recruiting labor, being exceptionally labor-intensive, and thus very low-waged. The turpentine producers were not going to give many slaves a bucket, an ax, and some food and send them out into the woods; they explicitly noted that they “did not want Indians skulking about behind the plantations;” and they were not going to pay Whites what they could earn elsewhere. Turpentine thus became a very substantial employer of people who, before the Civil War, were legally designated “Free Persons of Color.” This social and legal category included a wide variety of persons who in other contexts would be socially recognized as White or Indian, or elderly or injured slaves regarded as not worth their food, married slaves with families, not likely to run away, and actual Free Persons of Color.<sup>12</sup>

After the Civil War, when slaves in the Deep South were freed and slavery finally made illegal by December, 1865,<sup>13</sup> the category Free Persons of Color ceased to exist. Also, most people socially recognized as Indians had either been forcibly removed to Indian territory or were confined to small reservations. What then was used to fill the ranks of turpentine industry workers was poverty and widespread forms of debt peonage, a legal category that although composed mostly by African Americans was not an ethnic category.<sup>14</sup> Ethnic categorization after the Civil War was just as violent as before, but was less *directly* tied to the organization of production—both sharecropping and debt peonage worked to harness people almost inescapably, without it mattering if they were Black, White, or Martian. This context, where the social reproduction of “race” shifted slightly out of the organization of production, provided an opening for broader, and in some ways even more violent, processes for the production of “racial” difference and “racialized” claims.<sup>15</sup>

Most of the “fourth Race” people—who were all substantially Indian-descent, with no more or less mixing with Whites and Blacks than any other southeastern Indian group—formed as a socially recognized group in the space opened up by the demand for the labor of free persons of color, and survived as a separate social identity with the post-slavery slight diminishment in the use of ethnicity to severely allocate positions in, and marginal to, the productive economy. After the changes that came to this region in the 1970s with civil rights, and with the declining viability of small-scale

farming, the primary struggles of many of these peoples have shifted from being against racism to legal recognition, from living primarily within their communities to living also in a somewhat larger social context.

The current focus of my research with Smilings and Turks is on their social health. While no separate statistics have been collected, early field research in these communities and widespread comments by surrounding peoples emphasize that there is scarcely any alcoholism, domestic violence, or suicide, and very low rates of any substance abuse. It is a startling contrast with Labrador—the primary site of my research since 2001, where there are exceptionally high rates of all of these indicators of stress and imposed suffering among both Inuit and Innu [Indian] peoples, who since the early 1970s have had among the highest rates of youth suicide in the world. These separate and distinct peoples of the Carolinas have long been subject, as have the native peoples of Labrador, to widespread and intense social stigma and imposed impoverishment, and also have been rapidly and intensely uprooted from their “traditional” life ways with the collapse of small-scale agriculture and viable local employment opportunities in the Carolinas, and the imposed integration which closed their own community schools.

Two major differences between Labrador and the Carolinas have compelled my attention: one seems significant but inadequate; the other is a mask. Significantly, these special peoples in the Carolinas are very largely free of close government control, unlike the native peoples in Labrador, who are pervasively controlled. Such intensely close control, as in Labrador, often provokes literally uncontrollable behaviors—a start on the problem of the difference, but far from enough. The second major difference, which seems to be only a mask for something more fundamental, is that the peoples in the Carolinas have owned farmland. More precisely, they have purchased swampy and piney woods land, cleared and drained it with immensely hard work, and turned it into productive farmland—a way of embedding their work both in making productive land and in making a slightly better tomorrow for their children and grandchildren.

This has not been possible in Labrador, where the semi-autonomous Inuit and Indian productive economy rooted in the fur and sealskin trades increasingly collapsed through most of the twentieth century, and where a substantial proportion of native timber, all of the hydroelectric sites, and much of the mineral resources, have simply been appropriated by the Newfoundland, Quebec, and Canadian governments, and by corporations, with comparatively trivial royalties paid that do little but support native political elites, some of their fancy office buildings and conference travel, and provide some easily lost cash to ordinary native people. Along with the destruction of native productive economies in Labrador there has been very few opportunities for sustained employment in the waged economy—waged work has been episodic for the Inuit, and scarcely available for the Innu [Indians], robbing people not just of their resources but of the dignity of work, and the claims upon tomorrow that can be made by relatively regular employment.

The focus of my comparison between the Carolinas and Labrador has thus turned to the issue of social reproduction—how people create and reach their tomorrows—and to the differential capacity of peoples to *participate* in shaping their own social reproduction. But two sets of insights, one from Gavin Smith and Susana Narotzky, the other from Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Meirs, pushed the issue of social reproduction into new terrain.

Smith and Narotzky, discussing class formation in their book *Immediate Struggles* ask “what happens . . . when the process of social reproduction generates a structure of constant uncertainty and fluidity . . . ?” This is indeed a key issue, and their focus on social reproduction and on daily life to understand this concept is very far advanced by their realization that “we have to be very careful of the way our analytical concepts seek to explain social reality, . . . because these self-same concepts often provide the legitimating frame for programs of rule . . . within which the people we study must live.”<sup>16</sup>

And thus our useful concepts work partly because they often point toward conditions that the state imposes upon people. In that sense the struggles of the peoples we study have to also be against our concepts. Our concepts are not just embedded in our own views of the world, not just expressive of our insights about the social relations of the peoples we study. Our concepts themselves point toward processes of domination. They name the struggles people must, often unavoidably, engage—struggles that have not, or not yet, either produced new social relations or permitted the full establishment of the dominant social relations. Our concepts—particularly those that pretend to be both abstract and general, such as “culture,” “social organization/ social structure,” “kinship system” thus usually name open and unresolved tensions in the social relations we seek to understand. Our concepts point toward what is neither there nor absent, but indicate arenas for the production of necessarily contested inequalities, with the ensuing struggles never contained within the underlying inequalities.<sup>17</sup> I want to use this implicit tension in the social realities our concepts seek so inadequately to name to further explore the concept of social reproduction.

Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Meirs, in the introduction to *Slavery in Africa*,<sup>18</sup> argue that the opposite of slavery, especially within Africa, is not freedom, but belonging—that slaves are people largely denied their own forms of belonging. This realization will help us clarify our approach, our sense of what our concepts, our explanations, can and can not do.

“Belonging” has also been a framework for the organization and legitimation of colonial domination in rural Africa, and for both the struggle against this domination, and the localized collusion with it. Beyond the fantasy constructions of colonists and their anthropologists, there was no place on the constructed landscape where actually less than about 25 percent of the population were *not* members of the “tribe” that lived in the colonial and ethnographic fantasy—the Tiv, the Nuer, the Nupe, the Tuareg.<sup>19</sup> All these labels, erasing crucial internal differentiation, named

the multiple and brutal ways that belonging was made by the colonists to matter as a form of domination both over and within native societies, and by some people as a terrain of popular struggle both to support and to oppose colonial domination. Simultaneously, it kept from view the usually brutal inequalities within these societies that made them governable in the midst of their resistance to colonialism.

This internal and silenced differentiation, this made-partly-real fraud of domination, starts us back to the issue of social reproduction, which is, as I see it, another name for belonging to tomorrow—through some combination of your own (collective) efforts, the demands and impositions of others, and the weight of the worlds both of production and of unequal social relations.

### III TWO LIVES, TWO LIVELIHOODS

If we understand that belonging is not just a matter of today but crucially names a relationship to tomorrow, then we can see that the capacity of Turks and Smilings to embed their labor in making productive land—a decades-long effort that primarily benefitted each next generation—was a way of claiming and organizing their tomorrow. But we must not romanticize belonging, for a close look at the intense labor that produced tomorrow for Smilings and Turks shows that it was unequal in the gender, kin-group, and family distribution of long-term rewards for hard work. Within both communities the more dependent and vulnerable people, especially those from smaller kin groups and families, necessarily became the laborers for those with more effective kin organization and larger, but at times inadequate, pools of family labor. Women whose husbands died long before they did may well have inherited property, but often became dependent for labor. In sum, long-term belonging to tomorrow was incomplete, for both haves and have-nots, because it was rooted in needs produced by inequalities within the community. Further, however effective belonging to tomorrow was for Smilings and Turks within their own communities, as they invoked their dependence on each other, it was only partially effective in their relations with, or struggles against, the dominant society.

These somewhat separate and special peoples in the Carolinas had two lives, two livelihoods to make, as it were—one within, another outside their small, only partially closed communities. And however hard they worked, however much they sought to fashion their own lives, they could not escape all, perhaps most, of the material and ideological consequences of racism and discrimination. Thus, as Gavin Smith (1989) realized in his first book *Livelihood and Resistance* an ethnography of an impoverished and oppressed Andean village in Peru, social reproduction is organized by struggles that are always open-ended, always partially inconclusive, always not fully resolvable. Both our theories and the struggles of the people we



study, as he continually reminds us, are rooted in the irresolvable openness of theory and of struggle.

Belonging to tomorrow is precisely what has been denied to the native peoples of Labrador by intense and pervasive state control and state appropriation of native collective resources. Thus native peoples can only belong either to today or to some *partially* abstract category, such as “Indian” or “Inuit,” with an idealized past built on lies and erasures, and little controllable future. In such temporally constricted situations ordinary Labrador native peoples, not able to belong to tomorrow, are under great pressure to live just in the current moment—moments that often get expressed through substance abuse, domestic violence and the suicides that deny one’s own future while diminishing the future of others.<sup>20</sup>

There are two livelihoods made in native Labrador, and neither has much of any direct connection to work or to subsistence production. There is the partly unificatory livelihood of producing and tending children and the elderly. This livelihood is earned by, or realized against, the largely, but not completely, impossible struggle against dismay: or worse, despair. Since the near total decline of viable commercial hunting and trapping, this livelihood of making and caring is mostly women’s work, women’s struggle—but not entirely. Men, in the midst of their angers and destructive disappointments, and in the midst of the overwhelming suppression of their dignity, their viable futures, and their productive relations with youth, with the elderly, with each other, and particularly for the Indians, with the waged economy—in the midst of all this many men and women still manage to commit themselves, at least episodically and sometimes consistently, to this largely impossible struggle against dismay and for others. This struggle, which particularly at times of organized protest against the violence of the state could well be named hope, shapes one of the two livelihoods that can be earned in native Labrador.

It is a livelihood because it gives sustenance for living in today and towards tomorrow, for living against the tomorrow that replicates today. But we need to be very careful about the implications of naming this livelihood hope, and we have to be unromantically clear-headed about the consequences of doing so. The ancient Greeks, the early Greeks when they were still mostly rural, understood more than any society since the reality of hopes. Mythic Pandora, who in Greek mythology is the first woman and in that sense analogous to the biblical Eve, had a box that contained all the evils of the world. One day Pandora untied the magical knot that held the box closed, and opened the lid. All the evils in the world escaped their trap, and were let loose upon the earth—all except one. Pandora slammed the lid back down, trapping Hope inside, and—as the myth goes—because Hope still resides among people, people (“men,” in the original) must forever struggle against all the other evils in the world.

Hope in this myth is both a route to a better future and simultaneously an evil—an evil not quite like the other evils, for it was too slow or too

slow-witted, or too kind or too cruel, or too hopeful to escape the box, and so stayed trapped among men, but none-the-less the Greeks knew that Hope named both the possibility of a better tomorrow and the evil of inescapable, continual struggle—earning one's tomorrow by the sweat of your brow, as it were, where sweat is not just from work but also worry, and needing to pour sweat again tomorrow both from the effort and the anxiety of battles that are not winnable. So we name the first livelihood the struggle against dismay or despair, also called hope to remind us that the struggle can hurt, or even kill those who hold fast to it. But hope and struggle also unify people, or have that constant potential.

Consider, for an example that may help to clarify what is at stake in grasping the ambivalence of hope, the so-called “normalization” of domestic violence: those women and children, few or many, who shape part of their struggle for a better tomorrow in the context of coming to believe that the domestic violence they experience is normal, at least when it is not “too violent” or “too regular,” and who also seek to go about making and continually remaking their lives in its midst, with their own social relations. The violence is accepted and simultaneously denied—denied by the construction of lives beyond its grasp, but accepted in that it is then not adequately confronted. This can alert us to the fundamental ambivalence of hope, or even just of the struggle against dismay and despair. This livelihood, the livelihood of people raising children, caring for the elderly, caring for themselves and those they feel close to, committing themselves to a tomorrow that may be mostly like today but is also reached through their efforts—all this is the first livelihood, built both on hope and in its labors against just hope.

Then there is a second livelihood, set both alongside and in part against the struggles for a better tomorrow. This is a livelihood of socially warm and expressive moments, when people engage each other in passing conversation, in hunting and fishing together, in mutual support and help, in childhood friendships and alliances—and also at times when adults drink together, or children, starting around ages eight to ten, come together to pilfer gasoline from snowmobiles or chain saws for sniffing, and more recently, the more individuating social relations for the acquisition and use of crystal methamphetamine, even more destructive than alcohol or gas. All these moments, with the partial exception of crystal meth, are times when people have enjoyable opportunities both to express themselves as special and unique persons, and to engage, if only briefly, in rewardingly warm social relations. Unfortunately these warm and expressive moments, particularly since the late 1960s when relocation was forced upon both Indian and Inuit peoples, often occur when adults get together to drink, usually heavily, and when children join together to pilfer and sniff gasoline.

These two engagements of adults and children with each other are *moments* in the most intense sense of the term. For the children because in the aftermath of the extreme highs that gasoline sniffing produces—reputedly

the most stunning high of all substances—comes the inexorable, increasingly severe neurological damage, which takes about two years to take hold, striking children just about when they enter puberty, or adult life. Substantial alcohol consumption, which characterizes a lot of evenings when adults get together both to drink and to be together, can start out superbly warm and pleasant. But in the characteristic pathways of drinking the consequences are all too often domestic violence, sexual abuse, and children with multiple unmet and unacknowledged needs.

Fueled by alcohol or gasoline this intimate violence, potential or actual, immediate or impending, is a frequent consequence of these expressive moments. It is not just the substance abuse, but a context of widespread unemployment, few autonomous productive possibilities, and pervasive, almost inescapable domination—in sum, a pervasive denial of opportunities to achieve and express recognizable dignity in productive ways—that makes substance abuse often, perhaps ordinarily, gender and generation fragmenting. The more intensely individuating use of crystal meth, a currently increasing but still very small-scale problem, is in many ways the outcome of that prior fragmentation. The social basis of hope, and the warmly expressive social moments of alcohol and gasoline use may be working to suppress the use of crystal meth, which people say makes a person “very crazy, very violent.”

Together with the more unifying livelihood of hope there is a fundamental split in both livelihoods. Both are unifying and fragmenting, both are healing and destroying. This intense duality is reinforced by the combination of a unifying possession of collective “tribal” resources—land, water, minerals, timber, etc.—that provides an important material basis for an actual community of people. Simultaneously there is the often fragmenting and self-serving implications of local native political-economic elites’ witting or unwitting collusion with the state and corporations’ attempts to destructively appropriate these same collective resources. This is ordinarily done in return for an appalling yet appealing pittance of their worth and little if any public consideration of the destructive consequences of this appropriation.

Collective resources present, materially, the same duality as do struggles to realize hope for a better tomorrow and the moments of expressive social warmth in the context of what is too fully, but necessarily, dismissed as “substance abuse.” At the center of this duality is an organization of domination that extensively, but not quite completely, precludes a better tomorrow. The recent charade of Canadian land claims, where native people have to give up most of their rights, supposedly forever, in return for a few minuscule benefits and a lot of cash—cash that has no tomorrow—shows that it is the governments’ intent to preclude a better tomorrow in a search to impose a tomorrow that continues government and corporate control, appropriation, and domination, while also inviting native “advice” and “traditional ecological knowledge” in the form

of the native political elite's well-paid-for and utterly ineffective consultations. The good pay for this ineffective advice does help secure, via the patronage networks the pay lubricates, the continued local domination of collusive tribal political elites.

We have, in the illustrations from the Carolinas and Labrador, two situations, both increasingly widespread among native peoples—and many peasant communities as well. Among both Smilings and Turks we find people who, in the midst of their oppression and exploitation, could claim something of a better tomorrow through their own labors building small farms. Crucially, this potential, which changed substantially over time and generation, as the potential to effectively mobilize kin-based labor waxed and waned, kept inequalities within the native community from becoming intense. As the viability of small farms collapsed, particularly over the past five decades, the internal inequalities have become more pronounced and significant in multiple ways.

Among the Inuit and Innu we find peoples who could once participate actively in at least partially making their own futures, in the midst of a truly destructive oppression and extortion. Now the intrusions of the Newfoundland and Canadian states, plus the deceptive and destructive domination of extractive industries, has made this nearly impossible for all but the native elites, leaving ordinary native people primarily with a defiant sociability, distancing themselves from the continually expanding controls of the state, but rooted in substance abuse, violence, and suicide. It may be better than having destruction imposed upon you, but not by much. And again in this context inequality increases substantially, even though the elites are very far from immune to the self-destructions embedded in communal social relations.

In both of these contexts the struggles and the sorrows of hope are still very much and very actively present. Our task may be to join those struggles, not to inform them, certainly not to try to guide them, but simply to help sustain them. For struggle itself dignifies life, whether or not it is, for the moment, winnable. The hopes made active that we name struggle is peoples' ways of contesting the chaos domination imposes upon them, by seeking to shape their own social reproduction.

## NOTES

1. This chapter was first written as an appreciative engagement with the work of Gavin Smith, an anthropologist who has played a major role in bringing the historical vision of British Marxist history into a more dynamic and engaged anthropology. I seek, in my own way, to tie down his wonderfully grand vision to the microscopy of ordinary daily life, and by so doing to move us—anthropologists and activists—a bit further along a progressive path. I wish to thank Carol Brice-Bennett, Mandy Oxendine Chapman, Bruce Jones, Ruth Bullard Locklear, and L. Jane McMillan for encouraging and corrective advice.

2. A much fuller presentation of this expansion of how we understand capitalism, the capitalist state, and the dynamics of everyday life is presented in my forthcoming book, *Deep Power*.
3. This is a complex point in multiple ways, with a broad range of entailments. Some important consequences will emerge from the examples given in this essay; more will be presented in *Deep Power*.
4. The so-called “family wage” that male workers got, in the mid twentieth century US, Canada, and elsewhere is not relevant here. That elevated pay scale is part of the illusions that have grown up around the “Fordist” organization of production—mass production, and high wages to produce mass consumption to buy the goods of mass production and a politically quiescent populace. There are multiple problems with this perspective, starting from the fact that it included a very small portion of the labor force for very brief periods of time; that it depended on large and totally abused sectors of the population, at home and abroad, to make the wage buy what it did—African-American sharecroppers and cotton pickers, women retail workers, the colonial producers, etc, for a few examples, and the active racism, sexism, and nationalism of the supposedly politically quiescent Fordist workers to help “keep those folks in their place.” It was never just high wages and home ownership that produced political conformity to the state, but a “welfare state” that produced real and somewhat widespread benefits, strong unions that made people think their future might be a bit better, and the only feature that continues into the present, an educational system and a media array that intentionally mass produces near-total ignorance of anything that mattered.
5. Unites States, Kerner Commission. The Kerner Report: The 1968 Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders. (Republished, NY, Pantheon, 1988.)
6. One of the major pressures evicting tenant farmers was the US crop-support program—payments made to farmers not to grow crops, but let their land lie fallow, in order to maintain crop prices by diminishing output. If the landowner evicted the tenant the federal program allowed (encouraged?) him/her to keep the entire support payment, rather than sharing it. The superficially progressive phrase, “internal colonialism,” barely scratches the surface of organized and systematic state-sponsored intentional brutality. One had to see a tenant farming family given 24 hours to leave, and then their house bulldozed flat, and the ground beneath what was once their house ripped open by a trailing hook behind a bulldozer, to facilitate subsequent plowing, to appreciate how very much the very poor and vulnerable prefigure what is going to happen to those supposedly “above” them. The current wave of foreclosures and evictions of the urban and suburban working classes, in the context of Obama’s and Congress’s staggering large taxpayer-financed “bailout” of the banks and investment companies, is nothing more than a continuation of these corrupt practices by a Congress that is no longer even bought, but rented with regular and recurring payments, and an Executive branch that can never be deferential enough to the conservatives, however hard it tries.
7. This project was under the direction of a wonderful civil-rights leader, Mr. Charles Davis, who readily saw through the federal government’s illusions, but was trying to help the victims both of government policies and of agrarian mechanization and increases in the scale necessary to make a viable farm.
8. This region, the way civil rights organizing was embedded within and against local forms of a dying agrarian capitalism, and the political relations between African Americans and Native Americans, is described and

analyzed in my *Living Indian Histories* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2003). There is also an excellent historical analysis of the struggles that formed in this region over Indian identity and Indian well-being in Malinda Maynor Lowery, *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

9. In other contexts and situations, there is a completely different and particularly valid way of doing fieldwork: active partisan political engagement with the struggles produced by the victims of domination and exploitation. This kind of fieldwork raises its own issues and its own cautions. See Linda Green, *Fear as a Way of Life: Mayan widows in rural Guatemala* (NY, Columbia University Press, 1999) for a good introduction to this issue.
10. I do not know the current situation of the people once named Redbones, and the Smilings are increasingly merging with the Lumbee.
11. See *Sider* (2003), **Chapters 10 and 11**, for the range of transformations of southeastern native societies in the colonial cauldron. Coastal Plain and Piedmont native peoples survived the Euro-American onslaught in a variety of ways, including minimizing their native identity by housing themselves in log cabins of Euro-American design (horizontal rather than vertical logs), raising peaches and hogs for the local market, etc. It did not help to make an “Indian” identity very visible unless you were more distant from the settlements and had a lot of warriors.
12. The literature on turpentine and the “piney-woods” industries from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth centuries does not address this ethnic issue in the mobilization and control of labor. I found it out by talking to people about work and migration in family histories—a subject the people I talked with introduced, trying to deepen my knowledge of rural non-White history. People talked about ancestors who migrated back and forth from the Carolinas to Georgia to get work in the woods, especially when farms were doing poorly, who traveled together for security and sustenance, and what the work crews were like.
13. Lincoln’s two emancipation proclamations, in September 1862 and January 1863, were applicable almost entirely only to those slave states that the Union had not yet conquered and so did not control. It was, in sum, an Obama-like gesture, effective largely by stirring hope, and by providing some hope for the future. This hope helped many slaves run away to Union lines before they were freed, but taking enormous risk of torture if recaptured. Would that the Emancipation Proclamation—and the current Democratic Party—were as liberatory as they have been thought by many to be.
14. For an extraordinary understanding of the widely ignored expansionary history of peonage, see Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901–1969*, (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1990.)
15. This schematic introduction to the formation of these small and special groups of people is more fully detailed in my *Living Indian Histories* (University of North Carolina Press, 2003), esp. **Chapters 10 and 11**.
16. Susana Narotzky and Gavin Smith: *Immediate Struggles: People, power, and place in rural Spain* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2006). The quotes are from pp. 11 and 217.
17. This is borrowing, and slightly modernizing, Heraklitus’s pre-Socratic formulation of the issue: “The . . . oracle . . . which is in Delphi neither conceals nor reveals but indicates.” (Charles Bakewell, *Source Book in Ancient Philosophy*, NY, Scribner’s, 1907). Our concepts—culture, social organization, kinship systems, and so forth—neither conceal nor reveal the basic social relations they pretend to address. Rather, they indicate the unavoidable struggles people must engage.

18. *Slavery in Africa: Historical and anthropological perspectives*. Edited by Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1977). Their introduction is particularly relevant.
19. This realization comes from my work on the history of differential mortality in African famines, the first part of which, dealing with the formation of localized difference and inequalities, has been published as “The Making of Peculiar Local Cultures: Producing and surviving history in peasant and tribal society,” in *Was Bleibt von Marxistischen Perspektiven in der Geschichtsforschung?* Alf Luedtke, ed., (Goettingen, Germany, Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1997).
20. This mixture of lies about history and a future that is extremely difficult to even barely control, and the consequences of this, are described and discussed in my forthcoming book on Labrador native peoples’ continuing history, due out in 2013.

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## 9 “They Say We Aren’t From Around Here”

### The Production of Culture Among a Displaced People

*Gastón Gordillo*

In 2007, the Calilegua National Park in northwest Argentina inaugurated *el Sendero Guaraní*, The Guaraní Trail. Starting near the park headquarters, the trail forms a one-kilometer circuit that cuts through the rainforests crawling on the eastern slopes of the Andes; it consists of eight stations with signposts in Spanish and Guaraní with information about Guaraní culture and history. At the peak of the tourist season, Guaraní women in indigenous attire guide Argentinean, North American, and European tourists on the trail, performing Guaraní rituals and elaborating on the texts written on the signs. The last signpost reads: “The Guaraní people: owners of everything, in search of the Land Without Evil, when there were no borders and no countries. Today it is not the same as it was before. They took the forest away from us and our labor is for others. We are a people without territory, who struggle to recover what belongs to us.”

Guaraní leaders hailed the inauguration of the trail as an important victory, which was the result of long negotiations with the park administration and of broader political mobilizations to increase their public visibility and affirm their claims over the regional geography. And this was a struggle informed by the spatial and social dislocation that has estranged the Guaraní people from the tropical lowlands of the province of Jujuy. As the signpost quoted above suggests, many Guaraní see themselves as “a people without territory” who have to “work for others” for their subsistence. Just a few kilometers east of the Calilegua National Park, the cloud rainforest shrouding the mountains descend toward the wide valley formed by the San Francisco River. There, thousands of Guaraní men and women live in industrial towns facing high levels of poverty and unemployment. Dominated by powerful sugar plantations, most of the valley is covered with sugarcane fields. The social inequality and malaise that characterize the Guaraní experience in the towns of the valley stand in stark contrast to the lush mountains rising to the west. And many Guaraní people have drawn on this spatial contrast to imagine a past defined by a now-lost autonomy, which they project onto the valley as a whole.



The reference on The Guaraní Trail to a time with “no borders and no countries” also signals that most Guaraní descend from people who at the turn of the twentieth century migrated from Bolivia to work on the sugar plantations. Government officials have repeatedly invoked this Bolivian origin to delegitimize their land claims on the grounds that the “the Guaraní are not Argentinean indigenous people.” These accusations, in turn, have forced activists to downplay the relevance of the international border and insist that both sides of the border were Guaraní territory prior to the emergence of Argentina and Bolivia as nation-states. And these political experiences are reconfiguring Guaraní subjectivity and senses of place.

In *Livelihood and Resistance*, Gavin Smith examined how people in the Peruvian highlands created new senses of community out of confrontations with landowners, and argued that studies of cultural practices that overlook their political dimensions “simply obscure the essential components of struggle and resistance inherent in cultural production” (1989: 218). Subsequently, he added, “The production and reproduction of culture for any people in the modern world is an intensely political affair” (1989: 221).

The analysis of the political dimensions of subjectivity has been a recurring thread in Smith’s work in Peru and southern Europe (see Narotzky and Smith 2006). When he first formulated this perspective, other anthropologists were following a similar conceptual path and were moving away from ahistorical, depoliticized notions of culture (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Roseberry 1989; Comaroff 1985; Taussig 1987). Yet what set Smith’s work apart was that he drew on the writings of Marxist scholars such as Raymond Williams (1977) and E.P. Thompson (1966 [1963]), as well as social historians, to explore ethnographically as well as historically questions about the politics of meaning and identity formation. And more so than other ethnographers, he put the concept of *production* at the center of an anthropological approach to culture. This move included a conceptualization of production removed from economic objectivism and grounded in the historical dynamism and creativity of collective action. And along the lines of similar calls made at the time by William Roseberry (1989), this emphasis on the production of culture implied viewing subjectivity not as an arrested object (or a text, in Geertz’s sense) but as an ongoing, never complete force that is *generative* of meanings.

In this chapter, I draw on Smith’s emphasis on the culturally-creative salience of political experiences to analyze the conditions under which new subjectivities and spatial imaginaries are articulated by Guaraní activists and leaders in the province of Jujuy. The creation of The Guaraní Trail, in this regard, represents an attempt by these actors to reconstitute not only public perceptions of the landscape but also their own sense of self and what constitutes their “culture.” In the pages that follow, I analyze how this cultural, spatial, and political reconfiguration has been tied to the most important Guaraní land claim in this province and by attempts to interpret local spatial landmarks. And I argue that this cultural production has been

shaped by a twofold spatial dislocation: the displacement from southeast Bolivia and the current separation between the urban spaces in which most people live and the rural geographies they feel alienated from.

## THE RISE OF GUARANÍ ACTIVISM

In northwest Argentina, the people who currently self-identify as Guaraní (or Ava-Guaraní) were historically called “Chiriguano.” This group was the result of the fusion, on the foothills of the Andes in today’s Bolivia, between local Chané and Guaraní-speaking Tupí-Guaraní who migrated there from the east in the 1400s and 1500s (Combès and Saignes 1991; Métraux 1929). For several centuries, Chiriguano groupings also had a

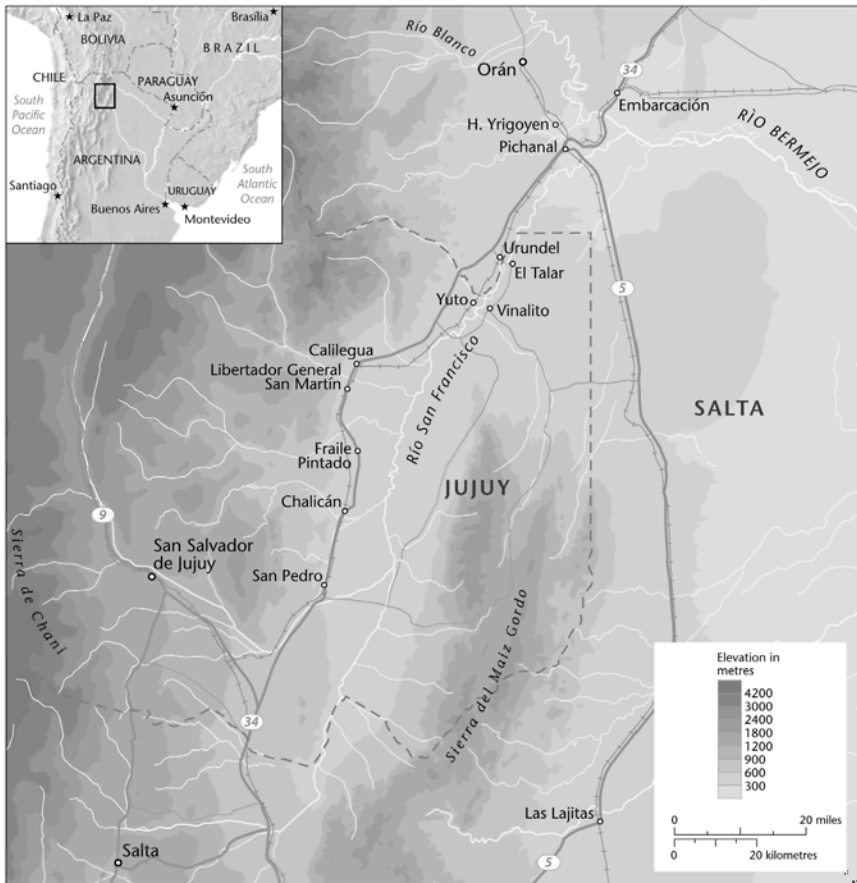


Figure 9.1 The tropical lowlands of the province of Jujuy, northern Argentina (map by Eric Leinberger).

presence farther south in the Zenta and San Francisco valleys, in what is today northern Argentina. Yet it was in the late nineteenth century, in a context of land encroachment and state violence in southeast Bolivia, that thousands of Guaraní-speaking men and women moved across the border to Argentina to work on the expanding sugar plantations of the region. Most of these people eventually settled on a permanent basis on the plantations as part of their labor force. And when the sugarcane harvest was mechanized in the late 1960s and early 1970s, they had to move to the surrounding towns, where they became part of an urban underclass living in multiethnic neighborhoods.

Displaced from their Bolivian homeland and discriminated against as “Chaguanco” (the denigrating term used locally to refer to them), many people felt under pressure to abandon or downplay their indigenous markers and identifications. In the 1960s and 1970s, many families discouraged their children from speaking the Guaraní language and wearing male ethnic emblems such as long hair and wooden disks (*tembeta*) under the lower lip (Rocca 1973: 755; Bernard 1973: 75). At the time, these people did not see themselves as Guaraní but as Simba (men wearing long hair) or Ava (people) (Bernard 1973: 74; Hirsch 2004: 72). But many others, especially the youth, had an ambivalent, even negative view of their ethnic background, and chose to assimilate within the subaltern population of the region (Rocca 1973: 755).

This situation began to change in the 1990s, when the rise of an activism defined as Guaraní was strongly influenced by the expansion of indigenous struggles in northern Argentina and the organization in Bolivia of the Asamblea del Pueblo Guaraní (APG, Assembly of the Guaraní People) (see Postero 2006; Gustafson 2002; Combès 2005). The language of indigeneity provided new generations with a narrative that resonated with their own experience of domination and became a source of identity-formation (see Li 2000). In this context, self-identified Guaraní or Ava-Guaraní leaders began organizing urban communities; they rejected the terms “Chiriguano” and “Chaguanco” for their racist connotations, celebrated a Guaraní identity linked to their peers in Bolivia, and aimed to revitalize the practices of their ancestors by reversing old processes of acculturation and language loss. Yet this was a “cultural revival” defined by novel forms of cultural production.

A similar re-indigenization has been taking place elsewhere in Latin America among populations characterized by high levels of cultural, linguistic, and racial hybridity (French 2004; Muehlmann 2009; Warren 2001; Tilley 2005). And many of these groups, like the Guaraní in Jujuy, are trying to reinvent themselves “from the ruins of their traditions,” to use Jonathan Warren’s expression (2001). In our case, this involved not only reinventing what it means to be Guaraní in northwest Argentina but also re-imagining and redefining the histories that connect them to the surrounding landscape. In contrast to other indigenous groups whose historical presence in a given geography has not been contested, the Guaraní had

to struggle against public perceptions about their intrinsic foreignness. And this oppositional and ultimately defensive stance became, in and of itself, a source of new perceptions about the regional space.

## THE LAND WITHOUT EVIL AND THE HISTORICAL DEPTH OF GUARANÍ SPACES

Since most Guaraní people in Jujuy have been socialized in proletarianized urban spaces, for decades their main concerns were typically working-class concerns about jobs and housing. As some leaders readily admit, prior to the 1990s few Guaraní talked about “the land” as part of a political agenda. It was among the elderly that the memory of small-scale maize cultivation in Bolivia and at the margins of the plantations informed imaginings of having once had a direct access to land. Yet in the late 1990s, new Guaraní leaders were forged through their interaction with NGOs and other indigenous organizations that encouraged land claims and the assumption that an indigenous positioning is necessarily anchored in “the land.” This was also the time when Argentina was going through a profound economic crisis, which eventually led to the collapse of 2001–2002 and the dramatic increase in levels of unemployment and poverty, which hit the lowlands of Jujuy particularly hard. These conditions created fertile ground for demands for rural spaces, and Guaraní organizations began arguing for the need to recover what in ancient times had been their territory.

Since most of the San Francisco River Valley is owned by the Ledesma plantation, the most powerful corporation in the province, Guaraní leaders were aware that their only chance to obtain land of their own involved the only government-owned space in lowland Jujuy: 11,000 hectares (ca. 27,000 acres) of semiarid lands covered with forests (and depleted by decades of illegal logging) east of the town of Vinalito, at the gates of the plains of the Gran Chaco (see [Figure 9.1](#)). No Guaraní people lived on that land and there were no recent memories of a prior Guaraní occupation of that area, yet these plots were included in a land-allocation program for indigenous communities. And even though some officials criticized their claim on the grounds that they had come “from elsewhere,” Guaraní leaders began arguing that these had been Guaraní lands in a distant past and that the granting of titles would encourage a massive exodus to settle them.

In a few years, “Vinalito” became the rallying cry of Guaraní political struggles in Jujuy and the source of new cultural and political meanings. Many leaders were aware of the multiple hurdles posed by an eventual move to Vinalito, and that investments in water wells and roads were needed before those lands could be settled. Quite a few were skeptical of the wisdom of moving there, given that most people had no farming experience and that many have jobs and homes in their towns. Yet many leaders and ordinary people imagined a collective future in Vinalito in optimistic,

semi-utopian overtones, and claimed that there they would be able to live off planting maize and raising chickens and pigs “like before,” as their ancestors did (Gordillo 2011). When I began working in the region in 2003, the debates about this claim were in full swing and several leaders argued that in Vinalito they would find their “land without evil.”

Several historians and anthropologists have long argued that the patterns of long-distance mobility that characterized several Tupí-Guaraní groups in South America were guided by a millenarian search for a place without suffering and sorrow called “the land without evil.” This seems to have been one of the factors, together with the aim to raid the frontier of the Inca Empire, that encouraged the Tupí-Guaraní migrations that eventually led to the emergence of the Chiriguano at the foot of the Andes (Combès and Saignes 1991; Clastres 1995; Métraux 1946).

Yet several authors have also noted that even if the concept of “the land without evil” had existed in the region in previous centuries, by the nineteenth century it had disappeared from the memory and vocabulary of the Bolivian Guaraní. In this regard, the use of the term in Jujuy to refer to the lands in Vinalito is a very recent political appropriation. In the 1990s, the idea of a “land without evil” was incorporated by leaders of the APG in Bolivia largely due to the influence of NGOs and anthropologists who presented it as a pan-Guaraní cultural symbol (Combès 2005). And Guaraní leaders in Argentina, in turn, adopted the term from the Bolivian APG, which they look up as representing the authentic culture of their ancestors, in part because many Guaraní people in Bolivia speak the language and farm their own fields.

In Jujuy, the Guaraní leadership evoked “the land without evil,” first, to create a particular view of Guaraní past mobility, as shown on the signpost in the Calilegua National Park (“The Guaraní people: owners of everything, in search of the Land Without Evil, when there were no borders and no countries”). The search for this mythical land that made them move over wide regions allows activists to claim a presence in the San Francisco River Valley prior to the creation of international borders. But “the land without evil” was also invoked politically to imagine a future of collective well-being in an unlikely place, the barren lands of Vinalito. At several meetings to discuss the land claim, some leaders argued that Vinalito was “the land without evil of the Guaraní of the province of Jujuy,” where they would be able to collectively heal from long experiences of oppression and spatial estrangement.

These spatial imaginings are, on the one hand, the product of an urban experience of poverty, and many people explicitly argued that they wanted to move to Vinalito to escape poor sanitary conditions, cramped homes, and chronic unemployment. Yet these idealized views of Vinalito were also a response to the accusations that the Guaraní were foreign indigenous people whose authenticity had been further degraded by their urban experience. In 2003, Gloria Pérez, one of the most important leaders in Jujuy, articulated this view of a Guaraní territoriality defined as response to the claim that they

are “from elsewhere” when she told me: “Our great desire is to go live over there [to Vinalito], to plant our own fields. . . . We want our land so that we don’t have to live all crammed and in promiscuity.” And then she added: “The true Ava-Guaraní lived here. It’s not that they came from elsewhere. . . . All this land was Ava-Guaraní land. And then, the *karai* [the whites] made the limits and the borders. But for us there were no borders. The whites put up the borders. That’s why we were left inside Jujuy.”

Some officials, sectors of the media, and even some anthropologists have criticized these claims about an ancient Guaraní presence in Jujuy as a calculated, manipulative invention aimed at securing material benefits. In the case of similar accusations involving indigenous demands on the coast of Brazil, Jonathan Warren (2001) has argued that these narratives reduce complex, multilayered processes of subject-formation to a businesslike cost-benefit rationality, thereby naturalizing a capitalist logic assumed to pervade very disparate actors and aspirations. And while the Guaraní attempts to territorialize their presence in rural spaces is certainly part of a recent and selective political process, the claim that the Guaraní presence in Jujuy preceded the Bolivian and Argentinean nation-states is in fact historically accurate. Numerous documents show that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Guaraní-speaking groups made inroads into the San Francisco River Valley. In fact, two missionaries commemorated as martyrs by the Catholic Church were killed in 1683 by “the Chiriguano” near Pichanal, a few kilometers north of Vinalito (Tommasini 1937; Bussu 2003).

It is also true, nonetheless, that leaders in Jujuy often assert this historical presence of Guaraní-speaking people at the expense of silencing the past presence of other indigenous groups in the region and of avoiding making explicit references to the more recent and massive Guaraní migrations from Bolivia at the end of the 1800s. The silencing of other indigenous groups is in fact part of a spatially grounded experience: that for over a century the Guaraní have been the main indigenous people living in the valley on a permanent basis. This experience and their attempts to counter accusations about their foreignness have made many men and women look for material vestiges of this distant Guaraní past to prove the validity of their claims.

## SEARCHING FOR TRACES OF THE ANCESTORS

The San Francisco River Valley was for centuries a contested area of articulation, conflict, and exchange between the agrarian societies of the Andes and small-scale, hunting and gathering groups from the Gran Chaco. By the time the Spanish began settling the valley on a more permanent basis in the 1700s, setting up several forts and sugarcane *haciendas* (estates), various groupings occupied the region. Quechua-speaking Ocloya farmers who had long been subjected by the Spanish Crown inhabited the valleys and ridges west of the San Francisco River. Wichí and Toba people from

the Chaco occupied the jungles that covered the bottom of the valley and Guaraní-speaking groups raided the valley from the Zenta Valley and the Tarija River in the north, where they had a more permanent presence.

Currently, Ocloya, Wichí, and Toba people no longer have a collective presence in the lowlands of Jujuy. The main Ocloya community is currently near the provincial capital, San Salvador de Jujuy, and in the 1800s state violence forced Toba and Wichí groups to withdraw to the Chaco or mingle with criollo settlers. The massive influx of Guaraní women and men in the valley in the late nineteenth century, therefore, turned them into the dominant indigenous presence in the region. And even though in the first half of the 1900s thousands of indigenous people from the Chaco (including Wichí and Toba) migrated to work on the Jujuy plantations, they returned to their lands after the sugarcane harvest. By the time the largest plantations, Ledesma and La Esperanza, mechanized the harvest, the Guaraní were the only indigenous people who had been living in the region on a permanent basis over several generations.

Guaraní leaders currently project this memory of having a long-term presence in the valley onto an even more distant past, which they tend to imagine as constituting an all-encompassing Guaraní substratum. Therefore, many read any physical trace on the landscape created by a prior indigenous occupation as produced by their “Guaraní ancestors.”

In 1750, Jesuit missionaries founded San Ignacio de Tobas, a station that settled a Toba group on the Ledesma River, near the sugarcane hacienda of the same name. After the Spanish Crown expelled the Jesuits in 1767, the mission was run by the Franciscan order until it was abandoned in the early 1800s (Teruel 1994). In subsequent decades, the area was known by the toponym “Fraile Pintado,” Painted Fray, allegedly because figures of Franciscan frays were painted on trees to mark the trail to the mission. In 1859, the village of Fraile Pintado was officially created near the ruins of the mission.

Fraile Pintado is today a town of 14,000 largely surrounded by sugarcane fields and home to a relatively large Guaraní population. Many people in this town are aware that the area was originally a Jesuit mission, and the local Guaraní leaders argue that the people missionized by the Jesuits were their own ancestors. In July 2004, I asked Gloria Pérez, the main Guaraní leader in Fraile Pintado, about the origin of the town’s name. “The Spanish wanted to missionize the Guaraní. But the Guaraní weren’t that silly,” she replied smiling. “They killed the missionary and with his blood they painted the image of a fray on the trees.” Narratives such as this are notable not only because they erase the past presence of other indigenous groups in the region, such as the Toba, but also because they reinterpret local toponyms, and therefore local histories, through the lens of an early Guaraní resistance to Spanish conquest and missionization.

Interpretations of the regional history such as this have led to public disputes opposing academics and Guaraní organizations. This became apparent in 2003 when a construction crew building homes in Fraile Pintado found

buried urns containing human remains. The municipality called in an archaeologist, who concluded that the remains were 2,000 years old and that the vessels’ design was that of the so-called “San Francisco Culture,” an ancient agrarian society that inhabited the valley and surrounding areas (Ortíz 2003). The local media covered the news, and Guaraní leaders quickly criticized the archaeologist’s report; they claimed that those were remains of “Guaraní brothers and sisters” and that this finding proved that their ancestors had lived in the region for thousands of years. Some even argued that the references to the San Francisco Culture were calculated attempts to erase the Guaraní history and undermine their political rights. As a leader in the town of Libertador General San Martín told me in 2007, “They say it’s the San Francisco Culture in order to claim there were no Guaraní around here.”

This reading of physical traces on the landscape reveals recurring anxieties about the erasure of the Guaraní people from the regional historiography. And the claim that all human remains from a distant past belong to their ancestors presents, in turn, an unchanging Guaraní territorial presence defined by an unbroken continuity across millennia.

A similar attitude involves a legend that is well known in the valley and is probably quite old: that of *el cacique Calilegua*, the Calilegua chief (which according to historians has no basis in the documentation). Upon the arrival of the Spanish in the valley, so the story goes, an indigenous leader named Calilegua decided to commit suicide rather than surrender and jumped off the top of the highest mountain. The mountain was named after him and this ridge is currently the dominant landmark of the Calilegua National Park. Even though the legend did not specify the cacique’s ethnic identity, since the 1990s Guaraní leaders have repeatedly claimed that Calilegua was a Guaraní leader and have embraced his memory as a symbol of their ancestors’ resistance to colonial conquest and as further proof that they have lived in the valley since time immemorial. In 1998, a white merchant in the town of Calilegua personally funded the construction of a monument to cacique Calilegua on the rotunda at the town’s entrance: a four-meter statue of a semi-naked male wearing a feathered headdress, holding a spear, and facing the Calilegua National Park. This site has become the focal point of Guaraní rallies and religious ceremonies, and many Guaraní men and women speak of the monument with pride for making them visible on a prominent road with a high volume of traffic.

The popularity of the Calilegua chief as a political symbol of an emergent indigeneity has even led to attempts to identify traces of his presence on the surrounding landscapes. In July 2004, when I conducted fieldwork in the town of Calilegua for the first time, several Guaraní people told me about a place called *la piedra del indio*, “the Indian’s boulder.” They described it as a large boulder surrounded by a semicircle of a dozen smaller rocks that had been carved out to accommodate people sitting on them. And several people explicitly associated the site with cacique Calilegua. At the end of a meeting held to discuss the land claim in Vinalito, for instance, a



man in his forties named Sebastián told me that the boulder was the place where Calilegua addressed his followers. He emphasized I should visit the place, hoping I would certify its authenticity based on my authority as an anthropologist. “It’s a sacred place that should be fenced off,” he said. And he added, “They say we aren’t from around here. But how could we have brought such a boulder from elsewhere”?

Like many others, Sebastián discredited views of the Guaraní people’s foreignness by pointing to ancient material vestiges of an indigenous presence. And as was the case with the human remains in Fraile Pintado, he naturalized the Guaraní presence in the regional space to the point that any such trace could only be read as proof of an old Guaraní occupation. Julia, a woman who was listening to our conversation about the boulder, added, “We have to protect what’s ours.”

I agreed to visit the site, yet I soon learned that the Guaraní people are in fact spatially estranged from the boulder. People agreed that the latter is on land owned by the Ledesma plantation, which surrounds the town of Calilegua from all sides and is notorious for its zeal in preventing local people from trespassing into its property. Security guards on quadricycles, in fact, regularly patrol the boundaries of the cane fields. Yet several activists were so keen to take me there that they requested Ledesma for a formal authorization to visit the place, a request that was sponsored by officials of the Calilegua National Park. A few days later we were granted permission, but on condition that the Ledesma head of security took us there in his pick-up truck.

On the agreed-upon day, I got in the truck with four Guaraní activists. Two of them, a man and a woman in their sixties, had seen the boulder decades earlier when they were workers at Ledesma, so I assumed we would promptly find the place. The head of security (a former army officer) had never heard of it but seemed intrigued enough to be relatively accommodating to our interest. We began driving toward the foot of the Calilegua mountain range on dirt roads cutting through sugarcane fields, in an area occasionally punctuated by small rock formations. Yet after driving around for over an hour, and after several false leads, our guides admitted they were lost. The layout of the fields, they said, had changed dramatically since the days they worked on the plantation. We turned around, disappointed and empty-handed.

The ghostly presence of “the Indian’s boulder” on a heavily guarded plantation captures some of the tensions and paradoxes shaping Guaraní spatial and political imaginaries. Even if we had found *la piedra del indio* that day, the salience of this place for Guaraní people does not result from a direct, bodily engagement with it. The place is imagined as sacred because in revealing human-made carvings it testifies to an ancient indigenous presence. That this elusive landmark is now imagined to be somewhere in a space they do not have access to highlights the geographical estrangement that has informed Guaraní political practices and demands.

As these anecdotes illustrate, the official discourses that portray the Guaraní as people who “aren’t from around here” have forced activists and leaders

to affirm a connection to the surrounding geographies that is as culturally and politically constructed as it is based on the actual experience of men and women who have lived in this region for generations. These processes resonate with what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) called “the invention of tradition.” Hobsbawm (1983:2), in particular, pointed out that a recurring feature of land confrontations involving peasant movements is their claim to have rights over the disputed land “from time immemorial,” a claim that “often expresses not a historical fact, but the balance of forces in the constant struggle of village against lords or against other villages.”

Similarly, while many Guaraní claims may not neatly correspond with “historical facts” they do express, and contribute to shaping, a particular balance of forces in the Jujuy lowlands. And these political practices have created new meanings, spatial sensibilities, bodily dispositions, and memories: in short, what anthropologists call “culture.” And as we know, culture cannot be reduced to historical facts, for it is an ever shifting social field of practices and imaginings where the very distinction between invention and reality is permanently disrupted, be it here, on Wall Street, or in rural Thailand. The attempts to discredit Guaraní claims as calculating, rationalized inventions therefore miss the profoundly cultural-political nature of these demands as well as the political dimensions of cultural expressions. And while the attempts to ground the memory of the Calilegua chief on an actual space have proven elusive, Guaraní mobilizations did succeed in charging the valley with new, public markers of indigeneity.

## THE CREATION OF NEW GEOGRAPHIES

The imaginaries examined above are not just the product of historically situated experiences; they have also guided Guaraní political practices. And their constitutive power is beginning to have material effects on the spatial layout of the region.

The opening of The Guaraní Trail in the Calilegua National Park was the first noticeable spatial transformation resulting from Guaraní mobilizations. The construction of this trail symbolized a reencounter of sorts with the geography that the Calilegua chief came to embody and provided activists with a public forum from which to disseminate their experiences and voices to a wider public. Since this is the most visited national park in northwest Argentina, the signposts and the female guides wearing the *tipoi* (the one-piece dress that has become the archetypical Guaraní marker) communicate to thousands of tourists that the Guaraní are indeed the indigenous people of those lands. Yet the trail also highlights the tension between their presence and visibility in the park and the fact that they have been “a people without territory.”

The year after the trail was inaugurated, the struggles over Vinalito began to undermine this territorial estrangement. In September 2008, after

road blockades and a massive rally on the disputed land (triggered by confrontations between Guaraní families and soybean farmers), the Jujuy government relented and agreed to grant titling over some of those lands. In a ceremony in Vinalito, officials gave collective legal title over 4,100 hectares of land (10,130 acres) to eleven Guaraní communities that had presented lists of people willing to settle it (Gordillo 2011).

Many Guaraní people in Jujuy now feel that they have at last a rural space of their own, despite its small size and poor quality for farming. And while some families have moved to the land and the government has built basic infrastructure (power lines, water reservoirs), the semi-utopian image of “a land without evil” created during the struggle for land titling began fading. Many people have, in fact, reconsidered their initial enthusiasm for that place. In August 2007, I talked with a leader named Pablo, who had been deeply involved in the land claim in previous years. I asked him what he thought of other leaders calling Vinalito “the land without evil.” Pablo chuckled. He said, alluding sarcastically to the plot’s size and adverse environmental conditions, “It’s a land with evil” (*es una tierra con mal*). For Pablo, that utopian phrase had become an empty, idealized political slogan. And his ironic distancing from Vinalito’s significance reveals that many Guaraní people have positioned themselves as urban subjects that do not necessarily long for a return to maize cultivation in rural areas.

Regardless of this settlement’s future and of the diversity of Guaraní experiences and aspirations, the recent political mobilizations by Guaraní men and women have contributed to redefining their subjectivity and sense of place, often by embracing essentialist perceptions of the surrounding geography that are haunted by a recurring sense of loss and estrangement. Yet this has been a politically effective cultural reinvention, which in partly redefining local spaces is beginning to undermine the view that the Guaraní “aren’t from around here.”

## CONCLUSION

Gavin Smith argued that cultural production does not occur with equal intensity from one day to the next. “The productivity of culture,” he wrote, “increases at historical moments of heightened resistance and rebellion, because the valued components of culture are challenged, threatened from without, and so must be articulated within” (1991: 182). In our case, Guaraní activism has certainly created an intensified arena of cultural production, in which the parameters of what constitutes Guaraní indigeneity and how it is grounded in space are being reconstituted.

The rereading of local spaces in terms of Guaraní landmarks and histories is, as we have seen, the result of a collective experience of socio-spatial dislocation, which many people have tried to counter by asserting the historical depth of their presence in the region. This has involved selective

historical interpretations that are intrinsic to territorial struggles. No actor is free from “inventing” memories that may legitimize their territorial claims, as is clear in places as diverse as Jerusalem, the Balkans, or Northern Ireland. These contestations mobilize subjective dispositions that are as created as they are based on real experiences and aspirations. And even though the two thousand year-old human remains in Fraile Pintado or the elusive rock carvings near Calilegua may not be “Guaraní” traces, they are the detritus of the indigenous actors that occupied that geography prior to its conquest, privatization, and commoditization.

Guaraní men and women draw on these spatial sediments to highlight a history of colonial violence and exploitation that has in fact characterized the experience of very disparate indigenous populations. In doing so, they draw upon this shared heritage to push forward the political aspirations of those who are indeed the descendants, in the San Francisco River Valley, of the original inhabitants of the Americas.

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**Part III**

# **Livelihoods**



# 10 Global Connections and Disconnections

## Space and Labor in Mumbai's Slums

*Judith Whitehead*

### INTRODUCTION

A striking feature of forms of livelihood in the shanty-towns and slums of Mumbai is their sheer diversity, along with an extreme fragmentation of labor markets and labor processes in small-scale industries and services. Over 50 percent of Mumbai's population is housed in slums or shanties, and some, such as Janata Colony in Worli where I conducted research during the summers of 2004–2005, and Dharavi, in north-central Mumbai, are long-established sites of informal habitation. Like most of India's laboring population, the work that the 7.2 million people who live in "slums" carry out is almost entirely located in what has been termed the "informal" or "unorganized" sector of the economy. Much of it occurs in the "slums" themselves. Types of work in Mumbai covered under the term "informal sector" include petty commodity production, petty mercantile activities such as street hawking, vegetable and fish vending, owning or working in an enterprise that employs less than ten people, contractual work in larger enterprises that is without benefits or regulation, home-work such as the embroidery that Muslim women carry out for sub-contractors for national fashion firms, domestic service, prostitution, scooter rickshaw driving, temporary construction work, fishing, money lending and extortion, *zari* (embroidery) work, and so on.

The diversity in the types of work and in labor relations in "slum" economies indicates that hyper-differentiation of labor processes is a major feature of the contemporary employment scenario in Mumbai (Grant and Nijman 2004). Some types of work seem directly related to circuits of capital, others less directly, and some appear to be almost autonomous from them. In order to understand these forms of livelihood in relation to global and national flows of capital, I suggest that analyzing the spatial-temporal dimensions of contemporary labor processes in central Mumbai can offer new insights into how labor, capital, and means of production have been broken up or recomposed in the past two decades. The period from 1991 to the present was marked by neoliberal economic reforms and the exposure of some of Mumbai's industries to global competition and flows of



national and international investment. My goal is to better understand how the decomposition and reshaping of labor processes since 1991 relates to various scales of capital disinvestment and reinvestment. This enables me to understand what the spatial trajectory of these forms of livelihood might be, i.e. how necessary or disposable various forms of labor and the spaces in which they are carried out might be to the overall reproduction of capital, locally, nationally and globally (Herod 1991).

The introduction of a spatial-temporal dimension is important due to the highly uneven ways that globalized capital has become linked to or delinked from specific forms of work and populations in locally embedded places. Mumbai, as an emerging global city whose work-force is increasingly fragmented and spans almost all spatio-temporal modalities, seems an ideal place from which to begin such an investigation. In order to do so, I first offer a critique of the informal sector concept, a descriptive term that has been applied to the unregulated forms of livelihood that either pre-existed economic reforms or have been recently created in central Mumbai's "slums" in the past two decades. I then introduce three distinctions of absolute space, relative space, and relational space and show how these converge with Marx's dialectical dualities of use-value/concrete labor, exchange-value/money, and finally to value/abstract labor (Harvey 2006). This is followed by descriptions of three major forms of livelihood in two slum colonies in Mumbai: Janata Colony and Dharavi, and a discussion of the fields of force relating to the "emplacement" of labor in these "slums". Such descriptions then enable me to analyze the conditions of reproduction of both labor and capital and how these relate to the various spatio-temporal dimensions of livelihood in two major "slums" of Mumbai, Janata Colony and Dharavi.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE: THE INFORMAL SECTOR CONCEPT**

Recent work on the growth of global urbanization has documented large increases of people working in the informal sectors of the southern cities, as neoliberal reforms in agriculture are seen as propelling a vast migration to cities, with or without the demand pull of jobs in urban megalopolises such as Accra, Sao Paulo, or Mumbai (Davis 2006, UNDP-Habitat 2003). Coinciding with the early phase of neoliberalism in the 1980s, accumulation by dispossession in rural areas undoubtedly compelled large population movements from rural to urban areas in many southern countries (Davis 2006; Sanyal 2007; Harvey 2003). The latest intensification of urbanization, referred to as the urban climacteric, however, is marked by the exclusion of substantial sections of the urban population from formal sector employment, even in countries experiencing high rates of growth in GDP, such as India (Sanyal 2007; Davis 2006).

During the same period, i.e. from the late 1980s to the late 1990s, the concept of the informal sector attained great importance in development institutions, emerging first from an anthropological/ILO study by Keith Hart in 1973, to find a home in a compromise forged at the World Bank between economists and sociologists (Hart 1973). In collaboration with the ILO, the World Bank in the late 1970s began using the term to describe urban self-employment, although the phenomenon, and what it meant, was extensively debated between monetarists in the economics division of the World Bank who applied it to small-scale enterprises, and the sociologists, some of whom were critical of the dualistic way in which the informal sector was seen as separate from the formal sector (McNeil 2006: 46–47, Portes and Castell 1989, Portes 1993). However, since the concept provided an umbrella under which many different approaches to urban poverty alleviation could be cultivated, the term functioned as an important bridge between different development disciplines and between different policy approaches (McNeil 2006). In addition, new terms were being sought to describe what happened to work “after” restructuring and reform. The informal sector has hence superseded the concept of unemployment as a “postmodern” technique of governing wageless lives (Denning 2010). Since the early 1990s, the concept has bred countless monographs, which vary according to the political and academic stance of the researcher: on the one hand, the informal sector is envisioned as a site of “sub-subsistence” or “micro-accumulation” (Davis 2006), on the other hand, as a site of entrepreneurial innovation, if only a mercantilist state with its labor market regulations would step out of the way, in the millenarian neoliberalism of Hernando de Soto (de Soto 1989; 2000).

Spaces of central Mumbai had been centers of large fordist enterprises in textiles, chemicals and pharmaceuticals until about twenty years ago. While informal sector work was undoubtedly present prior to 1991, the collapse of fordist enterprises has meant that the informal or unorganized sector concept has been increasingly used to describe the increasing variety of forms of work that have emerged in the wake of deindustrialization.<sup>1</sup> The informal or unorganized sector is defined as work that is characterized by ease of entry in terms of skill and capital requirements, lack of health and safety norms, and lack of pensions and other benefits (Portes 1993, Sengupta 2007). An increase in the informal or unorganized sector in Mumbai throughout the 1990s was widely noted in both government policy reports and scholarly documents (MMRDA 1996; Bhowmik 2001; Deshpande, Guy and Deshpande 1997). By 1996, the MMRDA recorded a sharp rise in informal or unorganized sector employment in central Mumbai, subsequent upon the deindustrialization and the retrenchment of close to a million workers in textiles, pharmaceuticals and chemical industries between 1985 and 2000 (Bannerjee-Guha 2002). These industries were subsequently relocated from central Mumbai to edge cities such as Bhiwandi, Kalyan, and Thane. There, contract labor in small-scale industries, paid at

one-quarter the wages of workers in central Mumbai, possessed a competitive edge over the former fordist enterprises.<sup>2</sup> (Bhowmik 2005; interviews with textile workers, 2004). However, massive retrenchment and unemployment was framed in terms of a rise in “informal sector” employment and a decline in “formal sector” employment, as if the two were equal and unemployment was virtually non-existent. Subsequent studies of ex-mill workers have documented the hardships faced by retrenched workers during this period, and the often intermittent, contractual work that they managed to secure (Bhowmik 2001, 2003; D’Monte 2001; Deshpande 1997; Whitehead 2007; Menon and Adarkar 2007). Hence, statistical increases in informal sector employment often hid high levels of real unemployment resulting from industrial restructuring, as the scramble for survival pushed many former textile and other industrial workers into street-hawking and their wives into domestic service (Bhowmik 2001; Whitehead 2007).

In Mumbai today, the informal sector concept covers a huge variety of forms of work, class, caste and familial relations in employment. In contrast, work in the formal or organized sector during the period of economic liberalization, i.e. from 1991 onward, has remained virtually stagnant in numerical terms and declined in percentage terms (Sanyal 2007, Sengupta 2007). Impressive growth rates in GDP in the past twenty years after reforms, and especially in the past decade, were not accompanied by corresponding rises in formal sector employment (Sanyal 2007: 245–247; Bhowmik 2005). By 2007, in contrast, the informal or unorganized sector, which in India includes agriculture, had risen to engulf 92 percent of India’s working population (Sengupta 2007).

In addition to the diversity in types of work mentioned above, the informal sector covers varied relations of production and heterogeneous class positions, e.g. between the owners and workers in small or medium enterprises, or between sub-contractors and household workers. In addition, these forms of livelihood include differences between formal and real subsumption of labor, and conflate distinctions between the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors. The term also covers both legal and illegal activities.

In addition, since neoliberal policy makers have decried permanent employment, believed to lead to rigidities in recruitment, many large-scale firms in Mumbai have adopted the flexible specialization model (Harvey 1989). Firms such as Tata Motors, Hindustan Lever, Lokhandwala Builders, India Bulls, and Bajaj Motorcycles are increasingly hiring workers on part-time contractual bases without benefits or social security provisions (Banerjee-Guha 2008: 56; Bhowmik 2005). These workers too are included under the category of the unorganized sector, due to the unregulated character of their employment. Struck by the diversity and magnitude of informal sector work in Mumbai, Portes’ prediction of an increase in informalization, as employers seek to capitalize on the “flexibility” and lower social costs of the “informal sector”, appears to have been borne out (Portes 1993: 59). Indeed, if the informalization of work in India has ballooned to cover

almost the entire labor-force of a large, emergent economy,<sup>3</sup> then perhaps its very success has rendered the term logically superfluous. Finally, as several scholars have pointed out, the “informal sector” concept is a descriptive, rather than an analytical category, and hence does not focus on the relationships between informal sector work, the formal sector, and wider spaces and flows of capital: regional, national, and international (Portes 1993, McNeil 2006).

## **ABSOLUTE, RELATIVE, AND RELATIONAL SPACE**

In order to analyze the relations between different types of work and the reproduction of capital locally, nationally, and globally, it is necessary to understand how both labor and capital in central Mumbai are being spatially recomposed through global and national linkages and/or delinkages. I suggest that the hyper-mobility of capital is often combined with a hyper-fixity of labor in central Mumbai to create new, fragmented space economies there. In order to understand these new space economies, it is necessary to analyze differences in the use of space in the production, circulation and realization of capital. Through introducing the concepts of absolute, relative, and relational space, David Harvey has provided a potential mapping of the fragmented and differentiated ways that space economies are being recomposed through globalization (Harvey 2006).

Absolute space is the space of Newton and Descartes, and is usually represented in an immovable grid amenable to standardized measurement. It is the space of mapping and engineering practices, and thus includes parts of what anthropologists have referred to as both space and place. It is also the space of empirical individuation. Relative space, on the other hand, is related to non-Euclidean geometries and involves analyzing space in terms of phenomena that may differ in absolute terms, but not in relative terms, or vice-versa. Transportation industries, or express mail, for example, can be analyzed relatively, in the sense that they possess multiple locations in absolute space that are similar in terms of their relative temporal distances from a specified, central location (*ibid*: 122).

Relational space, on the other hand, implies combining space and time to produce a distinct frame of spatio-temporality. Here phenomena arise that are internal to the space-time modality. It is applicable to phenomena like space-time compression that result from the creation of containerized transport and new information technologies, two innovations crucial to the globalization of finance and manufacturing. Here, while space and time are relative, external influences become internalized in specific processes or things through time (*ibid* 124).

As Harvey elaborates, each of these space-time modalities is related to basic dialectical dualities in Marx’s analysis of capitalism. Everything that pertains to use value and concrete labor lies in the province of absolute

space and time. Concrete work processes, specific mixes of technology, the use-value of commodities produced, the factories or households in which they are produced, and specific expenditures of energy can all be individuated, described and understood within an empirical framework of absolute space and time. While the use-value of a commodity is both material and social, i.e. arising from the specific social needs that it satisfies in a given cultural-historical space, its empirical, material properties provide its ultimate bedrock of use-value.

However, everything that pertains to exchange value lies in relative space-time. Exchange-value represents an abstraction from the different qualities of commodities to produce a socially accepted and quantitative standard of equivalence between them. Historically, this has taken the form of money, but it is increasingly expressed globally in ever more abstract qualities such as derivatives (Bryan and Rafferty 2006). Exchange-value expresses itself in pure quantity, with all qualitative difference being extinguished (Marx 1976: 6). Because exchange entails the movement of commodities, money, and capital over time and space and because it embodies the quantitative relations between diverse use-values expressed through the market, exchange-value operates in relative space and time. Indeed, the increasing magnitude and velocity of financialization since the late 1980s highlights the relative nature of exchange value and its perpetual attempt to expand spatial modalities and contract temporal constraints. The circulation and accumulation of capital—i.e. its realization—occur in relative space-time. Hence, global commensurations of money and other financial assets occur within the realm of a relative, and not absolute or relational space-time modality.

Value and its production through the formation of abstract labor is, however, a relational concept. Value is produced in and through otherwise incommensurable concrete labors being compared through processes of exchange. It represents an abstraction from diverse forms of concrete labor, but nevertheless a real abstraction that has to occur for their quantitative commensuration to emerge. Like weight, which compares otherwise incommensurable things in terms of an abstract property, abstract labor and value are both abstract and real (Marx 1976). It is hence internal to the social relations that produce it and can only be seen (or measured) through its effects, i.e. the effect of reducing otherwise incommensurable and very different concrete labors to a common referent, i.e. a pure quantity of value expressed in different forms of money. (Harvey 2006: 141; Rubin 1971; Elson 1979). Commodification produces abstract relations between diverse producers through the exchange of things that then indirectly influences the working lives of producers. This finding of Marx holds true even though these commensurations occur today at various spatial scales (Rubin 1971).

The conceptual connections and differentiations discussed above establish the possibility of analyzing the differentiated local space economies

with national and global flows of capital in their variegated and uneven juxtapositions and linkages. Absolute space is the space of concrete labor and use-values, relative space the domain of exchange value, and relational space the modality in which abstract labor and value reside. Hence, it becomes possible to analyze the heterogeneous livelihoods subsumed under the “informal sector” by unpacking the diverse ways that specific forms of labor-power, means of production, and capital have been decomposed and recomposed in central Mumbai during the era of flexible specialization. For example, labor/capital relations in the several SEZs that now exist in the Mumbai hinterlands would approximate a pure combination between the absolute space of concrete labor, the relative space of global exchange value and accumulation, and global, relational value created through the abstraction from and equalization of concrete labor in the SEZs with concrete labors in similar industries in other geographical spaces (Banerjee-Guha 2008). Here socially necessary labor-time is directly commensurated across global geographical scales. Finally, it is only because of the fetish quality of commodities, in which relations between producers and consumers are formed through the exchange of things, that diverse and dialectical relations can arise between these three forms of spatio-temporality and combined factors of production to produce concrete things, exchange-value, and abstract labor congealed in various value relations simultaneously (Marx 1976, Rubin 1971; Elson 1979).

With these three forms of space-time modality in mind, it is possible now to conceive the varied forms of livelihood in two major “informal settlements” of central Mumbai, Janata Colony and Dharavi. Both are major “slum” areas of central Mumbai where informal sector work predominates. However, the nature of their linkages and/or delinkages to regional, national and global flows of capital differ markedly, as shown by the analysis of labor and capital mixes in their varied spatial modalities in each location.

## JANATA COLONY

Janata Colony, where I conducted surveys, interviews and focus groups in the summers of 2004–2005, is a well-established “slum colony” comprised of long-term migrants to Mumbai, who came there seeking work in the textile mills from the early 1960s to the early 1980s.<sup>4</sup> They migrated either from the Konkan coast districts, such as Goa, Raigad, and Ratnagiri or from the southeastern Deccan districts of Satara, Solapur, and Sangli, where drought was and is a recurring problem for small and medium farmers. The Worli neighborhood in which Janata Colony is located was formed from an original fishing island, inhabited by Koli fisher folk, that was reclaimed and bridged to the mainland through in-filling in the mid nineteenth century. The current population of the colony and Worli village

is about 250,000, with the migrants outnumbering the original inhabitants of Koli fisher folk by a factor of ten to one (Interview with Worli municipal corporator, July 15 2005). With the collapse of the textile mills in the early 1990s, Janata Colony witnessed a steep decline in formal sector employment and, in the early 1990s, high rates of unemployment amongst men. Women from Janata Colony remember the early 1990s as a time of great hardship, when it was difficult to feed their families properly, never mind finding money for school fees or medical emergencies. Although many men in Janata Colony referred to themselves as unemployed, and did not believe that their current work was “a real job”, they are included in the official statistics of the informal sector if they derive some income from employment and work at least 180 days per year (Sengupta 2007).

The initial, striking impression of Janata Colony and its residents is its apparent autonomy from both the state and wider society. Janata, or People’s Colony, contains numerous voluntary committees. These committees oversee sanitation, garbage collection and disposal, the cleaning of gutters and drains, informal baby-sitting services and networks, and micro-credit circles for both consumption and production loans. In addition, several NGOs—connected either to political parties, such as the Shiv Sena or the Communist Party of India—or to the Catholic Church—provide a range of social services, including job training, a free legal clinic one a week, a free weekly medical clinic and a visiting psychologist. The psychologist specializes in domestic and familial problems. In addition, prominent women from the community are members of the Mahila Mandals, local police and judicial committees that are empowered by the Mumbai Police to adjudicate minor civil disputes such as excessive noise or drunkenness, domestic disputes, missing persons, etc. The only services Janata Colony residents receive from the municipality are electricity and ten water taps that function for two hours per day, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Several women told me that they would also collect water for their neighbors if they were away from the Colony during that time. The appearance, therefore, is of a self-sufficient community, built from the ground up on land reclaimed from the sea and disconnected from the state, in which most provisioning of social services is provided from within the community itself or by the NGO sector. Indeed, the dense networks of neighborliness in Janata Colony were often remarked upon by women as a major reason for not wanting to be relocated elsewhere. This social capital appeared to be necessary for the community’s social, cultural, and economic reproduction, although much of it was created due to the lack of state provisioning of social services.

All the women interviewed stated that their husbands came to work in the mills in the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. Their reasons for moving included declining returns to agriculture, the fact that their parents’ landholdings would be fragmented amongst brothers, the increasing drought conditions in the southeastern districts of Maharashtra, and the greater economic and social opportunities that mill work brought. Four

women stated that they had had problems with their in-laws or that their in-laws' house was too small. Although wages from mill work were not that high, i.e. between 1800–3500 Rs. per month, or between \$60–180 Can in 1980, the job status was high due to its security and benefits. Or as one woman pointed out, “everyone wanted their daughters to marry a man with a mill job.”

Interviews with women from eighty households show that the majority of migrants in the 70s and 80s were not the poorest of rural villagers. The education of a majority of men was from the 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> standard, and almost all of their village families had some land in their home villages. All, with the exception of one couple who were recent migrants from Uttar Pradesh, were from districts in surrounding Maharashtra state, including Satara, Solapur, and Sangli. There were also migrants from the Konkan coast, especially from Raigad, Ratnagiri and Goa. Either males or couples migrated; there were no independent female migrants in Janata Colony.

Like many other neighborhoods of Mumbai that experienced in-migration from the late nineteenth century onwards, Janata Colony exhibits a high degree of congruence between spatial settlement and particular social groups based on religion, region, caste or occupation (Masselos 2007: 273). In terms of caste composition, Janata Colony is divided, both spatially and socially, between Goan Christians on the eastern side of the mohalla, and a number of Hindu castes on the west, sea-facing side. The reason for this distinctive spatial and social geography relates to how individuals and families managed their residential choices upon arriving in Mumbai. Acquiring a space in this large and well-established squatter's colony was accomplished mainly through extended family networks. A very high number, i.e. about fifty-nine, or 74 percent of those interviewed, stated that they chose Janata Colony, not only because it was close to the mills, but because they had previous social ties to the colony. Many had a brother or sisters already residing in Janata Colony, a few relied on brothers- or sisters-in-law, and some had aunts or uncles already living there. Relatives were important points of contact when first arriving in Mumbai; providing shelter, food, and employment contacts, and a base from which to acquire a home later on. In addition, a number of women mentioned that loans from relatives had been important for acquiring land and construction supplies for their houses. Due to these informal networks, caste and religious clustering is an important aspect of residential spaces in Janata Colony. There was a substantial sub-community of Goan Christians. Aside from these, the major caste groups are *agris*, *bhandaris*, *kunbi marathas*, and other Marathas. All of these groups have a history as farmers, and all are caste Hindus from Maharashtra, with the exception of *bhandaris*, who claim *kshatriya* status but are officially deemed a scheduled caste by the central government. They consist of just two households. Hence, there are few Dalit castes and no Muslims currently residing in Janata Colony; nor were there any Brahmins. Social networks here function both as a means of inclusion into the city,



but also as a means of informal social exclusion. The slum area itself was spatially divided between Goan Christian and caste Hindu families, with a temple in the west of the village and a small church and adjoining square built in its eastern half.

Forms of livelihood, however, tell a somewhat different story. There is a diversity of work and labor relations that characterize the “informal sector” that women and men from Janata Colony engage in. In the wake of retrenchment from the textile mills, the work of both women and men, and sometimes adolescent children, outside the home is required to meet basic household expenses that have been computed as 3000 Rs. per month for a family of five in 2004–2005.<sup>5</sup> About 40 percent of the eighty households interviewed fell short of this minimum requirement.

## WOMEN’S WORK

The most predominant, long-term pattern of work to emerge from the household surveys was the employment of women as domestic servants in the high-rises that have mushroomed along the Worli sea front from about 1990 onwards. There were seventy-three, or 80 percent, of women who reported that they were engaged in such work, with rates of pay, working hours, holidays, and working conditions varying considerably from one employer to the next. Most worked for two to three households and for between three to six hours per day. Domestic service by women was taken up from the mid-1990s onwards due to the loss of male employment in the mills, and most women reported rather mixed feelings towards it. On the one hand, they welcomed the opportunity to work outside the home; on the other hand, they were sometimes disgruntled about the conditions of their work, especially its low pay and lack of holidays. Like many women in central Mumbai, following the relocation of textile, pharmaceuticals, and electronics industries to Mumbai’s hinterlands, their work constituted the “feminization of survival” during the early years of industrial restructuring (Sassen 2003). In many areas undergoing industrial restructuring and retrenchment, women have had to pursue often low-paid and temporary work to secure the social reproduction of their households.

Although a National Domestic Workers Alliance was established in Mumbai in 2001, and has had legal success in having a minimum wage rate, pensions and job security laws applied to this sector, the implementations of these laws has been hampered by the private character of domestic work (Interview, Sr. Jeanne Devos, August 2005). Indeed, none of the women interviewed in Janata Colony had joined it. This was because, as several noted, “competition for this work is very high.” A high percentage of women who were engaged in domestic service acquired their employment through friends in Janata Colony.

In addition to domestic service and household work, a number of women engaged in petty commodity production or service work at a very small-scale: two women made *iddlis*—(small, rice pancakes)—every morning for a south India restaurant in Worli proper, five women worked as vegetable vendors in a nearby market, one woman made *agarbatis* (incense) that she sold to nearby apartment dwellers, two women did tailoring from their homes, while one woman sold fish at the Koli fishmarket in Worli village. In addition, two women who had formerly been household servants, now worked as child-care workers in a crèche run by Pragati Kendra, an NGO associated with the Catholic Church. Two other women were also employed by Pragati Kendra, as a president of a micro-credit organization, and as a community activist, respectively.

Significantly, most women worked within the circumscribed space of Worli, with only a few engaging in domestic service in nearby Parel and Lalbaug. Not only did this decrease their transportation expenses, but it also constituted a moral boundary of respectability that metro travel could transgress. As one respondent cautioned, “even though nice women work outside the home nowadays, it’s not good to travel long distances on the train because we have to look after the home also.”

## MALE LIVELIHOODS

While women’s work exhibits a readily discernible pattern based mainly on domestic work, both paid and unpaid, the work of men is more varied. Almost all had previously worked in the textile industry, and two were still employed in nearby Century Mills in 2005, but as watchmen. A number of men initially expressed some hostility to being interviewed about their work; firstly, because they felt that their current employment was not really a job at all, and secondly, because a number were active members of the Shiv Sena, and distrusted research work carried out by non-Mumbaiers. Hence, some data on their employment and conditions of work was acquired through interviews with their wives who were connected to local NGOs through their participation in micro-credit circles.

Twenty-six men from the eighty households surveyed were currently employed in the construction industry in 2005, helping to build the apartment buildings and office towers that were mushrooming in central Mumbai and crowding out the squatter colonies that had previously provided housing for industrial workers. This work was based either on temporary contracts of several months duration, or was daily wage work. Hence, working days and income varied considerably in the construction trades, from a minimum of four days per month to a maximum of twenty-three. Daily wages also varied between employers, i.e. they were between 80–180 Rs. All the men who agreed to be interviewed complained bitterly about the contract system and the irregularity of their employment. They also had

lost many of the benefits, e.g. pensions and assured holidays, that accompanied their work in the textile mills.

Many worked at other part-time jobs in order to make ends meet. Five men worked as night security guards either at industrial estates, office towers, for construction sites, or for the nearby Nehru Science Centre. Eleven men, who were not employed in construction, plied auto rickshaws, while thirteen had been able to plough their VRS payments from the textile mills into purchasing a taxi.<sup>6</sup> Two were street hawkers, selling tea from *dhabas*, (small, owner-built shops), while one rather fortunate man was able to use his VRS payment, plus a loan from his sister to retrain as a mechanic. He had probably the most stable and well-paid work of all the people interviewed. Finally, one man worked for a nearby printing press, although his work was contractual and intermittent, and he was financially supported by his wife as a day-care worker. Two men were currently unemployed; one, according to his wife, because of his alcoholism and the other due to chronic illness.

The following case studies illustrate the economic and social reasons for migration to Mumbai, and also the insecurities of male employment following the closure of the textile mills.

### Case Study of Alexa Fernandes

Her family owned a farm of ten acres in Goa, and she had four brothers and a sister. The land was to be divided between her brothers after her parents' death. She was married at age sixteen, thirty-five years ago, to a man from a neighboring village whose family had a small farm of about four acres, and who she met at middle school. His elder brother and a cousin had migrated to Mumbai, and they had already secured employment at Century Mills in Worli before Alexa and her husband decided to move. Her sister and brother already resided in Janata Colony. She had a difficult time adjusting to her in-laws in Goa, so she convinced her husband that a move to Mumbai would help them both economically and in their married life. Upon arrival in Mumbai, they stayed at first with her brother, who also provided them with meals and was able to secure a job for her husband in Century Mills, first as a night watchman, and then as a weaver. Her brother told her about squatting lots in Janata Colony and helped them with a 5,000 Rs. loan to purchase the materials to build a house, which was completed in 1980. Her husband also received help from her sister to retrain as a mechanic following the loss of his job in Century Mills in 1991.

Alexa works as a domestic servant for two families living in apartments on the Worli sea-face, working two hours per household every day, and earning 300–500 Rs. per household each month. She has been working as a domestic servant since 1992, and was hired through employers visiting Janata Colony. She also sells *iddlis* to a nearby south Indian restaurant, getting up at 5 a.m. to prepare them, and receiving 125 Rs. per day. She has

two children, a daughter who is working as a telephone operator while the son is studying for a Bachelor of Commerce in college. Until 1999, when her husband acquired a job as a car mechanic in Andheri, their life was very difficult, being supported for several years from her own work. Now that he earns 5,000 Rs. per month, they have been able to send their son to college and to invest Rs. 40,000 in adding an extra storey to their house. She wishes to stay on in Janata Colony because the people there are supportive and because her work is close to home.

### **Case Study of Jayoti Tendulkar**

Jayoti was born in Raigad, Maharashtra, and moved to Bombay in 1983 at twenty, a year after her marriage. Her husband was twenty-five when they married. She has two children, a son, Kiran and a daughter, Vanita. She and her husband moved to Worli from her in-laws' house because it was very crowded. Her husband initially found work in the mills through friends. They have struggled financially since the end of the textile strike. Mr. Tendulkar's current income from contract work with a printing press is very insecure. Her father paid rent for their house in Worli for four years, and then provided a loan for them to buy their house. To support her family, she has worked as a domestic servant, in tailoring in her home, and in hospital work as a cleaner. She became involved in a micro-credit circle six years ago and is currently working at a crèche supported by Pragati Kendra, and as a community activist. She was also able to take out a loan from the micro-credit circle for an operation for her son's kidney stones. She was active in bringing together community organizations to resist a move by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Council to resettle Janata Colony residents in apartments in the northern suburbs constructed by the Slum Rehabilitation Authority.

### **EMPLACEMENT IN JANATA COLONY**

Although almost everyone interviewed had migrated from villages to Mumbai in the past twenty to forty years, few were willing to return there following the collapse of the textile strike and retrenchment from the mills. In order to understand their decision to remain in Janata Colony through the lean years of the 1990s, it is important to specify the conditions and constraints, opportunities and openings available to Janata Colony residents. These social fields of force consist of multiple forms of domination that influence an individual or family's decision to migrate or not. They emanate not only from particular, local settings, but also from wider national and international opportunities and constraints on processes of migration (Lem 2007).

Reasons for staying in Janata Colony become evident when examining changes in Maharashtra's rural economy in the past twenty years. Recent

studies of the agrarian sector have recorded a grim picture of agrarian crisis in most regions of India following liberalization. This is especially true of the Deccan plateau, which covers one-third of Maharashtra and includes the districts of Satara, Sangli, and Solapur. After 1991, under World Bank directives, tariffs on imported agricultural inputs were withdrawn, while national support prices for these same inputs were dismantled in 1995 (Patnaik 2007). The public distribution system, which provided a guaranteed price for farmers and low-cost essential commodities in urban areas, was also dismantled in the early 1990s, and in 1996, the country's agricultural sector was opened up to multinational agri-business, especially those selling farm inputs. Under deflationary policies, government expenditures for rural development and infrastructure were reduced by a factor of four from 1990 to 2000. Since support prices for output were also withdrawn in 1996, India's farmers were exposed to declining international prices for tropical agricultural commodities, alongside steeply increased input prices simultaneously.

The agricultural sector in India, in which 70 percent of the population is still employed, witnessed falling food absorption overall during the period of economic reforms to levels not seen since the 1960s famines, with 80 percent of the fall occurring between 1998–2003, and 40 percent of the total population, most located in rural areas, falling below the level of food grain absorption of the worst-off sub-Saharan countries of Africa for the same period (Patnaik 2008). A recent widely quoted report on Workers in the Unorganized Sector found that 77 percent of informal sector workers, constituting 92 percent of India's working population and including agriculture, are earning twenty Rs. per day or less (Sengupta 2007), which is about .50. Can. A majority of these are in the agricultural sector.

In Maharashtra, the agrarian crisis has been especially severe. It was accompanied by increasing fragmentation of agricultural lands, with 73 percent of holdings now deemed marginal holdings of less than two acres. Maharashtra also records the highest levels of income disparity between urban and rural regions and is second only to Bihar in terms of rural poverty (Grant and Nijman 2004). One-third of the state is in a rain shadow region, including the districts of Solapur, Satara and Sangli, from which many Worli migrants originated. These districts are also home to sugarcane and cotton cultivation—both water-intensive cash crops—that have witnessed high rates of recent farmer suicides (Sainath 2008). An indication of agrarian distress throughout Maharashtra is reflected in the fact that the Maratha Mahasabha, an organization promoting the interests of the dominant agricultural caste in Maharashtra, the Marathas, is now seeking Other-Backward-Caste (OBC) status in a bid to secure government positions and escape from agriculture altogether (Kumar 2009). In the words of its president, “agriculture in contemporary India is equivalent to slavery”.

Sangli, Satara, and Solapur districts, from which a large number of Janata Colony residents moved, are in the Deccan rain shadow region,

which has been especially hard-hit by the agrarian crisis. Hence, women in Janata Colony responded to my question during a focus group about why they didn't return to their home villages during the early 1990s with surprise and laughter. They pointed out that they had no land now to return to, since their parents' land was being farmed by their brothers and cousins. They also said there was no hope in agriculture. Their visits to their villages for marriages, births, and funerals brought home the problems of agrarian distress. In addition, as one woman stated, "we came here partly to send home money to help our families with farming. Without us working here, there is no hope for them."

The fields of force relating to migration within India thus favour urban over rural India and industry over agriculture, particularly service-oriented industries such as financial and IT-related services, which employ a small percentage of the total population. The very low or negative rates of growth in agriculture between 1991 and 2008 are indicative of a larger pattern in which marginal, small and middle farmers are being pushed out of owner-operated farming in favour of larger farms utilizing the latest transnational inputs.

In earlier years, such people often moved to cities like Mumbai and to shanty towns such as Janata Colony, as in the migration trajectory outlined by Davis (2006). However, migration figures from the 1991 and 2001 censuses indicate declining rates of migration to Mumbai island and increases in rural migration to edge cities like Thane and Bhiwandi, where textile and other industries have out-sourced production to small-scale units (MMRDA 2003: 2; Kundu 2003). Temporary migration between rural districts has also been on the increase (Sainath 2008a, 2008b; Kundu 2003). These migration patterns indicate the increasing phenomenon of rural "wage hunting and gathering" studied by Jan Bremen. Rural migrants are increasingly traveling not to cities, but to whatever temporary rural work is available, often organized by labor contractors and characterized by circuits of temporary shifts between "home" districts and those where seasonal work is on offer (Bremen 1996, 2003, 2005, 2007; Sainath, 2008a, 2008b). These fields of force are not conducive for Janata Colony residents to return to their parents' villages.

If one examines the fields of force relating to international migration, the patterns retaining many Janata Colony residents in absolute space are also evident. None of the first generation migrants from the eighty households interviewed were educated in English, but rather in Marathi, Konkani or Hindi medium schools. English-medium education possesses a colonial legacy that historically favored upper-caste, middle-class Hindus and is not even today available to the majority of working-class Mumbaikers. None of those interviewed possessed the requisite savings to pay for the preparation of visa documents, passports and fees, never mind international airline tickets. Indeed, most of the residents lacked the cultural capital for front-line work in the shopping malls, restaurants, and entertainment complexes sprouting up around them, since lack of fluency in English and other forms

of embodied distinction—dress and accent—mark them as not part of the cosmopolitan middle-class that are desired employees in such contexts.<sup>7</sup> Employment at call centers, in BPOs, or secretarial work in offices, was closed to them for similar reasons. In short, Janata Colony residents inhabit absolute space, with returning to villages a disheartening option, and the social and geographical mobility symbolized by transnational migration closed by their lack of the economic, social, and cultural capital.

In Janata Colony, no labor process enters directly into global circuits of capital accumulation. The *iddli* and *agarbati* producing households of Janata Colony exchange their goods and purchase inputs as micro-commodity producers, selling to an already segmented market that caters to the consumption of the city's middle class. Despite its commodification, domestic service is carried out for private families living in the nearby high-rises. It does not constitute productive labor because the latter is defined by work occurring within a value relation between capital and labor. Like domestic labor in the home, paid domestic service contributes to the reproduction of the value of the commodity-labor power of those salaried workers whose work occurs elsewhere. Hence, paid domestic service and micro-commodity production is indirectly linked to capital accumulation: cheaper goods and services of unorganized workers increase the consumption yield of wages of middle-class households (Portes 1993: 49). At the level of Mumbai's economy in general, the relatively low cost of such goods and services can be interpreted as a form of unequal exchange between the domestic and capitalist sectors which cheapens socially necessary labor time in Mumbai overall. On the other hand, the labor power of those who purchase these services exists in both absolute and relational space, and also, in the cases of transnational professionals working for financial firms and who account for many new residents of the Worli apartments, in relative space as well.

The other major form of livelihood in Janata Colony was contractual work in the construction industry, which experienced high rates of growth in Mumbai from 1996–2008. Real estate prices were among the highest in the world in south and central Mumbai from 1995–2009 (Nijman 2000; Whitehead 2007), while costs of construction material and labor were very low (Whitehead 2007). This followed Mumbai's rescaling into India's global financial center, specializing in financial and producer services, back-end office functions for multinationals, real estate, and the entertainment industry. The firms that employed construction workers from Janata Colony were Lokhandwala Builders and Hirandani Industries, specializing in high-rise residential apartments, with their head offices located in central Mumbai. India Bulls, a major developer of commercial real estate in Worli, also employed several men from Janata Colony.

The combination of labor, capital and means of production in the construction industry constitutes a classical value relation based on both absolute and relative surplus extraction and existing in both absolute and relational space-time. Hence, work in this sector subsumes both absolute

space related to the concrete labor of building and head-loading, relative space in that an exchange-value of the rental or sale price of housing or commercial stock is sold in the local market, and relational space and value in the sense that the exchangeability of the commodity produces both abstract labor and a value that is compared with other producers in the same sector. Since built-up real estate constitutes an immovable product, however, the comparison of its value composition across geographical scales is limited to Mumbai and, in terms of the location decisions of firms, to the national cost commensurations and locational advantages of Mumbai as India's financial capital in comparison with other cities in India.

None of the forms of livelihood in Janata Colony enters directly into global relational space, in the sense in which abstract labor is produced through commensuration between different forms of labor, technology, productivity and capital intensity across a global scale, although their labor-power exists potentially as such.<sup>8</sup> Hence, despite the fact that the majority of its inhabitants possess a photo-pass depicting their long residence and full citizenship in Mumbai, it can be expected that future pressure from real estate developers may intensify and that Janata Colony might find itself as a space of exclusion in the near future. The high and rising prices and rents for both residential and commercial real estate in Worli, situated adjacent to Mahim Bay, have already led to recent piece-meal evictions and subsequent gentrification despite the legal protection that long residence in a slum provides (Whitehead 2007).

## DHARAVI AND ITS EXPORT INDUSTRIES

The peripheral nature of labor-power in Janata Colony to processes of global value comparisons, however, is not true of work in all spaces of "informal settlement" in Mumbai. Dharavi, a "slum" of between 600,000 and about one million people in central Mumbai, is famous for its small-scale enterprises that produce directly for national and international markets (Sharma 2000).<sup>9</sup> Often referred to as Asia's largest "slum", and receiving recent notoriety through the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, Dharavi is also an established "slum colony", with an even longer history of migration and settlement than that of Janata Colony.<sup>10</sup> In the pre-colonial period, the area of Dharavi, situated near Mahim Creek between central and north Mumbai, was known as Koliwada. Like Janata Colony, it was also a fishing community inhabited by Kolis, whose lands were integrated into Mumbai Island through land-reclamation schemes in the nineteenth century. At that point, it occupied the northernmost edge of Mumbai, and was called Bombay. The new lands reclaimed from the sea offered "free" lands for incoming migrants. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, Muslim tanners from Tirunavelli District in Tamil Nadu migrated to Mumbai in search of work and set up the first small-scale leather tanneries (Sharma 2000: 90).



Although the tanneries were legally transferred in 1980 from Dharavi to Deonar for environmental reasons, a few still exist illegally in Dharavi.

However, the leather accessories industry, producing handbags, belts, wallets, and briefcases, has taken the place of the tanneries as Dharavi's largest industry, much of it oriented for export. Begun in the 1930s by low-caste Chamarkar migrants from Solapur and Satara in southeast Maharashtra, it was intended as an adjunct to the tanneries. Yet the Dharavi leather accessories industry, consisting today of about thirty-five large-scale firms, about 5,000 small-scale firms, and over 10,000 "jobbers", now produces 17 percent of India's leather accessories' exports. Leather manufacturing in Dharavi also supports about 500 small and medium traders involved either in the transportation and sale of finished hides, or providing linkages for leather manufacturers to national and international wholesalers. Recent employment growth in leather accessories exceeded other manufacturing industries in the past decade and the leather accessories industry has recently been identified as a "special-focus" area for national export-import liberalization incentives (Pais 2006). Most of the leather accessories industries are very small-scale, hiring ten or less workers, while the "jobbers" are one-person home-based industries that sometimes employ one other person (Sharma 2000: 88). While the industry was started by lower-caste Maharashtrian migrants in the 1930s, the majority of current workers in the leather industry are recent migrants to Mumbai from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Like Janata Colony residents, most found their first jobs through informal family, caste, and community networks (Pais 2006). Labor-contracts are short-term and paid on either a time or piece-rate basis, with the average monthly wage being slightly less than the minimum wage of 2105 Rs. per month, and with no accompanying job security, pensions or benefits (*ibid*). The exposure of this industry to the global market was evident in the worldwide economic downturn during the winter of 2009, during which the demand for leather exports decreased by 50 percent, and about 100,000 people were let go. Unlike Janata Colony residents, however, the recent migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar working in the leather accessories industry still retain strong linkages to their home villages and most returned home during the current downturn. Yet, they, too, like Janata Colony residents, lack the necessary economic, social and cultural capital for international migration.

Other small-scale industries in Dharavi that cater to an international market include gems and jewelry and the manufacture of surgical sutures for Johnson and Johnson. In these cases, labor-power in unorganized industries enters directly into a relational space in which productivity, socially necessary labor-time, and wages are directly compared internationally to produce abstract labor on a global scale. Labor in the leather-accessories industries constitutes both concrete labor in absolute space and relative labor-power in the commodity flows of the labor-market space of Mumbai. In addition, it also constitutes global relational labor that produces value and abstract labor

in the context of international market commensurations of value with other leather accessories industries in different parts of the world.

## CONCLUSION

The globalization of small-scale industries, of which the leather accessories industry in Dharavi is an important example, involves the fragmentation and division of absolute spaces and times, in terms of wages, benefits, and quality of life variations. By using the relative spaces of exchange and accumulation to divide the world into many absolute spaces of differential labor development, global capital has been able to absorb monopoly rents across local, national and global scales. Grant and Nijman have referred to this process as the hyper-differentiation of space economies, acutely visible in the urban centers of accumulation of emerging or emergent economies, such as Mumbai or Accra (Grant and Nijman 2004: 55). The fragmentation and differentiation of space, the hyper-mobility of capital across geographical scales, and the localization of labor in absolute space all raise the potential rate of surplus value extraction substantially. The absolute space of labor immobility here functions as a force of production (Swyngedeow 1992).

Post-liberalization Mumbai is characterized not by the increasing homogeneity of labor-power and labor-processes, but rather by its opposite: the increased production of heterogeneous and segmented labor processes. These labor processes are sometimes linked through diverse intermediations of mercantile exchange to global markets, but can also be partially delinked from them. In many of Mumbai's "slums", high levels of competition for available jobs, and the continuing importance of informal networks in jobs and housing, has produced segmented residential and occupational spaces that are, in turn, selectively reproduced and exaggerated by the nature of their relations to national and international capital. Rather than abandoning the search for how labor-power becomes equalized across heterogeneous conditions of production and differential absolute spaces,<sup>11</sup> the use of spatial-temporal frameworks enables an analysis of livelihoods in terms of differentiated and segmented markets of labor, capital, and means of production. In other words, the different spatio-temporalities of local, national and global scales of production emerge in this analysis as a set of concrete relations, avoiding hasty generalizations that see abstract labor arising solely from the transnational flow of commodities and investment capital (cf. Chakraborty 2000; Castree 2004). The formation of transnational exchange-value through financialization inhabits relative space, but not always relational space. It belongs to the realization phase of capital, rather than the production of value and surplus-value. As Marx puts it:

If we bear in mind that the value of commodities has a purely social reality, and that they acquire this reality only in so far as they are

expressions or embodiments of one identical social substance, viz., abstract labor, . . . value can only manifest itself in the (actual) social relation of commodity to commodity. (Marx 1976: 15)

Analysing labor-processes in terms of absolute, relative, and relational spaces can also avoid the opposite tendency, of viewing the empirical heterogeneity of labor-processes and self-employment as evidence that large parts of the global work-force are outside capitalism itself (Gibson-Graham 1996). In the analysis presented here, whether or not construction work, domestic service or leather accessories manufacture in central Mumbai are inside or outside value relations at various geographical scales depends on the nature of their linkages to circuits of production, exchange and consumption that also inhabit differentiated local, national and/or global scales of commensuration.

An analysis of space economies in terms of absolute, relative, and relational spaces can advance the examination of how labor-power, capital, and means of production are being decomposed and recombined within and between space economies at various spatial scales. In addition, the analysis of space economies can materially link the “preservation” or “destruction” of livelihoods and neighborhoods to the kinds of selective hegemonies that have emerged as the characteristic mode of “managing” surplus labor populations in the neoliberal period (Smith 2011). Selective hegemony, i.e. the targeting of specific populations for relief, benefits, or advancement, operates on the bases of differentiation and fragmentation, flows and enclosures, inclusion and exclusion (*ibid*). Since it is selective, rather than universalistic in its mode of functioning, it also presupposes a permanent outside or set of marginal populations (Chakraborty 2008, Smith 2011). For example, the leather workers of Dharavi, who are well-positioned in relation to global relational space in terms value chains, are being currently targeted by both state and central governments for industrial upgrading and export promotion. Mega-plans to develop Dharavi’s valuable real estate are currently floundering on the objections of owners of these small-scale industries. The residents of Janata Colony, however, because they do not enter into relational global spaces and currently live on extremely valuable land, constitute the excluded and marginal figures outside political economy *per se*, discussed by Smith (2010). Indeed, when I revisited Janata Colony in the spring of 2010, I found that the homes of about 250 families had been demolished and that piecemeal evictions of others had been frequent since 2005. Hence, their current position is vulnerable and their immediate past and probable future was and probably will be characterized by continuing revanchist political policies emanating from both the state and municipal governments (Whitehead 2007). Janata Colony residents are truly “matter out of place”.

The anthropology of transnationalism, perhaps because it has focused on labor migration, has been much concerned with flows, commodity chains, and hybridity. But by definition, the flows of labor and capital across the

globe focus on the relative and relational spaces of international financial, labor, and commodity comparisons. The attention upon labor and commodity flows has therefore tended to obscure its other: the lives and livelihoods of those fixed in absolute space, engaged in concrete labor, and tied down to specific places and localities in ways that make them terribly vulnerable to the differentiated space relations that have become a characteristic appendage to the hyper-mobility of capital.

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## NOTES

1. In India, the term historically used for work that is marked by lack of labor and other standards, ease of entry, family-based, small-scale enterprises, is “unorganized sector”, in contrast to the “organized sector”. It also includes agricultural work, including family farming. More recently, the Indian government has changed the definition to bring it in line with ILO guidelines, so that the terms “informal sector” and “unorganized sector” are interchangeable (Sengupta 2007).
2. In India, the unorganized sector is defined as unregulated employment that requires little capital input to start, includes self-employment in the service industry, or petty commodity production, or involves work in small industries employing less than fifty people, and includes agriculture.
3. It is difficult to categorize India’s economy currently: often it is referred to as an emerging or rising economy, however, I have chosen the word emergent to indicate its present prominence in the global economy.
4. There is not enough space in this chapter to discuss the current modernist/post-modernist debate on Mumbai’s “slums”, with modernists such as Mike Davis stressing that slums represent apocalyptic structures with poor sanitation, hygiene and services, while post-modernists such as Srivastava argue that Mumbai’s slums are really habitable village-like structures that have grown organically over the past century (Davis 2006; Srivastava 2009; Bremen 2007). However, Janata Colony’s appearance is closer to the organic, village model discussed by Srivastava than the dystopic vision presented by Davis. Courtyards, a Hindu temple, a small Catholic church, and gutters and drains had been built and maintained by residents. Houses have been improved and renovated over the past decades, with some inhabitants investing as much as 100,000 Rs. in home renovations. Gutters were invariably clean, and a community well had also been built by its inhabitants. Janata Colony therefore seems a perfect candidate for *in situ* improvements in sanitation, sewerage, toilets, and water supply, rather than one requiring the wholesale redevelopment being demanded by builders and real estate companies eyeing Janata Colony’s prime location next to the Worli Sea Face.

5. This has increased to Rs. 7,000 in 2010, due to price inflation and the banning of street hawking and local markets in south and central Mumbai, from which most Janata Colony residents previously provisioned their households.
6. VRS is short for Voluntary Retirement Scheme. It refers to the payments that ex-textile mill workers received after they lost their jobs in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although these payments were substantial, often amounting to several lakhs, many interviewed stated that they had to wait between five and ten years to receive them.
7. The exclusion of Marathi speakers from front-line work in the new entertainment and shopping complexes in central Mumbai led the Shiv Sena to protest against English-language preferences of employers and to set up employment training for Marathi youth that focused upon language, dress, and manners.
8. Rafferty and Bryant (2006) argue that financial derivatives have taken on some of the functions of global money, allowing corporations to commensurate value and risk worldwide. However, this would only apply to investments in which concrete labor is being activated through the market to produce global abstract labor and value, as in the out-sourcing industry. For Marx, value and abstract labor were both invisible, but nevertheless real social categories that were produced through innumerable acts of exchange in the market. They were abstractions from the different concrete labor, finding a material expression in a universal equivalent, i.e. money. If the social relations of commodity exchange and capital/labor relations are not present, then it seems impossible to talk of “abstract labor” existing, in reality, in slums, but only of its potential.
9. A conservative estimate of the value of exports produced in Dharavi is US \$500 million per year. Others put the estimate closer to US \$1 billion. Accurate figures on Dharavi are difficult to come by: there has not yet been an official census of either the population or the building structures in Dharavi (Chatterji 2005; *The Economist* Jan. 27, 2005: 28).
10. Information on Dharavi’s leather accessories industry has been gained mainly through secondary sources. Because Dharavi has received a great deal of attention from scholars, activists, developers and planners, I decided to focus my research on a less well-studied “slum” colony. However, its case is important for the argument presented in this chapter.
11. Indeed, it was difficult to find any work that deals explicitly with commensuration of value, understood in Marxian terms, across “segmented” and differentiated labor markets and processes, with the exception of Bowles and Gintis (1977). Since Marx assumed that value commensuration to produce abstract labor occurred only within a national economy, and that the major form of commensuration was a reduction from complex to simple labor, value theorists have generally been unable to account for differences in wages, productivity, quality of life variations embedded in the socially-necessary labor times produced previously on a national scale. However, where labor-power is directly involved in producing goods and services for an international market, it is clear that such commensuration is actually taking place, aided by the use of derivative instruments (Bryant and Rafferty 2006).

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# 11 Ghostly Figures Outside the Domain of Political Economy

## Class Analysis and the Invisibilized Livelihoods of an Andean Export Zone

*Christopher Krupa*

Anthropologists working in the Marxist tradition today continue to be vexed by attempts to apply Marx's conception of class to the study of livelihoods not fully subsumed under industrial production regimes nor indeed to any single or identifiable production regime. Critics skeptical of Marx's applicability to contemporary social formations have argued that his theoretical elaboration of class is inextricably bound to the historical and geographic conditions of its production. That is to say, this conception, based on the subsumption of labor to capital and the former's transfer of surplus-value to the latter is specific to Western Europe in the mid-to-late 1800s. These critiques and the troublesome applications force confrontations with the question of what class analysis might refer to in those economies where wage labor is not universal and where society is not clearly bifurcated into capitalist and proletariat or landlord and serf. Such contexts include individual and household economies that are forged around heterodox, shifting, and flexible livelihood practices. They also include contexts in which the source of value is difficult to determine such as in the service sector, informal economy, and home-based enterprises as well as livelihoods sustained by large sectors of the population who live precariously as the disposable cast-offs of economic rationality.

Such problematics have complicated the relationship between anthropology and Marxism for decades. But assessing Marx's contribution to an analysis of contemporary livelihoods starts with clarifying the more fundamental question of whether we read Marx's notion of class as referring primarily to a (logical) relation, one structuring all relations of production, or a to a (historical, content-oriented) social population, such as *the* working or middle class/es of a particular setting. To take the former position means that we treat class analysis as devoted to mapping the relations that form around the production and appropriation of a surplus. The nature of that surplus is conditioned by what in a given social formation is considered to be a major source of value. "Class" here is the (necessarily binary and dichotomous) relation effected by the transfer of value. The capital-labor



opposition that appears central in Marx's work is thus treated as an idealized form of the relation posited when labor-power is the dominant source of value. The latter position, by contrast, starts with what the former treats merely as effects—human groups similarly positioned in a social arrangement by the conditions of its reproduction. It asks about the terms of that population's existence—its homogeneity versus heterogeneity—and of the boundaries and forms of solidarity and affiliation that distinguish it from other populations. Different forms of value transfer provide maps for untangling that population's means of social reproduction.

My goal in this chapter is not to argue that one of these interpretations represents a more faithful reading of Marx than the other. For as Bertell Ollman (paraphrasing Vilfredo Pareto) long ago suggested, Marx's words appear to us quite often like bats—"one can see in them both birds and mice" (Ollman 1971: 3). But for anthropologists, concerned with the vistas opened up into lived social realities by the concepts we import into them, it does matter, however, whether we think we are looking to the skies or to the earth when tracking the determinate forces underlying how the people we meet in the field get by. These different understandings of class direct us to different research agendas, different field methodologies, and different guiding questions, through which different sorts of social constellations come into view. I want to suggest here that Marx himself proposes important directions for working through this impasse in class analysis, a different framework for studying livelihood production in the world today than that suggested by either a strictly relational or population-based theory of class production. I find this lead in the collection of rough notes assembled posthumously as the *Economic and Political Manuscripts of 1844*—the basis of what would later appear as the *Grundrisse* and form the terrain on which *Capital* was penned. I discuss what I take to be a critical insight found in these notes before pursuing their implications for the study of non-standard livelihoods in a part of highland Ecuador where I have carried out fieldwork since the mid-1990s. The lead opened up by Marx, as we shall see, pushes for a critical scrutiny not only of the sorts of economic opportunities opened and closed to people around the world, but also of the ways the analytical categories we draw upon to understand them might collude in the structuring of such possibilities.

## OF CATEGORIES AND THE GHOSTS THAT HAUNT THEM

As one of the key texts in what is considered Marx's "early" works, the 1844 Manuscripts clarify the importance of Hegelian phenomenology to the development of Marx's critique of capitalist society and to the concepts he developed for that critique. Central to this is a concern with the production of objectivity and of appearance, of the objective forms through which reality appears and is made manifest to people living in a particular social assemblage. Like

Hegel, Marx seeks to expose the illusory nature of things-as-such, of objects existing apart from the human conditions of their realization, and to posit this externalization as the fundamental basis for all experiences of alienation. As Marx (1963: 137) notes early in the Second Manuscript, because “labor and capital are alien to each other, and thus related only in an external and accidental manner, this alien character must *appear* in reality”. Hegel’s efforts to recompose the dialectical co-production of subject and object turn, in Marx’s work, into an elaboration of the social relations at once internally composing, and yet obscured by, the object’s objective presence—“things” being merely abstractions (i.e. reifications, and thus obfuscations) of their relations with other things, as his famous discussion of commodity fetishism would later reveal. This “philosophy of internal relations” is central to Marx’s understanding of class (Olman 1971). While capital and labor *need* to appear alien to one another to enable capital to function, they are actually dialectically bound and mutually constitutive of one another. Speaking of tenant farmers on landed property, Marx (1963: 140, second emphasis added) notes that “the tenant is the representative, the revealed *secret*, of the landowner. *Only through him does the landowner have an economic existence*, existence as a property owner,” despite the appearance of that existence being borne exclusively of the latter’s relationship to land (which is itself only realized in its productive existence through this third relationship to the tenant). As the form of value animating these relationships, rent is the force that calls forth these class relations, indeed these modes of *existence*, as bearing any economically recognizable form.

These examples suggest the more relational mode of class analysis outlined at the start of this chapter. It reads the emergence of classes-as-populations out of the logic of value and not vice versa, a methodology Marx outlined quite specifically thirteen years later in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.<sup>1</sup> What seems to be left unaddressed, however, is the relationship between the *economic* existence of the landowner, tenant, or what have you, and their apparently “non-economic” modes of existence, the gap between the categories they come to occupy in a set of class relations and the productive practices and relations that escape those categories—something we might consider as their more fully historical composition as human agents. These are the things that anthropologists concerned with class need to worry about and which may have great bearing on what we take livelihood, in its full sense, to mean.

It is on this point that the Manuscripts offer their most surprising insight. In a fragment reflecting on labor’s emergence as private property for capital, Marx abruptly shifts his tone and changes the scale of his analysis to reflect on the very impression of reality a faith in such categorical abstractions might imply:

Political economy . . . does not recognize the un-occupied worker, the working man so far as he is outside [the] work relationship. Swindlers,

thieves, beggars, the unemployed, the starving, poverty-stricken and criminal working man, are figures which do not exist for political economy, but only for other eyes; for doctors, judges, grave-diggers, beadles, etc. *They are ghostly figures outside the domain of political economy.* (Marx 1963: 138, emphasis added)

What is the significance to Marx and for our thinking about class analysis of training the eye on these ghostly figures?

At issue for Marx, on the one hand, is the question of how laboring populations sustain themselves (or do not) when not employed. His point here is to state quite clearly that even those who, at any one moment, may be living entirely from wage labor, at another moment, may not be. The modes of dispossession implied by creating a formally free labor force imply too that when opportunities for full-time waged work close up, other opportunities for getting by may fall well outside the recognizably “economic” domain of activity befitting a working population and thereby come to be characterized as criminal, illicit, and fatalistic. But these activities too, Marx suggests, are very often part of the life trajectory and class process of those considered a formal proletariat and may even combine with waged work (as an earlier discussion of this topic suggests)<sup>2</sup> when wages are depressed below levels of subsistence.

The second issue pushes this point further still. Marx is here drawing attention to the ways that human beings become visible to capital only through their inscription into the categories it calls into being. Marx (1904: 302) developed this scrutiny of dominant modes of categorization further in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, noting that:

In the study of economic categories, as in the case of every historical and social science, it must be borne in mind that as in reality so in our mind the subject, in this case modern bourgeois society, is given and that the categories are therefore but forms of expression, manifestations of existence, and frequently but one-sided aspects of this subject, this definite society.

Reflecting on the significance of this passage, Ollman (1971: 12) remarks that:

What is unusual in Marx’s statement is the special relation he posits between categories and society. Instead of being simply a means for describing capitalism (neutral vehicles to carry a particular story), these categories are declared to be “forms,” “manifestations” and “aspects” of their own subject matter . . . the story itself is thought to be somehow part of the very concepts with which it is told.

As one of these major categories (an “abstract one-sided relation of an already given concrete and living aggregate” [Marx 1904: 294]) acting in

the story, the class location “labor” cannot be considered merely by logically recomposing the aggregate from which it is extracted (i.e. in tracing the ways value transfers dialectically constitute the labor-capital binary) or through a historically-situated account of the composition of this population (i.e. as a historic unity). Rather, we need to unpack the capacities of the former to affect the latter, to see, in other words, the capacity for relational categories assembled around value-transfers to actually *make* populations and determine their fates. To do this, the capital-labor opposition has to be considered as not simply an economic arrangement predicated on the accumulation of surplus-value, but also an ideological claim (i.e. one that says “this is all there is for you, or else”) and a political project (i.e. making that enforceable) which undergird the overall reproduction of capitalist society as a whole.

These ghostly figures—the unemployed, thieves, beggars, and swindlers—disrupt the sense of objective realism transmitted by economic forms. They expose the ongoing work that capital must perform in order for waged labor to *appear* to be the only domain of valued economic activity for the working classes, even as it produces surplus populations from whom it cannot directly reap value and thus casts off to other “extra-economic” realms of administration. As Marx’s discussion of British capital’s “quite logical” decision to deduct from wages its own contributions to the poor house alms suggests, however, these invisible figures (and the sites of their “extra-economic” absorption) remain absolutely central to the actual regeneration of labor and capital, particularly in enabling the latter to expand its productive capacity at the expense of the latter.

Marx’s de-invisibilization of the spectral figures of working class lives offers a sharp critique not only of the categories of knowledge produced by capital but also of the researchers (here, the “political economists” of his era such as Proudhon, Mill, and Ricardo) who take those categories as natural, organic elements of the social landscape they are trying to explain. This critique can be found throughout the entire corpus of Marx’s writing but here, in the Second Manuscript, it suggests a complicity between capital and those who confine their investigations into the “economic” to that which transpires in waged settings, furthering the former’s efforts to make the full spectrum of work and productive self-realization appear monopolized by the relations capital itself constitutes as a condition of profit. But there is a whole world out there, Marx suggests, of livelihood options and categories of displacement that surround, support, and haunt the primary wage nexus and binary class structure, which must be addressed if we are to fully understand how working class lives are actually lived and unraveled, how people actually get by or don’t, even in advanced capitalist societies. In what follows, I pick up this challenge by examining, on the one hand, the construction of waged labor as the exclusive economic option open to people living in the midst of a rapidly expanding export sector in highland Ecuador and, on the other, some of the forms of livelihood invisibilized by the hegemony of the wage.

## AN ECUADORIAN ECONOMY OF APPEARANCES

At the start of the twenty-first century, the municipal government in the city of Cayambe billed the canton under its jurisdiction (also called Cayambe) as the only region in Ecuador to have achieved full employment and to function as a labor-receiving, not labor-sending center—a remarkable achievement for a country where official unemployment rates reached 10.9 percent and in 2001 and where remittances from labor migrants were threatening to overtake oil as the main contributor to the GNP (INEC 2001). Owing nothing to state practice and everything to the unrestricted expansion of private capital, Cayambe had grown in less than two decades from a rather quiet rural hub of dairy production into the country's most important zone of export rose production. Between 1985 and 1991, national revenues from flower exports grew by 3,153 percent, from \$526,000 US to \$16,584,000, and continued to rise in the next decade, from \$193,848,080 in 2000 to \$340,808,430 in 2004. An estimated two-thirds of this revenue was attributed to roses, the majority of which were grown in Cayambe (Waters 2000: 298; Expoflores 2005; 2001).

A number of factors contributed to Cayambe's rapid transformation: Ecuador's proximity to Colombia, the pioneer of Latin American rose growing and cold-chain transport networks to US markets; Cayambe's short distance (70 km) to the capital city of Quito and its international airports; a long history of training Ecuadorian commercial agronomists overseas; the region's high altitude (averaging 2200 meters) and perfect diurnal variation, producing optimal growing conditions for commercial roses; neoliberal pressures to orient national development around export expansion; international agencies looking to finance such ventures on the grounds of poverty alleviation, job creation, and "non-traditional" export promotion throughout Latin America; and so on. But perhaps most important in this region's turn to flower growing was the local history of land relations it was striving to overcome.

From the mid-1600s up through the 1970s, Cayambe was occupied, top to bottom, by agrarian estates (*haciendas*) growing produce and raising wool for primarily domestic markets. Work on these estates was organized around a resident peon system known as *huasipungaje*, which gave workers (*huasipungueros*) usufruct rights to land for a house and subsistence in exchange for ideally five (sometimes more, sometimes less) days of the entire family's time working for the landowner (the *hacendado*). As part of the prolonged colonial occupation of the central Andes, hacienda bondage became, in places like Cayambe, the only way that most indigenous families could access productive land of any sort. Consequently, *huasipungaje* and indigeneity came to imply one another to such an extent that poor non-indigenous families of rural towns worried about falling into debt not simply for its economic implications but also for fear that having to turn to haciendas for work would effect their status slippage into indigenous identity (see Krupa 2011).

While the conditions of life and work on haciendas have been amply discussed elsewhere (c.f. Guerrero 1977), it bears noting that what is often called the imbalanced “reciprocal pact” forged between *hacendado* and *huasipunguero* was elaborate and included, alongside the work-for-land exchange, such things as the landowner’s annual gifts of grain to huasipungo families and protection from state-orchestrated labor drafts on the one hand, and workers’ “rights” to glean firewood and water from hacienda lands and access to pasture on the other. It was these ever-expanding relations of resource transfer and dependency, of rights and obligations beyond the work-for-land nexus, that many feel contributed to even the most conservative landowners’ temperate acceptance of agrarian reform laws passed in 1964 and 1973 (c.f. Barsky 1988). These reforms, with varying degrees of success, aimed to form indigenous “peasant” communities out of the haciendas. This started by giving resident workers title to their huasipungos and making them smallholders and political “citizens” for the first time, mandating their participation in various new forms of state regulation of rural domains (as property holders, taxpayers, petitioners for state services, voting members of their communities, etc. See Krupa 2010: 333–336). State-owned haciendas (expropriated from religious orders in 1908 and rented out in successive eight-year contracts) were turned over to workers in their entirety; private owners of haciendas were allowed to retain up to 1,000 hectares of their original land, a limit regularly surpassed by the common practice of title-splitting among elite family members.

It was the descendents of these private hacendados who would start turning their lands, those retained from expropriation under the reforms, over to rose production in the mid-1980s or start selling them off to others who would (after experiments with dairy production proved less lucrative than hoped). At the turn of the twenty-first century, 120 flower enterprises operated in Cayambe, with somewhere between 1,000 and 1,500 hectares under direct production.<sup>3</sup> Rose bushes produce an average of seventy flowers per square meter, clipped cyclically so that their stems produce budding flowers at high points in market sales (like Valentine’s Day and Mothers Day), each taking around eighty days to reach maturity. Flower growing is thus an especially intensive form of industrial agriculture. Labor administrators in flower plantations generally reported needing between ten and fifteen workers per hectare (including all technical and administrative staff), meaning that between 10,000 and 22,500 people in Cayambe were directly employed on local flower plantations in those years. This is a striking figure for a canton with an economically active population reported to be 29,101 in 2001 (INEC 2001).

Most of these labor requirements were filled by indigenous people living in the communities created out of the reforms. Approximately 113 communities in Cayambe owe their origins to this process, with another seven continuing from their origin in the pre-reform years, all encircling the flower plantations as if formed as labor reserves for them, and extending up into

the Andean mountains where plantation busses travel daily. It is generally true that lower altitude communities tend to rely more on labor in the flower sector than higher communities, where greater land availability,<sup>4</sup> more irrigation water,<sup>5</sup> and greater distance from labor markets make peasant farming a more viable contributor to household incomes. But even in the high altitude peasant community of Carrera, where I lived for most of 2001 and 2002, a survey conducted in the middle of this period revealed that 162 people, roughly half its adult population, worked in the flower sector. The other half, I discovered, generally had at some point in their life worked in the plantation economy or would soon find their way there.

And yet waged employment has been part of rural livelihood patterns since the dissolution of the haciendas, despite still-existing official categorizations of community structures as fully “peasant” and “agrarian” in nature. Dairy production (what private haciendas turned to before flowers) has notoriously low labor demands and households looking to supplement their newfound smallholder status with employment income generally sent members into the urban construction boom and oil pipeline projects undertaken by the developmentalist governments of the 1970s. These labor routines, for the most part, were incorporated into a heterodox assemblage of economic practices that reproduced rural and “peasant” livelihoods, what Waters and Buttel (1987) called “differentiation without de-peasantization”. Peter Peek’s (1982: 138) study of this process showed that while off-farm waged work increased dramatically in indigenous communities after the reforms (from 20 percent of income in 1962 to 62 percent in 1974), “the rate of permanent rural emigration did not increase,” but rather “seems to have declined after land reform was introduced” (see also Schroeder 1987; Korovkin 1997; Waters 1997).

This point—that waged employment opportunities do not automatically overtake peasant livelihoods and may in fact help stabilize them—is by now well accepted among rural scholars and has contributed to a general rejection of progressivist teleologies projecting the inevitability of capitalist transformation in areas where labor routines are introduced. But such understandings have not had much effect on the ways that agents of this transformation tend to frame their projects. Cayambe’s flower/labor boom has occasioned a discourse of regional transformation that posits plantation wages as the primary source of livelihood for the entire canton. Neptalí Bonifaz, Ecuador’s self-proclaimed first flower grower, inheritor of part of the largest hacienda in Cayambe (called Guachalá), and plantation owner put it in the following terms when I tried to ask him about his workers’ subsistence farming methods:

**NB:** This doesn’t exist. It doesn’t exist. Self-sustenance hasn’t existed for thirty years.

**CK:** But it contributes to the sustainability . . .

**NB:** Look, I can show you figures that show [shouting over me] less than eight percent of peasants’ income is from agriculture,

LESS THAN EIGHT PERCENT! Peasants don't live from food that they produce, but rather from the market, from participating in the market! We're crazy thinking in these terms, as if this were Central America, as if it's Guatemala! No! Ecuador is another thing entirely. Look. Everyone has cooking gas. Go walk around Central America and see if anyone has gas.<sup>6</sup>

By "market," Bonifaz is of course referring primarily to the labor market, the market he himself takes considerable credit for inaugurating in Cayambe. Claims such as Bonifaz's are often enveloped in an even grander salvation narrative that congratulates the industry for rescuing rural society, through wages, from misery, degradation, and social disarticulation. As industry representative Hernán Chiriboga Cordovéz wrote in a letter to the *New York Times* (March 3, 2002), protesting the negative image the flower sector received in a story the previous day: "Flower production has improved the living conditions of thousands of people in Ecuador and is the only activity in the highlands that offers an alternative to emigration".

At other times, waged work is presented as still engaged in a sort of final showdown with peasant agriculture, framed as a conflict between progress and archaicism, futurity and fatality. As plantation labor manager Vicente Sánchez explained to an indigenous worker from Carrera who was fired after missing a day of work on TerraNova Farms to attend a mandatory *minga* (community work project, in this case to upgrade its irrigation canals):

Go home and tell your [community] president that *he* lost you your job. Tell him he has to realize that people don't live from *mingas* or the community or the little water going to your little lands: people live from work, from wages—this, the flowers, is work!

Plantation owners and administrators often framed their position in this showdown in nationalistic terms, as a mission not simply to make profits but also to *hacer patria* or build a proper nation or homeland, in Cayambe, a region whose history of hacienda enclosures, peasant communities, and indigenous federations was imagined by these urban professionals to position it somewhere off the map of national space-time. Wage earnings, capitalist work routines, and participation in a global commodity chain were all considered by these professionals to be transformative and incorporative devices, vehicles of progress certainly, but also more accurate descriptions of how indigenous society was reproducing itself and imagining its (decidedly post-peasant) future. "I have a bus that goes up to Carrera," Bonifaz told me in 2002, "that brings down people from Carrera, and in three months they're *experts* . . . in three months they're not working for me anymore, but rather they go to other plantations where perhaps they pay better



... for them this is freedom.” Bonifaz continued his speculative mapping of indigenous desire: “For them, it’s freedom to . . . live in Cayambe [the city] and have a television and access to the cinema or discotheque or a video store, this is a lot more free than to live in Carrera and not have anything . . . This sense of liberty is the mission of flower growers”.

I have discussed elsewhere (Krupa 2010) how this dominant projection of Cayambe as an incipient capitalist totality was built upon a heated political antagonism between advocates of a neoliberal political economy (represented by the flower growers) and its opponents (represented by the indigenous sector that in 2001 and 2002 was the leading force behind a collective anti-neoliberal front). The forms of work discipline used in the flower plantations were imagined as techniques of political and moral pedagogy, sites where new ways of valuing certain activities and rewards were to be learned and which might disarticulate workers from the communities and the pro-peasant, anti-neoliberal political projects they participated in. Sánchez described his role as a labor manager as primarily one devoted to “trying to make people more sensible, more intelligent—and this comes by valuing *real* work. The [indigenous] protests that happen, happen because people don’t have a true consciousness”. Consciousness-raising started, as Sánchez explained to the unfortunate worker he fired, by a shift in one’s relation to appearances, or of how one reads the relationship between appearance and reality. Peasant communities may still exist, his admonition states, and suggest the possibility for getting by with irrigation water, subsistence farming, and collective decision-making structures, but waged labor is in reality the only livelihood option open to the categorically unskilled indigenous occupants of rural Ecuador—something anyone with the proper consciousness can clearly see. And so the one thing seeming to distinguish a fully proletarianized workforce from a peasant or simple commodity producer—full dispossession from the forces of production—was rendered moot, owing, as Bonifaz clarified, to its near-total unproductivity. Rural industrialization was not to be seen as itself responsible for that decline, in its aggressive monopolization of productive resources, but as the salvation that comes along in its wake to rescue the detritus from total abandonment. “Freedom,” as an index of the latter, displaces its production by the former (as dispossession). Those who don’t yet realize this latter sense of freedom as their destiny—the fired worker and his lot—will have to learn their lesson the hard way, existing outside the terms of economic legibility, scrounging to get by, and becoming one of those ghostly figures outside the domain of political economy.

I want to turn now to examining two of these figures of invisibility, two sorts of lives lived and livelihoods patterned within the export sector that are both at once impossible in the dominant framework offered above and yet absolutely essential to its reproduction. The first of these occurs at the center of the peasant community, the second in the heart of the plantation economy.

### FIGURATION 1: THE SEQUESTERED SHEEP

I spent the better part of 2001 and 2002 living with the extended family of Gerónimo Lanchimba and Rosa Pilca in the highland community of Carrera, about forty-five minutes by bus from the city of Cayambe and about twenty minutes away from the start of the plantation sector. Gerónimo was at the time the administrator of the largest peasant water council of the region and received a salary from a local NGO. Rosa oversaw the family lands, about five hectares distributed between three sections (a remnant of the hacienda micro-verticality system), which at any one time were devoted to different combinations of commercial onions, potatoes, basic grains (wheat and barley), and pasture. Their daughter Elvia, in her mid-twenties, and her husband Andrés lived with the family and both, before their son Iván was born, worked short stints in flower plantations and which they very regrettably returned to at times when temporary income was needed. Their son Segundo built a house on his parents' land and he and his wife Rosario were continuously experimenting with just about any project local NGOs seemed to be providing funds for or any job they were hiring people to help coordinate. Gerónimo and Rosa's other child, Diego, attended high school in the city of Otavalo. The usually unnoticed and unspoken-to other member of the household, Rosa's mother of incalculable age—generally just called *abuela*, or grandmother—is the subject of this story.

In October 2001 I returned home late one night from work in the plantations to find the entire family sitting around the cooking fire in the kitchen, as usual, but laughing hysterically at the *abuela*, who knelt by the fire, stirring a pot of soup with an impish grin on her face. The *abuela* had spent the day, also as usual, pasturing the twenty-five or so sheep owned by the family, moving between the family's three plots of land and collecting firewood along the way. Today went somewhat differently. The region was just coming out of a long drought and people were taking advantage of the rains to plant more commercial onions than usual, leaving little land anywhere for pasture. In an effort to feed the sheep, the *abuela* had walked very slowly between plots, through the forests of a private hacienda called Candalaria, and was unexpectedly caught by its attendant, who she called the *huasi cama* (see below), who managed to capture one of her sheep and hold it ransom as a kind of ad hoc trespassing charge. If she wanted the sheep back, she was told she would have to return every day the following week and work a *minga* for the hacienda, which the entire family agreed she had better do. I went with the *abuela* to the hacienda the next morning and found two other people there, both from the community of Carrera, both trying to get their sheep back. Similar pressures to find pasture had put them in the same bind as our *abuela*. Their work, it turned out, involved doing odd jobs on a ½-hectare plot of onions—the exact sort of thing their family members were doing back home.

The setting of this exchange is itself interesting. Hacienda systems were dissolved in the highlands thirty years prior—the word itself refers to an enterprise form that no longer exists. Privately owned haciendas in Cayambe are thought to have existed only in the low-lying parts of the Cayambe basin or to have kept only their low-lying portions (thought to be more productive and close to markets) after the reforms. The term “huasi cama” is Quichua for “caretaker of the house,” traditionally used to refer to the indigenous servant assigned to do domestic work in the hacienda manor. This was most often occupied by women whose work was expected to be surrendered as a condition of their male household head’s granting of a huasipungo. The term, as with the entire system, is essentially anachronistic in the post-hacienda age.

But the story gets even more complicated still. Though on hacienda land, the onion patch didn’t belong to its owners, who lived in Quito, but to the “huasi cama,” a young man named José Imbaquingo, who is a member of the neighboring community also called Candalaría. José’s father was a huasipunguero on the hacienda before it was divided up in the 1970s during the Agrarian Reforms, with the expropriated 256 hectares of its original 366 being now the community of the same name. José has worked as the “huasi cama”—guard and all-around tender—of the hacienda for fourteen years, living in a dilapidated shack offset from the bright orange-painted manor house, without water or electricity, receiving \$35 a month in stipend (at a time when minimum wage was \$120) and the right to use 1 hectare of land for his own purposes—conditions resembling huasipungaje of previous decades. Denied irrigation for his hectare from the local peasant water commissions—who categorized the land as belonging to a “hacienda” and thus outside its terms—he says he can only maintain a half hectare in production—and even then, at times like these, only by enforcing the loosely observed no trespassing rule and holding the sheep of itinerant grazers ransom in exchange for work. This process of landowning becoming the basis for rule-making is exactly the sort of bind that older members of the “free” communities existing before the agrarian reforms described to me as the fallacy of their greater freedom from hacienda bondage than huasipungueros. Since haciendas controlled all sources of water and firewood, eventually everyone ended up having to work for the hacienda in exchange for access to the basic necessities of running a peasant household in the Andes.

With his conditions so deplorable, why stay on here, I asked José: “One has to finish what one starts, no?” he replied. I didn’t press him to explain this, to disclose what sorts of internal pressures within his own family or community encouraged this staying on, or what expected returns from the hacienda compelled him to not abandon this miserable task. I’m not even sure what he was expecting to finish. But with the grandmother working as temporarily indentured labor on something called a “hacienda,” with José acting through affiliation with large land as the arbiter of property rights and the judicial state, I couldn’t help but be struck by how dislodged

from history this whole scene of unequal reciprocity seemed—a most complicated reproduction, in the heart of the transnational export production zone, of the structuring logic that dominated highland society from the late colonial period up through the 1960s.

And things don't just end there. Word of our sequestered sheep spread fast through the region. At 5 a.m. on the first morning of the abuela's duties, a few members of our extended family showed up at our house, announcing their presence with the soft call from the dark of "se puede . . . ?" (literally, "may I . . .," but meaning more like "hello, could you please come to the door?"). Everyone knows that paying back a trespassing charge comes with the attendant right to graze sheep freely on hacienda land while working—another residual expectation of hacienda bondage. Distant cousins in other communities also suffering from the lack of pasture arrived asking us to slip *their* sheep into *our* flock for the week, a service that they agreed to pay for in work for *us*. Geronimo, calling this euphemistically a *presta-mano*, (or "lending a hand"), decided on the spot that it was a good time to put an extension on the house and harvest some potatoes and so, for the week, various cousins, their cousins, and all their children poured concrete, laid stones, dug our fields, and went home each day with a small basket of potatoes and well fed sheep. One cousin even decided to leave a female sheep of hers with us in "*partidaria*," meaning we would feed her sheep until it became pregnant and split the offspring evenly.

I want to hold on to this image of the sequestered sheep, a condensed symbol of the at-once residual and yet still-emergent micro-hacienda relations that linger on and send very sparse ripples of indentured, indebted, and reciprocal relations across the so-called peasant highlands, as I turn to the other side of this divide.

## FIGURATION 2: THE CONTRATISTAS, OR, THE GHOSTS OF LABOR PRESENT

The second case I want to look at takes us into the flower plantations and has us peering under the rather formal veneer of waged relations that structure the economic and political project of agribusiness and *haciendo patria* in Cayambe. One expression of the patriotic mission of flower growers is their propensity to write rather elaborate contracts for their workers, citing in them extensive national laws about labor rights (including salaries, overtime, uniform provisions, etc.), the documents needed to prove eligibility of employment (national identity cards, voters' registration certificates, military service documents for men, proof of non-pregnancy for women, proof of primary education), and the terms that allow for legal dismissal—a showy display less of the state's power over industry than of industry's claim to having absorbed the very functions and regulatory principles of State itself (see Krupa 2010). Although growers have found a number of

ways around these laws, during my research the majority of workers in the greenhouses, packing rooms, fumigation, transportation, and kitchen signed such contracts.

But a large number of the plantations I studied also drew personnel through men called *contratistas*, or “contractors,” who were called upon to assemble teams of workers to perform specific short-term jobs that fall outside the routine tasks of flower production—such as repairing greenhouses, digging and preparing the soil for new ones, hauling out dead rose plants when new varieties are to be grown, digging irrigation trenches, and so on—all things that require little more than brute force. A *contratista* is offered a specific sum of money to complete a set task and it is up to him to get it done however possible—meaning finding workers, deciding how many are required, what each will earn, getting each worker to the plantation, loaning tools, and so on. I came to know a number of these *contratistas* well and they all fit a fairly standard profile.

Contractors are generally men in their late forties and live in Cayambe’s southern parish capitals (Otón, Ascazubi, Cusubamba), those areas of the canton from which men first and most aggressively migrated to Quito in search of waged work after the agrarian reforms. Contractors entered the construction boom of the 1970s initially as labor recruiters, bringing people from the emerging communities in their area to work on infrastructure projects in Quito. They were able to bid especially low on these projects, a recruiter named Marciel Moscera told me, because they were selling the labor-power of rural peasants who at the time “would take just about any work” at any price. It was also believed that rural indigenous people would be able to wait out the inevitable lapses in construction that plagued these projects (due to material shortages, changing governments, shifting capital, etc.) because they lacked the pocket money for transport home. These contractors were then able to simply transfer their knack at contracting construction workers and the networks they used to do so into the flower sector when it started to develop in the late 1980s. Often the connections were more intimate. Many of Ecuador’s flower growers come from a group of wealthy families who, whether they used to be hacendados or not, accumulated considerable capital by opening construction companies during the years of the agrarian reforms and oil boom. When they started their flower companies, many of these elites drew on their past connections with labor contractors to acquire the labor-power needed to build their plantations. Many of today’s *contratistas* have long histories of working for a particular flower grower, bringing workers first to his construction projects in Quito and later to his flower plantation in Cayambe.

The *contratista*’s workers also fit a fairly identifiable profile. *Contratista* teams are made up of people who fall well outside the image held by management of any ideal regular laborer. Among them we find the very old and the very young, minors whom it would be illegal to formally employ and elders who would be seen as a liability. We also exclusively find people

identifying as peasants, and coming from a select number of low-lying indigenous communities in the southern part of Cayambe (where land is dryer and, as mentioned, whose members have had a longer involvement with wage labor routines) or living on the fringes of parish towns. They are always members of very poor families. They have generally come to work for a particular contractor in one of four ways. First, they either worked for this contractor in earlier construction projects in Quito (true, mostly, of the older men) or are family members of that worker who have been brought along (men and women of all ages). Second, they are people who know the contractor and the work he performs, who live close to him, and who went to his house to solicit work. Third, some contractors, particularly the newer ones and more urban-based ones, pick workers for each job from crowds of unemployed men who assemble each morning in Cayambe's central park. And lastly, in a method that was becoming more common as my fieldwork went on, *contratistas* may find themselves absorbing new workers whose applications for formal employment on the plantation were rejected by management. These people are those who "failed" their psychological exam (mandatory in some plantations) or who simply gave the human resources director the impression that they would not be able to meet the intensity of work demanded in any area of the enterprise. Without fail, these are indigenous people who bear bold traces of rural living and low "cultural" development on their bodies: indigenous clothing, poor communication skills, no past labor history, no primary education, and extreme humility were all cited by management as examples of this type of person.

Growers have a lot to gain by relying on *contratista* workers. They earn way below any legal or living wage (about \$20/ week for men, \$16/ week for women, token amounts for their children), are not entitled to the services provided to regular workers (social security benefits, medical attention, uniforms, lunch service, etc.), can be shuffled between jobs, sent to fill openings in regular posts at a moment's notice, or even sent to other farms owned by a flower grower if something needs doing there. For example, when design confusion stopped the expansion of TerraNova Farms, one of the plantations I had been studying, the contractors were told to send their workers home and wait for a call. Two weeks later, owner Jorge Castellano felt more sure about the expansion of another of his plantations, SANTI, and sent the workers there. An engineering glitch there resulted in irrigation pipes being laid incorrectly and the *contratistas* were told to re-dig the canal and lay the pipes correctly in their off time. A tractor breakdown then caused the expansion at SANTI to be halted and, because of the distance of this plantation from the workers' homes and the expected quick recovery of the tractor, workers were housed in shacks left over from the hacienda that previously controlled the land. They were kept there—without pay and expected to feed themselves—for a week when work resumed. During this off-week, work again started at TerraNova. This group of *contratistas* did not go to work there because an engineer at TerraNova had accused them

of stealing a hoe loaned by the company to a worker. The ensuing fight between the engineer and the contractor—the latter of whom maintained the integrity of his workers—left a bad air between them and it was decided they should not return to TerraNova Farms. The owner also told staff at SANTI to never loan company equipment to the *contratistas*.

Despite such interactions with management, contract workers are for the most part invisible to the company who produces no record of their presence other than the agreement reached with the labor contractor himself about the task he is hired to complete. But in periods like February of 2002, when changing market conditions caused a downturn in rose prices, management often finds a value in absorbing these people into the marginal spaces of labor on the plantation. In TerraNova during that period, many regular workers were fired and their positions filled, temporarily, with sub-contracted workers. Contractors were instructed to send their teams into the greenhouses to do everything but harvest roses, making only a fraction of the money that regular workers make for doing the same task. Fired workers and those denied permanent positions were invited to join a *contratista's* team at their place of work. Management called the process “*prestando el nombre*,” or asking a contractor to “loan his name” to a worker who would be affiliated with him, paid by him, but may never actually meet him over the course of her or his work. This phrase rather insidiously imposed the complicity of contractors in a strategy of profit maximizing for which they received no benefit.

So in spite of the lower pay, no benefits, harder work, and strikingly more precarious work schedules than permanent workers, why would someone choose to work for a contractor instead of applying for a more formalized position in a plantation? On the one hand, many contract workers echo management perceptions of this labor relation as a kind of “default” location for people who are not “fit” for regular wage labor. I am often told by workers that they “don’t have the documents” needed to be given a permanent contract—did not do military service, complete primary school, or register to vote. One woman in her late forties, a *María Criolla* from the community of Pitana Bajo, said, disparagingly, that she lacks the intelligence needed for plantation work: “the work is very complicated,” she said, “and they wouldn’t give me a job anyway. *No me da la cabeza* [My mind isn’t strong enough]”. She added that, unfortunately, her daughter isn’t very bright either and will likely follow in her footsteps.

On the other hand, many of these workers present their decision to work for a contractor as a choice they themselves made. One young woman from the community of San Pedro said that work in the plantation is *muy trabajoso* or very hard work, implying that with contractors she can work at a lighter pace free from rigid labor discipline. Others claimed that working for a contractor, particularly one who has become a long-time employer, means that they are under no obligation to show up each day. They simply get paid for the days they choose to come. Moreover, their work schedules

are Monday–Friday, unlike regular workers who always work Saturdays and often are obliged to work Sundays. Having free weekends allows people to attend to the demands of home when necessary and, most referred to in this context, the demands of community. Communal work projects are usually scheduled for Saturdays but call at times for work to be performed during the week. Two contract workers I spoke with said they previously worked in plantations, but left because they couldn't meet their community work duties, which brings fines, the possible loss of services, and gossip. Working for a contractor allows them both a wage, of sorts, and the freedom to attend to these other claims upon their work—and guarantees exemption from the message-sending firing of workers we witnessed previously.

What I want to stress in this discussion of *contratista* labor teams is their construction by plantation owners and managers as a form of absolute deviance from the range of normative economic subjectivity in Ecuador. This range is defined and validated by the discrete, hierarchically arranged permanent work areas in the plantation and the ideal worked suited to each. Contract workers are not only invisible in this official schema but, to the extent that it can be read as a blueprint for the stages of national development, they are positioned completely “off the map” of progress, even the residual components of the past that are carried along into the present to make it possible. The ideal figure of this residual past was the indigenous community member who works under peasant-like labor conditions in the greenhouses, an icon of articulation that will be superseded in the movement to an industrial society. Contract workers are of this rural past as well, but represent a *degenerate* rurality, that sector of the population that has not earned the right to the benefits of industrial development in the region (by not completing primary education, not learning to “speak properly,” not shedding archaic codes of humility, etc) or to formal recognition (via the legal labor contract) in the present. By an act of capitalist triage, their fate, this interpretation suggests, is to be killed off (physically, by not earning a living wage, and symbolically by non-recognition in labor statistics, uniforms, state policy). And yet these workers have become integral to the functioning of many plantations in Cayambe. This seems a rather extreme form of bourgeois arrogance, claiming at once that it is possible for capitalist development to not produce an underclass and yet finding great utility in the fact that there is one.

## HAUNTINGS

It is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept.

—Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*

In a review of Marianne Forrester's *The Economic Horror* (1999), a thesis lamenting the coming irrelevance of labor to French capital, Richard Wolff



chastises Forrester for her book's assumption that progressive immiseration and alienation are experiences more characteristic of labor's loss than of its gain. "Marx went far beyond a powerful critical analysis of capitalism's cyclical unemployment," Wolff (2002: 140) notes, "to reach a deeper critique of capitalist employment as well". It is this *reaching through* labor's exteriorizations to grapple with its inner core, of reckoning with exploitation, as the basic fact of waged labor, by attending to the often desperate practices through which a (theoretically) eligible working class reproduces itself that has been the subject of this chapter. Alongside this, and with help from a fragment of Marx's writings, I proposed a method of class analysis that sought to unpack how the class locations constituting a dominant mode of value extraction (structured positions in a very particular set of exchange relations) can become deployed as ontological and socio-historical facts; how, in Ollman's words, we might follow Marx in seeing the categories used to tell a story as part of that story itself, constituent elements "conjuring" up the reality they purport to describe—in this case, treating capital, working class, and the lingering category "peasant" as referring to real and concrete populations.

The point was not to treat these categories as fictions; rather, it was to trace the effects of such conjuring tricks on shaping the sorts of livelihood options open to people in a place like Cayambe, where labor on export industries is presented as the only option open to the rural poor and where "peasant" is meant to describe a form of living that no longer exists—a "less than eight per cent of income" that hangs around as a showcase of misery and abjection. And yet, as Derrida and Marx note, dominant categories of political economy are inevitably haunted by the ghosts they at once produce and exercise to some elsewhere. As J.K. Gibson-Graham (1996: 244–245) claims,

Haunting the commodity and the market are noncommodity production and nonmarket exchange . . . Often depicted as premodern and precapitalist—in other words, banished to the presumably contiguous but noncontemporaneous space of the past—these forms of noncommodity production and exchange nevertheless cannot be entirely dispossessed of their contemporaneity.

What these two cases suggest is that there is both a world of livelihood options and ambiguously defined conditions of tangential marginality cutting through Cayambe's articulated formation of capital and peasant-worker and that these options and conditions, invisible to the formal progressivist scripts of surplus-accumulation, in fact as deeply condition its possibilities for reproduction as the wage nexus. Seen as an isolated *figure*, the abuela and her sheep seem simply members of an extended multi-"occupational" peasant household, whose enduring peasant-ness can be thought of as instrumental to capital's ability to secure a particular type of cheap and disposable laboring population in the march of expanded

reproduction. But set in the broader relations structuring her *figuration* at this particular moment in time, the peasant-herder abuela finds herself entangled in sets of obligations that must not, by law and logic, exist in the present: peasant communities emerged out of the dissolution of hacienda structures; indentured labor is outlawed; the term “huasi cama” makes no sense today; private haciendas capitalized into flower plantations; etc. So-called “peasant” society, it would appear, has its own forms of reproduction which are not only outside the sphere of market transactions but which are haunted by their own pantheon of ghosts.

The same might be said of the *contratistas*, who are the enduring figures of the reform years, working on terms and in relations scripted before Cayambe was thrown into primitive accumulation or capital’s triumphalist narrative of redemption, before waged labor was enforced as the motor of *haciendo patria*, for which one can only be in or be out . . . *but then there are the ghosts, always these ghosts, and in what “when” do these ghosts dwell?* To see these relations as “residual” to the dominion of others revolving around peasant communities and flower plantations, the attractions and aversions of waged labor, is to completely miss Marx’s very political argument about the spectral phenomenology of economic objectivity in any capitalist formation and to flatten what we take to be the complexly lived-historical into the already-captured temporality of contradiction. In other words, in spite of the claim that Cayambe (including peasant society) lives entirely from labor, plantation owners make sure this is not, in fact, true—the *telos* of historical advancement and nation-making is only open to certain figures who fit into an enforced spectrum of legibility. Those who are cast out, denied entry into the world of labor, invisible to plantation records and statistical celebrations of zero unemployment, are shuffled back in through the back door, made to work (but not eat) alongside their working class peers, showing how the very outside that capital produces can be reincorporated as a source of higher return on value.

In fact, by the end of 2002, subcontractors would be fully integrated into the design of many plantations, their recruiters often occupying small offices on plantation grounds, and supplying an ever-increasing number of temporary workers to fill the posts of fired permanent workers at substantially lower rates of pay. The difference between capital’s inside and outside seemed to be collapsing. Shared conditions of impoverishment seemed to be expanding at the same time that livelihood strategies were shifting and diversifying. Rural Cayambe in the midst of its flower boom leaves an impression similar to that which Huasicancha, Peru, seems to have left on Gavin Smith in the late 1970s. In a shift of tone reminiscent of that quoted of Marx, above, Smith (1989: 116–117) breaks from his analysis of the household federations stretching between Huasicancha and Lima to note:

It is hard to convey this in any absolute sense. [But] were the traveler or census-taker to make the journey to this remote mountain community

he or she would be most immediately struck by the uniformity that poverty imposes upon its victims. [And] were the same traveler or census-taker to seek out the Huasicanchinos in Lima, perhaps there too he or she would be impressed by their likeness to the ghostly figures whose absence from political economy Marx noted.

By examining a social reality very different from the one Smith studied, one over-determined by narratives and systems of capitalist totalization, this chapter has tried to show how the critique of labor itself combines with the critique of labor's unavailability, that is, of displacement, abandonment, and deprivation. Through all this, to return to the basic experience of poverty suggests that for many people in rural Latin America the options of livelihood production might continue to resemble those of a sequestered sheep.

## NOTES

1. "It would seem to be the proper thing to start with the real and concrete elements, with the actual pre-conditions, e.g., to start in the sphere of economy with population, which forms the basis and the subject of the whole social process of production. Closer consideration shows, however, that this is wrong . . . If one were to take population as the point of departure, it would be a very vague notion of a complex whole and through closer definition one would arrive analytically at increasingly simple concepts ("The Method of Political Economy," in Marx 1970: 205–206).
2. "Political economy does not deal with [the worker] in his free time, as a human being, but leaves this aspect to the criminal law, doctors, religion, statistical tables, politics, and the workhouse beadle" (Marx 1963: 76).
3. Cayambe's municipal land registration listed 1,700 hectares of land owned by flower enterprises in 2002. I have lowered this amount in my calculations to account for the amount of unused land flower growers generally hold for speculation and expansion.
4. Because most state-owned haciendas in Cayambe were located at higher altitudes, their lands were distributed in their entirety to huasipungo families, unlike lower altitude communities, formed around the leftovers of private holdings. Private haciendas also generally had higher altitude sections (owing to Andean systems of non-contiguous micro-vertical production zones), but these lands were less attractive to private owners looking to capitalize their operations after the reforms and were thus generally turned fully over to indigenous communities.
5. Irrigation water in Cayambe comes almost exclusively from high altitude grasslands called *páramos*. Ecuadorian water laws in the early twenty-first century prohibited ownership of water but afforded its control to those owning the land around its sources. As collective owners of the *páramos*, highland communities thus decided how it would be partitioned. Water councils generally assumed lower communities to require less water, owing to their relatively smaller land quantities and probable greater integration into labor networks, and thus gave proportionately larger rations to higher altitude communities.
6. Author's interview December 10, 2002.

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# 12 Humanitarian to Livelihood Approaches

## A View from the Dadaab Refugee Camps in Kenya<sup>1</sup>

*Wenona Giles*

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter engages in an exploration of some of the ways that capitalism is currently expressed in sequestered camps that house people fleeing numerous militarized conflicts across the globe. These camps are mainly located in countries in the global south and were traditionally organized as short-term places of refuge. However, they now shelter massive numbers of people, reliant mainly on “humanitarian aid packages”, for decades at a time. Research on livelihood opens up the possibility of challenging the exclusionary power politics inherent in humanitarian action (which I refer to as politicized humanitarianism), and facilitates critical research on displaced populations and with displaced people themselves. As well, a livelihood approach can potentially lead to the development of new understandings of exile as it currently exists in the industrialized world; and defines a practical methodology that is aligned and compatible with a critical political methodology.

Building upon work that includes the fields of forced migration studies, feminist, and political economy research, including the work of some of those who have published in this book, this chapter explores an alternative to politicized humanitarianism. For example, Butler’s work on precarious lives (2004) and Jacobson’s research on “displaced livelihoods” (2005) open ways of thinking about displaced people as agents, rather than as solely recipients of humanitarian assistance or charity. When applied to displacement, Butler’s ideas locate non-displaced populations in the same “space” as displaced populations. Viewed from this perspective or “frame”, humanitarian assistance has the potential for a different kind of relationship with displaced peoples—one that is more dynamic and two-way. As will be explained more fully in the chapter, this approach also creates the possibilities for the acknowledgement by both displaced and non-displaced populations globally, that we all share “a generalized condition of precariousness” (Butler 2009: 183) and that this common understanding is crucial in the struggle against violence. Gill’s reflections (in this volume) on a “reserve

army of places” builds on these other critical approaches, by opening more possibilities to re-examine the everyday experiences of people who have been labeled as refugees, but have much more multifaceted and dynamic identities than this label implies.

Forced migration is the result of militarized conflict (related to nationalism, ethnicity, and/or natural resources), human rights violations, environmental disaster or development induced displacement, or a combination of these phenomena. The longevity of these forms of displacement for massive numbers of people is reinforced through the politicization of humanitarianism, which refers to the ways that humanitarianism is used by the state and/or other institutions to effect political control over populations in a time of crisis (of forced migration, for example). In principle, humanitarian law emphasizes neutrality and outlines that life-saving aid should be provided to all people affected, soldiers and civilians, enemies and allies. In practice, humanitarian action is politically defined by state/s or intra-states; acts upon or for refugees; and takes little account of the expressed goals and desires of affected populations (e.g. those who have been exiled, as well as the host populations). It is inextricably linked to capitalism and geopolitics in today’s global economy and cannot be understood or critiqued without taking this relationship into account.

The chapter begins with a discussion of humanitarian action and its relationship to displacement in the global south. The paper then turns to thinking about alternative approaches to the current political form that humanitarianism has taken. The case study of three of the Dadaab refugee camps in north-eastern Kenya is then brought forward as a site of this analysis.<sup>2</sup> In the discussion that follows the case study, the focus becomes the relationship between mobility and livelihoods, and in particular how people who have been exiled or displaced make their livelihoods. The advantage of beginning with livelihood, instead of humanitarianism, is that we think in more active ways that are complicated by such crucial phenomena as history, culture, gender, class, and racialization. In particular, I explore how in a neoliberal humanitarian space, the gender relations of exile and precarity can affect a refugee woman’s ability to make a livelihood that will support and protect herself and her family. I ask whether using a political economy “frame” might help to open more “conversations” across a number of global chasms, about precarity, livelihood, and redistribution as linked phenomena, while also challenging frames that prioritize security.

## THE POLITICS OF HUMANITARIANISM

Most refugees in the global south eke out an existence or a livelihood for themselves and their families in protracted conditions of constricted mobility and extreme poverty. They carry the static, legalistic term “refugee” that is placed on their fingerprints, social insurance cards, and their World Food Program

ration card. Neither international relations nor humanitarian approaches have a history of viewing refugees as active participants in the improvement of their livelihoods or destinies. Political humanitarianism has been critiqued by a number of theorists who argue that humanitarian relief in its current forms is neither impartial nor short-term and is a product of state interests that can lead to the violation of freedom of movement and ultimately of human rights (Duffield 2007; Hyndman 2000; Loescher 1993; Malkki 1996; Nyers 2006; Verdirame and Harrell-Bond 2005). During the 1990s in her anthropological research with Hutu refugees from Burundi living in Tanzania, Maalki pointed out that “the intent is not to dismiss humanitarian interventions as useless” (1996: 379), rather “we should have better ways of conceptualizing, designing and challenging them” (ibid). Likewise, while Hyndman confirms a commitment to “the project of safeguarding human life” (2000: 189), she argues for change in the current humanitarian culture that will ensure “fair treatment of refugees, in particular women and people whose cultural backgrounds are not Euro-American” (ibid). She rightly identifies current forms of humanitarianism as gendered, racialized and as politicized processes that contrapose the needs of displaced peoples against the more powerful interests of states (2000: 3).

Building on Malkki’s research, Nyers asserts that we need to move beyond treating refugees as “speechless emissaries” (2006: 24). Rather, he sees humanitarianism as “a political concept” that is “always already implicated in a relation of violence” (ibid: 42) and an action that “make[s] the problem possible in the first place” (ibid: 22). He maintains that one of the central stumbling blocks to the amelioration of the situation of forced migrants is the goal of humanitarian actors to give back to refugees statist identities as citizens (ibid: 42). He sees this process as narrowing potential spaces of political authenticity for refugees (ibid: 23) and as defining refugees as “nonpolitical” and therefore “speechless, invisible and dangerous” (ibid: 128–129). Similarly, Duffield describes the idea of the “humanitarian emergency” (defined as being “*above* politics” by Western governments [2007: 71], as readily removing the “history, culture and identity of the peoples concerned” (2007: 34).<sup>3</sup> He argues that “states of emergency are essential for the existence of liberal governance, including development” (2007: 33) and portrays the increasing “governmentalization of the aid industry” (2007: 66) from the Cold War period and thereafter, as a time when the “non-state or petty sovereign power” of NGOs has been gradually absorbed into state control. This absorption includes the transfer of control over “permanent emergencies” to Western governments, ultimately leading to the “humanitarian wars” of the early 1990s (2007: 66; e.g. the Persian Gulf War, the wars of the Balkans, Africa’s Great Lakes, Mali and Liberia).

Refugee camps, such as the Dadaab camps in Kenya, are the hidden flagships of refugee-related and politicized humanitarianism, and the camp population is the purposively invisible output of humanitarianism. A refugee teacher interviewed in Kenya describes the Dadaab camps as “an open

prison” where those inside are denied freedom of movement—which he says is a denial of his human rights. He described that he and his family have not been allowed beyond a 20 kilometer range for sixteen years. So far, his only alternative is to return to Somalia, which he regards as too insecure. Hyndman writes that, refugee camps “remove evidence of human displacement from view and contain ‘the problem’ without resolution, as noncommunities of the excluded” (Hyndman 2000: 190). Power relations that pertain to gender, class and race differentiations in long-term refugee situations are generally ignored in humanitarian approaches. However, as the description below of the Dadaab refugee camps shows, these are dynamic and lively places where social relations take particular forms, depending upon the culture and history of the women and men located therein, but also upon the effects of war or other disasters in the region (e.g. the location of different, possibly warring ethnic groups in and around the camps)<sup>4</sup>, and the impact of humanitarian assistance on the social relations of the refugee households and communities. For example, humanitarian assistance works to define women and gender relations in a camp in homogeneous and passive ways. Women are often defined as the sole caregivers in a household to the exclusion of men, and traditional gender roles may be assumed, thus contributing to and/or entrenching gender inequalities in refugee camps. But refugee women are not always or only caregivers, vulnerable, or “at risk” and while it is true that women and men may have many new and gendered responsibilities in a camp, it is never effective to assume that refugee women and men cannot speak for themselves.

A critic internal to an international agency raised the question in an interview with us, as to whether attentiveness to long-term refugees and humanitarianism relief are the right “approaches” at all. She argued that we need to look at why and where there is a reduction in *humanitarian space* and the right to asylum—which itself implies a right to mobility. Describing the prison-like space of refugee camps at the Thai-Cambodia border, she said that the bureaucracy of present-day humanitarianism shrinks the space in which people live so that they cannot possibly rebuild their lives:

Humanitarianism is meant to help people overcome a threat that they are facing, that they can’t cope with themselves . . . to get people back on their feet, so that they can resume their lives . . . [However] if you are driven by logistics, you probably end up contributing to maintaining a miserable state of existence. . . . People who had escaped genocide and fled to the [Thai-Cambodia] border were in these closed camps that were ringed by guys with guns . . . We [humanitarian agencies] did everything, except figure out the fresh-air quota of what everybody got . . . As Cambodians told us, “We’re not chickens in a cage . . .

For some years now there have been calls to end foreign aid from the likes of neoliberals such as Dambisa Moyo (2009), Robert Calderisi (2006), and



Hernando de Soto (2000). The trouble with this “self-reliance” approach is that it remains embedded in a neoliberalism that looks to trade, microfinance, foreign direct investment, and an attachment to international agencies such as the World Bank to solve poverty in the global south. It does not and cannot solve the continual creation of “surplus” populations; it is stuck with the politically devised imperative of “permanent emergency” as a reason to act; and this “emergency” is translated as an entrepreneurial opportunity (Duffield 2007: 71, 70). However, Moyo is at least partially right when she says: “. . . Not a single country has reduced poverty and increased long-term economic growth by relying on aid.” (Wente 2009: F7).

### ALTERNATIVE POSSIBILITIES

The total number of stateless refugees in the world is slightly more than the population of Ontario and Quebec combined, and about the same as the total populations of Sweden and Denmark combined. Of what purpose are these large numbers of long-term displaced peoples to the global political economy? Where are they located in the local production of globalization? Are displaced populations to be understood as embodying marketable opportunities? Is that why they are kept alive? Duffield argues, “It is a malleable and disposable life that capitalism constantly produces in order to devour it as part of its own unending renewal” (Duffield 2007: 12). Ideas about “surplus life”, “surplus population”, (Marx 1977; Duffield 2007), “precarious life” (Butler 2004; 2009), slip easily into discussions about displaced populations and about why and how massive numbers of people are constantly and continually expelled not only from their regions of origin, but also from their houses, families, jobs, and livelihoods. Are long-term “refugees” one of the latest capitalist categories of a subaltern and disposable population who are unable to contribute anything to the current capitalist economy, but instead are used and devoured by capitalism as entrepreneurial emergencies? Or, does the idea of a *reserve army of places* (Gill 2009; rather than a reserve army of labor) mitigate the stasis and finality inherent in the descriptives *disposable* and *surplus*, while retaining the relationship of interconnectedness (inherent to ideas of a reserve army of labor)? A reserve army of places—which could be defined as refugee camps or other sites of war and violence, for example—seems to signal mobility and malleability and the possibility of transformation and change.<sup>5</sup>

As well, exploring the idea of a reserve army of places entails reaching beyond the entrenched concept of politicized humanitarian aid, to more pragmatic, down to earth concepts such as livelihood. Linking livelihood with mobility (the two are inextricably intertwined today) and resistance opens the possibility of thinking ourselves into mutuality, interconnectedness and reciprocity (Duffield 2007: 233). Duffield contends that in trying to create global solidarity, “While difference is acknowledged, *it is similarities*

*that are important*” (ibid: 233).<sup>6</sup> Included in this alternative political space is our abandonment “of the security prescription which argues that in helping others we should also help ourselves” (Duffield: 234).

## THE DADAAB REFUGEE CAMPS

“The town of Dadaab lies in Garissa district in Kenya’s Northeastern Province. It is situated some 500 kilometers from Nairobi and 80 kilometers from the Kenyan-Somali border. Since 1991–1992, there have been three refugee camps near Dadaab: Ifo, Hagadera, and Dagahaley. The camps cover a total area of 50 square kilometers and are within an 18 kilometers radius of Dadaab town. The camps currently host over 170,000 refugees,<sup>7</sup> with almost equal numbers of males and females, Somalis are the main refugee group in Dadaab, making up 97.5 percent of the population. [Most] of the Somalis come from the Juba River valley and Gedo region, while 10 percent originate from Kismayo, Mogadishu and Bardera. They mainly belong to numerous Darod sub-clans. Though some new arrivals have entered since the resurgence of violence in Somalia since December 2006, a large influx was halted by the Government of Kenya’s closure of the border.

The camps are situated in a semi-arid region that is otherwise largely inhabited by nomadic pastoralists. This environment greatly limits livelihood opportunities in the camps, and it is highly unlikely that the refugees would survive there without assistance from the international community. At the same time, it is highly unlikely they would survive only on the assistance from the international community. Food distributions include maize; pulses [beans]; wheat; oil and salt, and few non-food items are distributed. The agencies offer incentive worker opportunities for refugees, which pay a maximum amount of 6,000 Kenyan shillings [CAN\$90+/-]. These are the only jobs refugees can engage in legally, as they are not allowed to formally work in Kenya. Alternatively, refugees engage in businesses or at times are employed by other refugees for manual work and household tasks. The number of refugees who receive remittances from relatives abroad is 10–15 percent (Horst 2006), and this number may be increasing with the increasing cumulative number of people who have left the camps for resettlement purposes” (Horst 2008).<sup>8</sup>

Sixty percent of the refugee population in the Dadaab camps is described as poor or destitute and often unable to meet their daily needs, largely depending on food rations and/or assistance from within the refugee community (Horst and Elmi 2007). As one woman who had lived for many years in Dadaab but is now in Nairobi, told us: “the food ration given by UNHCR (office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) is not enough for the refugees, they only provide ‘don’t die’ survival”. For the poor, 80 to 85 percent of their food sources come from rations and 10 to 20 percent are purchased or provided by others. Food purchased is mainly sugar, at times milk, and occasionally meat (Horst and Elmi 2007):

though there are considerable differences between camps, the better-off the refugee household is, the less it depends on rations and the more on purchase. Additional goods purchased by better-off families are rice, pasta, vegetables and meat. Food rations are sold to buy foodstuffs considered essential by all Somalis (sugar, milk); to buy preferred food items (pasta, rice) by the rich; or as a livelihood strategy by the poor, who sell items with a high monetary value to get food with a high caloric value.

Those who can afford to buy food largely obtain an income through business; incentive jobs; or remittances (Horst 2008).

In general, most Dadaab refugees make the best of the dire poverty that they experience in the camps. In her book, *The Economic Life of Refugees* (2005), Jacobsen writes about what she calls “displaced livelihoods” (2005: 1). She describes the myriad livelihood activities of refugee camp residents under headings such as “camp economies” “camp markets”, “trade in aid”, “trade in services” “sources of cash and credit”, “con games, scams, crime and prostitution” (2005: 25–30). In camps throughout the world, she documents everything from trade in gold and diamonds to the buying and selling of food rations, second hand clothes (from relief shipments), household wares, firewood, and sex from prostitution. She also examines the livelihoods of urban refugees that range from petty trading (or hawking) in vegetables, cigarettes, candy or work in construction and cleaning (ibid: 47). However, without access to credit (most refugees are prohibited from opening bank accounts or getting loans), the majority of refugees rely on money-lenders and work mainly in a cash economy. This exposes them to theft, street crime and police extortion (ibid: 48).

Jacobsen’s field notes on a visit to one of the Dadaab camps in July 1996, a few years after the first Ifo camp was set up are as follows:

Ifo camp for Somali and other refugees, Dadaab, northeastern Kenya (July 1996): Somalis cross the border and locals come from all around to buy and sell in the camel market and butchery. Another section of the camp market contains coffee “hotels”, a shaded section with small stools where Ethiopian refugees serve coffee in china cups from their home regions. (2005: 26)

Indeed, on recent visits to the camps, we observed that the market in each of the camps sell everything from cell phones, clothing, cloth materials, foodstuffs, wood, utensils, tools. As well, shepherds guide sheep and goats that belong to refugees to pasture from a central point in the camps everyday; and brick-makers construct bricks required by those who can afford to upgrade their housing.<sup>9</sup> As well, our research in the Dadaab refugee camps indicates that there are more refugee households in the camps with someone working in the camp than among the urban based refugees in

Nairobi. In the Dadaab camps, “the livelihoods of different wealth groups are strongly interlinked . . . with households connected as neighbors, relatives, clan members, client-provider, and employee-employer relationships. Those who are in the rich wealth group, and to a lesser degree those who are in the middle wealth group, are crucial for the survival of the poor (Horst and Elmi 2007)” (Horst 2008: 11). Many refugee camp households live on credit, so that the system of credit in the camps is a very important survival mechanism. In fact, many of the poorer members of the camp buy food and other essential items on credit. Sometimes livestock are sold to settle debts or relatives from outside the camps are asked to settle the debts of their camp relatives with remittance money.

Omar arrived in Dadaab from Somalia in 1991 with his three brothers and two sisters when he was twenty-six years old. He had been a school teacher in Somalia. When interviewed in the camp in 2007, he had been there for sixteen years. Now forty-two, he is a teacher and school inspector in the Dadaab camp, married with six children. His household relies on income from several sources in order to survive: a small income from his work as a teacher and school inspector, food and medical rations, remittances from his family and friends elsewhere in Kenya. Despite his small and tenuous income, he also sends money to his parents who have remained in Somalia.

The case of Sufia demonstrates just how dependent an impoverished young woman and mother is upon the men in her life for survival—and how being legally defined as a “refugee” immobilizes her, until the UNHCR and the host state decide her fate. She arrived in Dadaab refugee camp fifteen years ago in 1992 from Somalia when she was nine years old with her mother and siblings. Her family is now far-flung, her father and uncles in Ethiopia, brothers in Chicago and Minnesota, and cousins in the UK, Holland, and Ethiopia. She married in her late teens and now at twenty-four years old, she has four children. Her husband was resettled in Australia a few years ago and in 2006, she was given an Australian visa and permitted to move to Nairobi while she waits for travel documents from the UNHCR and the Kenyan government for herself and her children—a lengthy wait (two years by the time she was interviewed). She and her children were living on remittances from two brothers and her husband, while she waited to move to Perth, Australia. Her children go to an Islamic madrasa school during the day, and in the evening she pays private school fees to a teacher who comes to her apartment. She describes how most refugees in Nairobi are there illegally and are often harassed by police. Like other refugees, she finds Nairobi a dangerous place for refugees. She saw few work-related opportunities for refugees in Kenya, inside or outside the camps, except in what she called “risky business employment”.

Thus despite being defined as refugees, and in order to survive, those in the Dadaab refugee camps must concern themselves with many of the same genre of livelihood issues in which other working class or poor migrants

must engage, including, for example, how many relatives and indeed friends one can mobilize to provide remittance money; gaining access to cash and credit; entry to markets and trade opportunities; trade relationships; negotiating safety (in gendered and other ways); which relationships to call on to access adequate amounts of international food, health and educational assistance; mobility within and beyond their home; access to jobs with international NGOs; access to travel documents and work permits. These practices and institutions shape, determine, and limit displaced livelihoods in refugee camps and are dependent on what Smith refers to as the “inter-communicative component of social labor” (Smith 1999: 188). Such aspects of social labor are gendered and impact on men and women refugees differently as will be discussed in the following section.

## GENDER, MOBILITY AND LIVELIHOOD

Refugees of the Dadaab camps experience forms of exile and precarity that are not limited by time and place to the borders of the camps, but include their escape and flight into exile, as well as their future prospects inside and beyond the camps. These conditions have a crucial impact on the making of women’s livelihoods and their involvement in forms of labor in the time leading up to their arrival and on their current life in the camps. In this section of the paper, I look more closely at gendered experiences of mobility and livelihood for refugees.

Women’s experiences prior to war or other disasters will affect what happens to them during exile and afterwards. The access of Somali women to a better life in the Dadaab camps may be limited to the resources that they can carry, such as cash, and depends on their exposure to and involvement in the market and whether they have the same access as men to any household finances. Depending on the specific socio-cultural situation, they may experience little control over their mobility, especially if they are considered to be the repositories of a community’s culture and honor. In fact, recent reports of Somali women traveling alone with their young children to refuge in the Dadaab camps describe attacks, including gang rapes en route. Women in *purdah* are very limited in their mobility and completely dependent on the protection of men to move beyond their household. Exile poses special dangers for these women, if their spouses or other male family members have been killed, jailed or have taken refuge in other regions.

In the process of escaping Somalia women and girls lose their livelihoods, citizenship, their homes, and sometimes also their family members. Gender relations in the household may change during and after this emergency period, especially if men are absent due to soldiering duties or for other reasons. Prior to flight, women may have to replace men as workers on the family farm, or they may have to take up marketing activities to support their families. When they find themselves in exile, they may need to

supplement emergency household food rations by engaging in marketing, agricultural or other types of resource gathering (for example, food and firewood) activities whenever possible. While such a gendered change may raise women's status in their household and community, it also challenges traditional gendered expectations and places women at risk of gendered forms of violence when they leave the refugee camp to work in isolated farmlands/bushlands or in the marketplace. Of course the gender relations of refugee women and girls' lives prior to war or other emergencies is also a contributing factor to their hyper-vulnerability during war and this condition is intertwined with their role as providers and family mainstays.

Traveling into or out of exile women experience other dangers that often include an invisibility to humanitarian workers due to their gendered position inside their communities.<sup>10</sup> A lack of gender-sensitive attitudes and skills among some agency workers means that women's presence and needs may be ignored whether they are traveling to, or from camps (El Bushra 1995: 84).<sup>11</sup> As feminists we should be looking beyond whether or not women are cast into dependent roles on men, but also asking: what are the *consequences* of perceiving women as only dependants and as servants of the men that they are dependant on? Invisibility is one outcome.

## CONCLUSION

In making a link between relations of power and life, Butler writes: "Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear" (Butler 2009: 14). She argues that in order for a life to be defined as precarious, it has to first be "apprehended" as a life (2009: 13). In the case of refugees, following Duffield, a first step would be to historicize and politicize these men and women and recognize that we are all governed by the same global neoliberalism. Only then, can we more easily engage in "interconnectedness, mutuality, and conversations" that surpass one way provider-beneficiary processes (2007: 233). Likewise, Nyers begins with the refugee her/himself and moves outwards from there. He questions "conventional perspectives on refugee flows that consider technical and operational 'solutions' within a state-centric discourse" (2006: xiv) as a satisfactory means of understanding who a refugee is and how his/her situation might be ameliorated.

Expanding on Butler, Duffield, and others, we are all part of a continuum of mobility and access to livelihood that is gendered and affects men and women in diverse parts of the world at various levels of precarity and impoverishment. Along with gender and other variables, displacement intersects this continuum and disperses men and women across pre-flight, flight, exile, and resettlement sites inside and outside of camps. By segmenting these sites, politicized humanitarianism runs the risk of framing women's and men's lives as disconnected from a past or future, and from other women and men;

and as existing outside of the continuum of mobility and livelihood. For example, after many years of supposed gender sensitive humanitarianism and transnational feminism, the result has been a replication of erroneous and restricted home versus host country definitions of women's lives that still focus narrowly on issues of violence and reproduction, but not poverty (Fraser 2009: 112–113).<sup>12</sup> Such an approach does not challenge the types of extreme limitations on livelihood, mobility, and well-being experienced by displaced women and men and the gendered experiences of sequestration, whereby women continue inside and outside of camps, to be extremely immobile and less monied than displaced men (who themselves are also, already victims of politicized humanitarian sequestration). Unless recognition and representation are informed by attentiveness to poverty or redistribution in research and policy making on refugees, a “rights” approach will not guarantee that rights are in fact, protected (Fraser 2005, Giles 2010). My emphasis in this paper falls to relations of redistribution among displaced populations, which includes, for example, mobile access to livelihood and self-support. Mobility, and who is permitted to be mobile is historical, political, class-, and gender-based, as well as racialized.

The wars that the global north imposes and engages in, lead to the demise and destruction of the lives and livelihoods of massive numbers of people in the global south, who are subsequently forced into long-term displacement, under the watchful and ultimately destructive eye of a politicized humanitarianism and aid. In this chapter, I have tried to make a case for untangling the neoliberal knots that disguise the way we see displaced populations. It is because we myopically frame displaced people as humanitarian victims, rather than as people who need to replace lost livelihoods and homes, that as of the end of 2008 there are over eight million people who are locked into long-term (ten years or more) sequestration in camps throughout the world (US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, 2009). Refugees have everything to lose as forced migrants and refugees. Indeed, while there may be a few gains during the process of displacement and exile (e.g. education and health services, that refugee women and men could not access in their homeland, particularly if they are poor), for the great majority, these benefits will be far outweighed by huge losses. The “empowering” experiences some researchers argue that refugee women [and possibly, men] may gain during flight and exile are generally far outweighed by the desolation and the material and social deprivation experienced in these places. Refugees literally *em-body* their experiences and these cannot be erased by humanitarian, bureaucratic, human rights or any other measures that capitalism applies to their exilic bodies.

How then, might we engage differently with refugees who have experienced forced displacement? Understanding displaced women and men in ways that encourage “conversations” in Duffield’s (2007: 233) sense of the word) about precarity, livelihood and redistribution, rather than imposing a lifeline of long-term emergency aid is perhaps one place to begin. Changing the frame through which forced displacement is understood from that

of “security” to the linked phenomena of mobility, livelihood and place will expose with greater clarity the continuum of precarity that we all share. And along with others who critique politicized humanitarianism we can continue to challenge the capitalist goal of defining some lives as surplus or disposable and therefore without value.

## NOTES

1. This chapter owes a great deal to discussions and debates with Jennifer Hyndman, the Co-investigator of the SSHRC research funded project: “The Globalization of Homelessness in Long Term Refugee Situations” from which this chapter arises. The research took place in Kenya, Iran, Geneva, London, Ottawa and Toronto. I would like to thank SSHRC, York University and the Centre for Refugee Studies for their support of this research. The comments by the editors of this volume are also most appreciated.
2. There are currently five Dadaab refugee camps: Hagadera, Dagahaley, two Ifo camps and Kambioos.
3. There are humanitarian workers who argue that survival comes first, and gender, second. This has been referred to as the “emergency excuse” by feminists working in situations that have been defined as humanitarian crises, where over and over again, gender is put on the back burner while “emergencies” are addressed (Hyndman and de Alwis 2003: 214; Hurley forthcoming).
4. It is well-known that the Al-Shabaab militia is located inside the Dadaab camps and operates between these camps and Mogadishu.
5. There seems to be a transformative quality to “place” that is useful here. Similarly, in discussions within the Women in Conflict Zones Network, in the late 1990s, Preston proposed that we define a conflict zone as a “series of relative locations” that are subject to redefinition . . . “a place where help is available” [e.g. a refugee camp] “can become a location where acts of violence occur.” But “place is also crucial in enabling women to move past their experiences in conflict zones, to transform places . . . ” (Preston in Giles 2003: 5).
6. This is similar to transnational feminist analysis and practice that allows for “connections between subjects in unequal locations to engage one another from distinct social, political, and geographical locations” (Giles and Hyndman 2004: 314). A number of feminist scholars have been exploring these interconnections, particularly in conflict zones, for many years (e.g. Cockburn 1998; Enloe 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997, etc.).
7. As of the August 2011, the population in the Dadaab camps has risen to 400,000 (personal experience).
8. This quote is taken from a field report (2008) by Cindy Horst for our research project. Horst is a researcher who assisted us in carrying out fieldwork interviews and research for this project.
9. The refugees are only allowed to build “temporary housing” in the camps, despite the many years they have lived there.
10. The story of Asho, a young Somali refugee girl who returned to Somalia from Dadaab refugee camp, where she had spent her entire life, relays just how precarious and deadly the journey home alone can be for women and girls: <http://www.thestar.com/news/world/article/556919>.
11. The story of the lost girls of Sudan is indicative of women’s invisibility. Despite their long and ambitious trek across eastern Africa to safety and to (hopefully) new lives, they were “hidden” in households around the refugee



camp, unlike their male counterparts who were housed independently. They were thus, twice lost to the possibility of third country resettlement. See Katarzyna Grabska's (2011) research on the "lost girls".

12. Fraser contributes a critical gendered perspective on transnational feminist activism of the 1990s that was "[o]ften stymied at the level of the state" and thus turned to international alliances and "global civil society", wherein a focus on poverty was ignored in favor of human rights relating to reproduction and protection from violence. This feminism privileged recognition over redistribution. (Fraser 2009: 112–113).

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# 13 Gender Mainstreaming and Market Fundamentalism in Rural Yucatán, Mexico

*Marie France Labrecque*

## INTRODUCTION

A research study I conducted on the establishment of maquiladoras in Yucatán between 1999 and 2004 showed that the valuation of the local culture by the Mexican government as a means to attract transnational corporations had at the same time contributed to depreciation of the labor power of the workers involved, especially of female workers (Labrecque 2005)<sup>1</sup>. While there is widespread discrimination against the indigenous population in Mexico, as was once again highlighted in a recent report by the Ministry of Social Development,<sup>2</sup> a substantial portion of the public discourse on development focuses on the Mayan origin of the workers, and Mayan women's outstanding sewing skills. There can be no question that "race", ethnicity and gender have been instrumental in attracting capital to the region.

In the current economic context, the maquiladoras of Yucatán are in continuing recession and the number of their workers is decreasing daily. Transnational corporations are pulling up stakes and heading for Central America and increasingly for Asia. What is more, a substantial number of maquiladoras have closed down without paying the affected workers the indemnities to which they were entitled. In spite of this situation, Yucatán still holds at least one significant asset: tourism. Even more than in the case of the maquiladoras, recognition of the value of the regional culture—especially the regional indigenous culture—is a major factor. More specifically, this recognition rests on the region's indigenous women, those who wear the Maya costume, the huipil.<sup>3</sup> In fact, indigenous women are easier to identify as Maya than men, a situation that supports the claim that ethnicity in Yucatán is also structured according to gender, an immediate reminder of what Marisol de la Cadena evoked in her compelling article entitled: " 'Women Are More Indian': Ethnicity and Gender in a Community near Cuzco" (de la Cadena 1995). In addition to gender, the concept of ethnicity should also embrace "age" or "generation", since the women who wear the huipil today are already in their fifties.

This chapter is based on another research study I carried out in Yucatán between 2004 and 2007.<sup>4</sup> I wanted to examine how gender equity policies

elaborated at the international level using an approach known as “gender mainstreaming” are transformed within national and local contexts. My research adopts a perspective similar to that used by Bruno Lautier (2006). He considers that contemporary globalization is characterized by an increasingly rapid movement of four pre-existing types of circulation: circulation of people, money, goods, and ideas, symbols and norms—gender equity being part of this last group. As they circulate, gender equity policies carry with them a whole range of ideas that can potentially counteract their intended effect. Gender mainstreaming is the strategy through which gender equity policies have been given form. It is defined as follows: “Gender mainstreaming is the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making” (Council of Europe, 1998, quoted in Walby 2003–04: 7). Moreover, for the Council of Europe:

Gender equality means an equal visibility, empowerment and participation of both sexes in all spheres of public and private life. . . Gender equality is not synonymous with sameness, with establishing men, their life style and conditions as the norm. . . Gender equality means accepting and valuing equally the differences between women and men and the diverse roles they play in society (Council of Europe 1998, quoted in Walby 2003–04: 7–8).

## CONTEXTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES

My intent being to establish the links between gender mainstreaming and market fundamentalism, it is important to first consider the more general context in which both have emerged. To quote Walby (2003–04: 18) again: “Gender mainstreaming raises important questions about the relationship between global, trans-national politics and national levels of policy making.” For me, as for many other scholars, the context of the emergence of gender mainstreaming is that of the Washington Consensus. This consensus corresponds to a series of programs influenced by the theories advanced by Milton Friedman and the Chicago Boys, arguing that the role of government should be minimized in favour of market forces. What came to be known as the Washington Consensus became a reality for developing countries and their populations through what were called Structural Adjustment Programs. These were first applied in the early 1980s when the international debt crisis was at its height. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were the key players in the implementation of the Consensus. While the IMF took on the restoration of financial equilibrium, the Bank was assigned the mission of converting developing countries to the doctrine of economic liberalism that was to accompany the downsizing

of the State and the general conversion to global economic competition (Bessis 2003: 640).

What about gender in this context? In reality, the concept had not yet penetrated international thinking. What is more, women had hardly even “appeared” on the world stage. They were, so to speak, “discovered” by the World Bank in the mid-1970s following the First World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, an initiative of the United Nations.<sup>5</sup> The UN declaration of the Decade for Women (1976–1985) contributed to making women more visible, especially in the field of international development and subsequently led to concrete outcomes in the form of policies, programs and projects for women being developed by numerous organizations and particularly by international development agencies.

Structural Adjustment Programs imposed severe cutback measures on the indebted countries of Africa, Latin America and Asia. Their governments stopped recruiting civil servants or dismissed them, unemployment numbers rose significantly, and the money so recouped was then assigned to repayment of the nation’s debt, to the detriment of the social service and health sectors. According to Sophie Bessis, it was only then that women became visible again. She writes:

On all fronts . . . women everywhere were inventing survival strategies to get through the worst of the crisis. They reinforced the social fabric ripped apart by the economic downturn and compensated for the loss of male status (men were the first to suffer from the slowdown of the formal sector). During the difficult years of structural readjustment in the South, women showed the World Bank that they were unexpectedly dynamic economic actors and principal agents in the struggle against poverty, a struggle that the Bank had—officially at least—made one of its priorities . . . These factors converted the World Bank to a sort of feminism that could best be defined as pragmatic. (2003: 640)

These were not the only factors to bring about the conversion of the World Bank. This conversion was also sparked by human rights support movements and by new thinking about development in general. Besides refocusing attention on the condition of women, these movements and new ideas stimulated the emergence of new approaches, such as bottom-up development and an increased interest in indigenous peoples.

We now seem to have reached a new era of the Washington Consensus where the «social» dimension is again becoming part of economic development strategies. According to Massey and contributors (2006: 15, 20–21), scholars and policy makers indeed consider that the Washington Consensus hit a wall with the crisis in Argentina in 2002 (Massey et al. 2006: 15). The market fundamentalist faith that underlay the Consensus was apparently shaken by that crisis and those which followed at the beginning of the new millennium. The new consensus took the form of a “package of

organization reforms [that included] corporate governance, enforcing anti-corruption measures, promoting flexible labor markets, adhering to WTO [World Trade Organization] disciplines, complying with international financial codes and standards, opening prudent capital accounts, implementing nonintermediate exchange rate regimes, creating independent central banks, providing social safety nets, and implementing targeted antipoverty programs” (Massey et al. 2006: 22). As Treillet put it: “Henceforth, social capital theory prevails” (2008: 56). According to Suzanne Bergeron, “what is new about social capital theory in the context of international development is that culture and institutions are viewed as a *solution* to problems of underdevelopment and poverty” (2003: 401). Gender constitutes a core element in this new Washington Consensus (Treillet 2008: 53). Even though most of the authors consulted trace the gender mainstreaming approach back to the 1995 Beijing Conference, others stress the fact that it was in 2001 that gender was systematically integrated into World Bank strategies and that emphasis was then placed on the interrelationship between gender disparities and poverty (Treillet 2008: 54).

At first sight, this new emphasis might appear promising. However, it immediately confronts us with another issue alluded to earlier: what several authors call market fundamentalism. Market fundamentalism can be defined as follows: “. . . [a] socioeconomic construction of society with an accompanying worldview that bolsters that system” (Soares 2006: 276). Neoliberalism is at the heart of this construct in that it enshrines the supremacy of the market over the lives of the people (Vargas 2006: 50).

According to Sophie Bessis:

The fact that women, even in the most difficult circumstances, are able to capture the dynamism of the market sphere is, in the eyes of World Bank experts, a significant step toward the much-desired generalization of market forces. The question of women’s rights is thus secondary for an institution that sees women first and foremost as a new type of economic actor, a possible guarantor of social stability in an era when that stability is increasingly difficult to achieve. The World Bank has thus instrumentalized women in the sense that their promotion is not an end in itself but rather a means of implementing the bank’s policies for economic growth and eradication of poverty. (2003: 641)

What is at stake here is the instrumentalization of women. As defined by Dobrowolsky (2007: 631) and others, the instrumentalization of women occurs when they are “either out of the picture entirely, or positioned in highly strategic ways”. Dobrowolsky argues that the instrumentalization of women, equally as much as their racialization or invisibilization, is fundamental to processes of marketization. Moreover, these processes dovetail with the current scramble to achieve cross-border securitization, widely evidenced by the multiplication of walls or barriers on different borders,

like the one between Mexico and the United States, and also by the recent new visa requirement for Mexican citizens traveling to Canada.<sup>6</sup> Dobrowolsky adds that marketization accentuates economic disparities and contributes to the invisibilization and/or the instrumentalization of women (2007: 643). Furthermore:

[M]arketization also means that many of the state's responsibilities either fall to the market or to the family on the presumption that women will take up the slack in the realm of care. Women's under-valued and unpaid work in the home, then, can negatively impact their paid opportunities. Thus, women are also used in highly instrumental ways that reinforce gendered inequalities. (Dobrowolsky 2007: 644)

In other words, the logic of the instrumental viewpoint calls for seeing women as a resource, a productive investment (Treillet 2008: 64). From the perspective of international development, the instrumentalization of gender refers to the form in which international strategies reach development organizations, that is to say, as a compendium of formulae and packages that lead to almost mechanical applications of the measures intended to bring about gender equality. As we know from an all-too-familiar dichotomy at the heart of instrumentalization, responding to practical gender needs can gradually take precedence over strategic gender interests (Sohal 2005: 670–672).

We cannot forget that these are times marked by increased flexibilization in the market. The resulting job insecurity, with unstable work often being carried out by women, or jobs becoming more feminized and underpaid, leads inevitably to a situation of increased economic insecurity (Dobrowolsky 2007: 650). In this kind of context, Treillet rightly notes:

The role of the State remains subordinated to the logic of the market as the prime mover of the distribution of resources and of the factors of production [. . .] Put in more general terms, economic agents must be put into a situation where they can exploit a broader field of opportunities. An increase in women's activities is [. . .] an essential factor, as much to improve household incomes and intrafamilial income distribution in the short-term as to increase medium-term investment (sanitary, educational) in a context where there are a reduced number of children. (2008: 61)

Treillet then adds: “The promotion of microcredit by the World Bank corresponds to a logic of stimulation of economic growth that extends to the poorest among the poor” (Treillet 2008: 62). That is exactly what I found in my research in Mexico where the Ministry of Rural Development used gender mainstreaming strategies in its implementation of microcredit for women in rural areas.

Clearly, a gender mainstreaming strategy has explicitly driven the organization of the Mexican gender equity program and the subsequent creation of Women's Institutes in that country. In Mexico, as in all the countries that endorsed the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, public policies must take the gender mainstreaming strategy into account. This requirement was further emphasized in the UN's Millennium Development Goals, adopted in the year 2000, especially in the third goal: gender equity. As long as the strategy continues to target gender equity, and until equality is achieved, it still is possible to design projects aimed exclusively at women. It was this kind of project that was the subject of my research in the field in Yucatán.

### FOLLOWING THE APPLICATION OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN THE FIELD

The approach I chose to take was to follow the application of gender mainstreaming at the local level, by tracking a small program for women in a rural area. The program, called *Apoyo a la mujer campesina* (Support for Rural Women), was carried out by the Yucatán Ministry of Rural Development and Fisheries (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Rural y Pesca*)<sup>7</sup> and the method adopted was the provision of assistance to rural women, to enable them to carry out income generating activities. Assistance might be in the form of materials—like string for making hammocks—and the women could pay it back with the finished product or with money, if they succeeded in selling what they produced. The women did not have to pay back the full value of the assistance received. Instead, they were required to demonstrate in one way or another—such as attending a fair and displaying articles they had made or exhibiting some of the work produced—that they had participated in the project.

By the time this research project was under way, gender and gender equity were becoming familiar terms among civil servants in Yucatán. They had attended workshops on these topics—with mitigated results, as can be seen in these comments collected in 2004 from a male program officer: “As for gender equity, even if you ask people what gender and equity are, no one is going to be able to give you an answer, and even less so in the countryside.” He added:

In actual fact, I cannot talk about equity and gender in the countryside. No one is “practicing gender” within the program . . . Here in Mérida, everyone seems to want to invoke these terms: at the Women's Institute, they insist that our policies have now begun to reach into rural areas and spread the beginnings of awareness of equity and gender (*con toque de equidad y género*). But if you actually went out into the countryside and did a survey in a village, people would not even understand



what you were getting at . . . . And though that is the case, each one of us is expected to talk about gender equity before implementing any program. I don't think it can be done.

I accompanied the program officers (including the one quoted above) from their office to the villages and localities where they were to recruit the women that the program was intended for. The officers had been assigned to meet with small groups of women and convince them to undertake income generating activities that would allow them to access assistance from the program. Of course, after hearing the comments quoted above, I suspected from the outset that funding of projects for women under the *Apoyo a la mujer campesina* program was likely to be provided without any consideration being given to questions of inequality or patriarchy. My goal was to ascertain the extent to which this was actually the case. In fact, in the course of my research, the program gradually evolved to take the form of microcredit for income generation projects instead of simply providing assistance to the women concerned. As a result, women were introduced to the wonderful world of finance without even having been given the opportunity to learn about it—and this in a context where the changeover from one policy to the other (assistance to microcredit) was not explicitly obvious. While the change was more marked than I had originally anticipated, it was not entirely surprising considering the broader transformations underway in the field of development at the time.

Development circles today are highly familiar with the concept of microcredit strategy. A quick search on the Internet shows that it elicits both praise and criticism. At the same time, reference is constantly made to the role played by women in microcredit activities, this being primarily due to the “origins” of microcredit and microfinance at the beginning of the 1970s. As is explained in the autobiography of its founder, Muhammad Yunus, the Grameen Bank was set up for the specific purpose of making small loans to people living in poverty (Yunus 2003).<sup>8</sup> Women constitute the majority of the clients of the bank.

But how does microcredit work in Mexico?

Mexico's National Microcredit Program (*Programa Nacional de Financiamiento al Microempresario*—PRONAFIM) is a federal government program established in 2001. It is composed of two trusts (*fideicomisos*) administered since 2007 by the Ministry of the Economy: the FINAFIM (*Fideicomiso del Programa Nacional de Financiamiento al Microempresario*) and the FOMMUR (*Fondo de Microfinanciamiento a Mujeres Rurales*). Applications can be made to the FOMMUR through either of two channels: through an organization or as a corporate group.<sup>9</sup> Organizations can be attached to a Ministry. One example is the Ministry of Rural Development and Fisheries of the State of Yucatán. It was responsible for the *Apoyo a la mujer campesina* program I studied, at the same time working as an intermediary between the trust and the rural women scattered

across the Yucatecan countryside. One of the conditions that must be met if the program is to receive funding is that a critical mass of at least 200 women must be recruited from the region concerned.

In fact, I had observed (without knowing at the time that it was a pre-condition) an intensive recruiting campaign among the rural women by the program officers. I remember wondering why the officers put so much pressure on the women when they traveled to remote areas and localities and, furthermore, why they tried so hard to convince them to “work” on different projects, whether these involved handicrafts, agriculture, raising poultry or bee-keeping. Women seemed to be very hesitant to use microcredit. We should not forget that accepting microcredit means going into debt. However, it would seem that the average pay-back rate between 2000 and 2008 was 98 percent.<sup>10</sup> One can only imagine how hard women had to work to meet their commitments. This payback rate does not necessarily mean that the women were successful in their activities. On the contrary, many of the rural women I interviewed told me that even though they had not sold what they had produced, when it came to reimbursing the assistance, they cooked or sold food in the streets, or carried out other activities with the help of their families, so as to get the money they needed. Payback figures could in fact be masking high levels of distress among the women involved but this situation does not seem to be taken into consideration when microcredit is being promoted.

Most often, microcredit involves amounts of between 500 and 1000 pesos, some fifty to 100 dollars. These might sound like very small amounts but it is important to know that the minimum wage in Yucatán today is a little over fifty pesos a day (*approximately* four Canadian dollars).<sup>11</sup> There can be no doubt that the emergence of microcredit activities in Mexico is tied closely to international strategies. Ximena Bedregal draws attention to the fact that microcredit was adopted by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, development agencies and the governments of the world’s most powerful countries some ten or twelve years ago. She goes on to note that the main arguments used to justify this strategy are that microcredit for women is a means to achieve gender equality (Bedregal 2001).

Although microcredit has spread across the world since the 1970s, the term is still used to refer to Mohammad Yunus’ involvement in Bangladesh and the role of the Grameen Bank. What is almost never mentioned is that the apparent success of the Grameen Bank came about as a result of the fact that millions of small- and middle-range farmers, as well as industrial workers in Bangladesh, had previously been ruined by the Structural Adjustment Programs of the IMF. Farmers who had lost their land and the unemployed were those who then became the clients of the Grameen Bank (Bedregal 2001). What is more, though most of those clients were women, most of the Bank’s agents—known by the women as “the Sirs”—were men. So, while there could well be improvements in the economic situation of particular women, is gender equality really gaining ground? The question

must continue to be asked for as long as microcredit for women is being promoted in the context of gender mainstreaming strategies.

Mayoux (2006) argues that there are three paradigms of microcredit: microcredit as a means for empowerment of women, microcredit for poverty reduction and microcredit for financial continuity, centered on the development of a profitable banking system serving the poor. The first two paradigms can be grouped together under the umbrella concept of global microcredit and the third considered as what is now known as minimalist microcredit. I have to say that, in spite of claims by the Mexican government that its program was designed to bring about the empowerment of women and a reduction in poverty—an aim that would probably call for something resembling a global microcredit approach—what I saw corresponds instead to a minimalist strategy, with microcredit being granted to women on an individual basis and for reasons which often had to do with political clientelism. Even though the field officers, during our visits to the different localities, made a point of stressing to the women (in my presence) that allocation of credit was entirely independent of political partisanship, the following critical remarks made by one of them and collected in 2004 suggests the very opposite:

I have the impression that even though the “authorities” assure people that there are no political overtones to the assistance provided, in fact there are. There is discrimination towards individuals who oppose the official party.<sup>12</sup> I have the impression that this kind of discrimination slows down the development of the countryside and hampers the development of projects which could contribute to eliminating hunger in the villages. And things just go on in the same way—and that’s nothing new. When the PRI was the official party, people from the PAN were discriminated against and those from the PRI would say: “we will not give any assistance to the “blues”, we will give it to the “tricolours” because *they* voted with us”.<sup>13</sup> Right now, it is the other way round. So, as long as there are these divisions between political parties, things are not going to work. When someone gets a public position, it’s obvious that they have to belong to the official party, but what can we do? Resign from our position? Because in practice we are there to serve the people, whatever their status, whichever party they belong to. We are there to fight against poverty, aren’t we?

The next question in this context could be: microcredit for what? The options offered to the rural women recruited by the Ministry of Rural Development if they are to qualify for microcredit—and this policy is still in effect—center on handicraft projects that include an indigenous component in terms both of supplies and of products and symbols. At the same time, there is growing pressure on the women to adapt the work they produce to fashion and international demands, as their production is increasingly

being used to attract national and international tourism. In fact, the international market is explicitly targeted. So, rather than weave hammocks only for their domestic use, the women use the same techniques to make chair hammocks. It was even suggested to some of them that they make miniature hammocks for pets—objects the women and their families would clearly not be using! They also make clothing (blouses, bathing costumes, skirts, bathrobes, shawls and many other such articles) which the Ministry presents during fashion parades at periodic trade fairs both in Mexico and abroad. Some forms of handicraft receive more encouragement than others, given that they have the potential to be well received on the internal market and internationally.

Pressure is being put on the women to adopt better ways of presenting what they produce, to use better packaging, get business cards and even obtain bar codes for their products.<sup>14</sup> The women are encouraged by the Ministry to participate in quite a considerable number of exhibitions and fairs all year round, such as the Handicrafts and Rural Gastronomy Exhibition, International Women's Day, Rural Women's Day and the like, where they set up stands and succeed in selling some of their products. To maximize profits, program officers are trying to obtain a *protected designation of origin* status for the Yucatecan hammock from IMPI, the Mexican Institute of Intellectual Property (*Instituto Mexicano de la Propiedad Intelectual*) so as to ensure the exclusive use of the designation "handmade hammocks from Yucatán". The Director of the program at the time of my research stressed the fact that these efforts were intended to "bring the artisans closer to the globalized world" and of course give them access to the international market.<sup>15</sup> She also drew my attention to the threat represented by hammocks from China which would in all probability be in competition with those made in Yucatán. She noted ironically that China today produces holy pictures of the Virgin of Guadalupe,<sup>16</sup> "which shows", she added, "just what 'they' are capable of!" However, in spite of all these efforts, the bulk of the handicrafts produced, due to poor quality and/or because of competition from the private sector or from corporations of artisans, ends up at the new House of Craftswomen at the entrance to the Ministry and is probably never sold.

For every exhibition or event they participate in, women are asked by the program officers to wear good huipils, even though they do not wear them in everyday life, and to bring typical food, desserts, and candies which can be shared amongst the women and possibly sold. So once again reference is made to culture, and specifically to ethnic identity, because the huipil is one of the basic markers of Maya identity. I asked the women if they liked having to wear huipils. Here is one woman's response:

I like to wear the hipil; when they invite us, we must dress in the hipil. It is more comfortable and brighter, and, as I always tell my sisters, we must tighten our belts for the hipil is expensive (. . .). It is the essence

of Yucatán. One should be proud to wear the traditional dress of Yucatán. . .that is why it gives me a lot of satisfaction, and besides I like very much to wear it. Once they made a movie with us while we were practicing our crafts and I liked it very much because it brought out what we craftswomen are and it made me happy. (Informant from the village of Halacho, 2005)

This answer is fairly typical of what many women told me, as if they were reciting a lesson previously learned—and it is quite possible that that was the case. After all, these women do receive some training, including education in Maya culture, to qualify for credit.

### INTERRELATED ISSUES

What is the connection between these observations about gender mainstreaming and market fundamentalism—the key concepts used for the title of this chapter? In the first place, I should say that it would probably be more appropriate to talk about a combination of fundamentalism and neo-conservatism. Market fundamentalism is defined by Soares as a socioeconomic construction of society with an accompanying worldview that bolsters that system (Soares 2006: 276). When combined with neo-liberalism, it means the supremacy of the market over the lives of the people (Vargas 2006: 50). Neo-conservatism adds populist appeal to religion, ethnocentrism, and the obsession with security (Connell 2005: 854). The data I collected, when considered along with these concepts of fundamentalism and neo-conservatism, illustrate another concept: the instrumentalization of the indigenous culture, as evidenced through the training of craftswomen in Mayan culture. Yet one of the paradoxes of the situation is that the majority of the women participating in the program and who received microcredit for a number of years did not significantly improve their living conditions, whereas they worked far more than ever before.

The links between microcredit, neo-liberalism and market fundamentalism have been extensively documented. Microcredit, besides being seen as part of an approach aimed at integrating women into modernity, drawing on the view that disparities and discrimination are part of tradition (Bergeron 2003: 408), is also seen as being an instrument for the transformation of women into “subjects of credits” and “effective economic actors” who improve their individual access to the market at little expense for governments. In her analysis of World Bank strategies based on the promotion of social capital, Rankin found that in fact the central objective of microfinance is first and foremost the health of the financial system, at least in certain instances like the “minimalist” approach in which microcredit programs are implemented without any interrelation with other community initiatives. She argues strongly that “. . . responding to macro-regulatory

imperatives for market-driven development, the minimalist approach pares down microfinance to the strictly financial dimensions of poverty alleviation (credit, savings, and increasingly insurance and other financial instruments)” (Rankin 2002: 13). But still more important, according to Falquet, measures of this kind bring no enduring solution to the continuing impoverishment of women (Falquet 2008). And if any doubt still remains as to the interrelation between microcredit and market fundamentalism, Ximena Bedregal makes a very hard-hitting observation: “One does not give a woman a loan to buy a goat so she can supply her children with milk but only so she can produce things that can be sold on the market and then . . . buy the milk on the market” (Bedregal, 2001). The issue at stake thus becomes that of circulating money that would otherwise not circulate or would stay outside banking and financial circuits.

In spite of its apparently generous purpose, the recent association between Mohammad Yunus’ Grameen Trust and the world’s richest man, the Mexican Carlos Slim, aimed at providing more microcredit to the poor in Mexico through a foundation, tends to confirm this type of analysis. Moreover, we have observed that women “graduate” only with difficulty from small loans to more significant ones. Women are maintained in specific unprofitable sectors of the economy to such an extent that one wonders how this could ever contribute to their acquisition of power or to increasing it (Lairap-Founderson 2002 in Sohal 2005: 668). Moreover, one might well ask, as Treillet does: “Power for what, and over whom?” She adds: “We are not dealing here with a collective seizure of power by the oppressed populations of the Third World, but rather with an intensification of the individual capacity for success through improved access to the market” (Treillet 2008: 63).

Zapata and Townsend—who also carried out their research in Mexico—suggest that the very prospect of success through microcredit tends to encourage individualism. They argue that microcredit represents nowadays one of the most important activities of the development industry. Yet its contribution to eradicating poverty is negligible. These same researchers agree with Hoogvelt (1997) that development strategies of this kind are part of a system emerging from what might be called a “global government”. From this perspective, agencies and NGOs that adopt microcredit strategies purportedly represent the vanguard of capitalism insofar as their staff teach the poor and the dispossessed “how to enter the world of production for a profit” (Zapata and Townsend 2002: 71).

One example of individual success is that of Peregrina Cutz Tec,<sup>17</sup> who created a doll dressed in the typical huipil costume of the indigenous Yucatán women. The doll was originally intended for her daughter, but an officer from the Program for Rural Women noticed it and asked for more of them. These were later sent to a boutique where the tourists really raved about them. In only a few months, the dolls, which cost 120 pesos apiece,<sup>18</sup> were already on sale not just in Mérida but also in California—and the

same dolls were circulating in Germany, New York and Chicago, probably through migrant networks. When I interviewed Peregrina Cutz Tec, after the program had offered her a relatively sizeable advance so she would produce more dolls, she was still hesitant for fear of “blowing it” and of getting into debt. In addition, she worried about having to work under pressure and in particular having less time for her family. But she eventually let herself be convinced and in fact was very successful. Of course, program officers exploited this successful venture to the fullest extent and publicized it widely.

In the meantime, although the success achieved by a smattering of people is drawing attention, the overall economic situation of the rural areas in Yucatán is far from encouraging. In 2003, when my research began, some eighty-three of the 106 *municipios* (municipalities) were experiencing high or very high levels of marginalization. Taken together, they represented 35.5 percent of the total population of the State. As a civil servant from Yucatán told me in 2004, “People are very hungry here, this is what poverty means. You would be surprised to see the extent of hunger in the countryside.” More recently, the Mexican National Council for Population (CONAPO) revealed that the situation had not changed since the beginning of the new millennium and that Yucatán was consistently among the States characterized by a high degree of marginalization (CONAPO 2006: 30).

More specifically, we need to consider the growing level of disparities within the region. On the one hand, there is a rural population living in areas characterized by endemic problems of poverty and, on the other hand, there is an urbanized society where people in a limited number of social classes have access to levels and patterns of consumerism that are part of global capitalism, as evidenced by the many shopping centers found throughout Mérida, the capital city of Yucatán (Macossay Vallado 2005).

Even though it cannot be said that narco-trafficking is widespread in northern Yucatán, money laundering has certainly deepened the divisions between social classes in the region. The results of money laundering are evident in the palatial villas of Mérida and along the coast. Furthermore, the Yucatán peninsula is now a transit zone for drugs from Colombia. This was clearly demonstrated in September 2007 when a plane carrying several hundred kilograms of cocaine crashed near one of the villages included in my research. In June 2009, the Mexican navy seized more than a ton of cocaine stuffed inside frozen sharks in the port of Progreso, some 30 kilometers from Mérida, the State capital.<sup>19</sup> That was just one year after the discovery in August 2008 of eleven headless corpses in Chichi Suárez, a suburb of the city of Mérida, less than ten kilometers from the beautiful historical center so praised by international and national tourists. The crime bears the signature of the Gulf Cartel and is “proof” that it is active in the peninsula. A twelfth headless corpse was found just eighty kilometers away only a few days later and even so, Prosecutor José Guzman declared: “We believe that the twelve executions were an isolated incident and not

part of a strategy to destabilize the State.”<sup>20</sup> Though this claim might seem rather dubious, it is still reasonable to say that the immediate problem of the State of Yucatán is not drugs but rather the endemic poverty of a huge proportion of the population. It is this situation that leads some observers of Yucatecan society to argue that the insecurity arising from poverty, corruption, and injustice (Euán Romero/Indignación 2008: 3) is more serious than the insecurity connected to the narcotraffic prevalent in this country.<sup>21</sup> This is the context in which the concept of gender mainstreaming applies in Yucatán.

## CONCLUSION

Falquet (2008) shows that microcredit programs bring about social change but do so without improvements to social justice, human rights and citizenship. She postulates that this is due to the intrinsic limits of the new paradigms and strategies like empowerment, gender mainstreaming, and microcredit which are used in such general and broadly applied ways that they lose all significance in terms of gender equity. Rankin argues that, worse still, they contribute to producing and maintaining existing gender hierarchies (2002: 2–3).

One of the problems, according to Rathgeber, is that gender analysis has become an end in itself and has not proven very effective in changing existing social structures, with the result that power relations remain intact (2005: 589–590). My research tends to confirm this view: although women do “participate” more, although they are more integrated into the labor market or more involved in income generation activities, disparities, particularly those between the sexes, persist. This also confirms what Bruno Latour recently wrote: “Gender equality [is not] an (unfortunate) consequence of the global extension of capitalism, but an essential condition of the perpetuation of economic growth, which in turn comes to reactivate gender disparities” (2006: 52). The use of gender mainstreaming as a development “platform” of sorts could be a tool for reactivating these disparities.

So the problem does not really lie in microcredit *per se* but rather in the fact that an international strategy such as gender mainstreaming—a strategy for achieving increased gender equality—becomes a platform for integrating particular populations into the neo-liberal market. It also lies in the fact that women, these indigenous women who are considered to be the bearers of the local culture, are the instruments of this integration. In actual fact, it might well be argued that governments tend to see the integration of these population groups into the market as an exclusively public policy issue whereas it is also a question of fundamental rights: the right to work, the right to a sufficient income, the right to decent living conditions, etc. Naturally, as long as the issue is treated as being one of public policy, the integration of given populations into the market will rest upon



historically constructed disparities, while transforming and strengthening them. Among these disparities is gender, as I have tried to illustrate here, but those of class, race and generations persist as well.

## NOTES

1. The maquiladoras in Yucatán are mostly garment factories, many of which produce jeans.
2. The report shows that 43 percent of the people who participated in the survey on discrimination think that indigenous people will always experience social barriers because of their racial characteristics. One out of every three interviewees thinks that the solution to poverty among indigenous groups is that they stop defining themselves and living as indigenous people. In addition, 40 percent of those surveyed would agree to work in collaboration with other people to prevent a group of indigenous people from settling near their community. (For the full report, see SEDESOL 2005).
3. Locally, this word is written and pronounced “hipil”.
4. The data collection referred to in this chapter was funded under two successive SSHRC research grants for research in Yucatán between 1999 and 2007.
5. The term “initiative” should be interpreted cautiously as the United Nations organized the conference under pressure from the (liberal) feminist movement.
6. Of course, security is not the only issue involved here; economic and other factors are also part of the equation, although the lines between different types of factors and their connection with national security are difficult to draw. Furthermore, this chapter was written between April and December 2009, at a time when the obsession with security also seemed to have spread into the public health arena with the widespread international and national mobilization in reaction to the A-H1N1 flu epidemic, not only in Mexico and Canada, but in many other countries as well.
7. The name of this Ministry changed in 2007 to become the *Secretaría de Fomento Agropecuario y Pesca*.
8. Muhammad Yunus was the recipient of the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize. The Grameen Bank was founded in 1983 and although its vocation has expanded considerably since then, it still specializes in microcredit financing.
9. PRONAFIM website: <http://www.pronafim.gob.mx/> (accessed on November 4, 2009).
10. Mundo Microfinanzas: <http://mundomicrofinanzas.blogspot.com/2008/12/mxico-destacan-elevada-participacin-de.html> (accessed November 4, 2009).
11. In fact, in 2004 when the data were collected, the minimum wage in Yucatán was 42.11 pesos a day and the Canadian dollar was worth 9.5 pesos. Most of the workers in that State earn less than twice the daily minimum wage while the living wage for a family of two adults and two children should be around 150 pesos, therefore between three and four times the minimum wage (Brenner 2004).
12. In small localities, people’s political affiliations are well known to everyone, so it is fairly easy for local representatives, especially in the context of decentralization of the administration, to influence the distribution of assistance and credit to their supporters.
13. The color “blue” (in fact blue and white) is associated with the PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional) and the “tricolor” (red, green and white) with the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional). At the time of my research, the PAN

was the “official” party in the State of Yucatán, and the party to which the Governor belonged. However, at the local level, in the villages, the situation varied considerably.

14. As reported by informants and in a reference in *El Porvernir*, December 16, 2006. Also available online at: <http://www.elporvernir.com.mx/notals.asp?id=102150>.
15. According to the *Agencia Mexicana de Noticia*, Notimex December 17, 2006 and information provided in person by the senior program officer.
16. The Virgin of Guadalupe is the patron saint of Mexico. This concept is considered so fundamental to Mexican identity that even people of other denominations than Catholicism identify with the symbol.
17. Peregrina Cutz Tec’s name was mentioned widely in the local press, so there is no need to protect her identity here.
18. It might be relevant to remind readers that the minimum wage was then less than 50 pesos a day.
19. From Welt Online: <http://www.welt.de/international/article3947538/Mexican-police-find-cocaine-inside-frozen-sharks.html>. (accessed November 4, 2009.)
20. From Sky News: <http://news.sky.com/skynews/Home/World-News/Mexican-Drug-War-Decapitated-And-Mutilated-Corpses-Found-In-City-Of-Merida/Article/200808415089165?f=rss> (accessed November 4, 2009.)
21. Gender violence should be added to the picture. Aminur Rahman, among others, clearly showed that microcredit can contribute to increasing tensions and frustration among household members, produce new forms of dominance over women and increase violence in society (Rahman 1999: 67). Situations of this kind were confirmed in a certain number of the comments and statements collected in the course of my research.

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# 14 Alternatives to Expanded Accumulation and the Anthropological Imagination

## Turning Necessity into a Challenge to Capitalism?<sup>1</sup>

*Susana Narotzky*

The prolonged economic crisis has brought to the fore a series of experiences and projects that propose an “alternative” economy. Some of these stem directly from the need of ordinary people to make ends meet; examples of this are the *Empresas Recuperadas* which take the form of worker cooperatives, or the barter networks and alternative currencies that flourished after the financial crisis of 2001 in Argentina. But there are many other expressions of non-market forms of production and circulation all over the world, including the EU and the US, that make a claim to a respectable slot in the “economic” element of social reproduction. Unevenly included in the Third Sector by states attempting to give them a regulatory framework, the social economy, solidary economy, work economy, care economy, post-capitalist economy, and so on are so many expressions of economic processes that position themselves as “other”, vis à vis the hegemonic form of the capitalist market economy.

In this chapter I address the potential, in practice, of these alternative imaginations of the economy. How do local practices of survival—marginal, informal, traditional—get reconfigured as social innovation? What transformative impact does anthropology have through producing or reviving concepts of reciprocity, community, and gift? How do anthropological models of other forms of production and exchange, their stress on social embeddedness and on the moral objective of social cohesion, become symbolic instruments in the programs of economic transformation of social movements? What potential for long-term change of the economic order do these alternative projects hold, and what tensions emerge from their embeddedness in an hegemonic capitalist market economy?

In concluding, I try to disentangle the complex interaction between the intellectual (academic) anthropological discourse, the real necessities that push people to reconfigure (or invent) as well as practice non-market forms of production and exchange, and the political and economic forces that generate the pressures for the reproduction of particular social relations.

## INTRODUCTION

The idea that “another economy is possible” has become the banner of many social movements around the world (Santos 2004; Santos and Rodríguez, C. 2004). Often, the rise of such an awareness comes from the bitter realization that the regular economy, that is, the market regulated system of production, distribution and consumption, has made some people redundant both as producers and also as consumers. Nonetheless, however redundant they might appear to be, these people manage to make a living, to reproduce and even to make plans for the future for themselves and some of their children. Recently this has emerged in the various periods of crises (in the seventies, the eighties, the nineties and, after the Argentinean crisis of 2001, on into this century). In many regions of the planet, however, this “exceptional” situation seems to be the “normal” state of affairs for the majority of people. This was observed by Keith Hart and Larissa Lomnitz in the seventies for Ghana and for Mexico and was defined as an informal economy (Lomnitz 1975; Hart 1973). The new concept, however, created a division between a “formal” and an “informal” manner of making a living, and this distinction was tied to two factors: (1) the degree of integration into the market system, and (2) the degree of regulation of production and exchange by the state. Modernization theorists, on the other hand, interpreted this distinction as an evolutionary sequence tied to different stages of development that appeared in the present as a transitional duality in the economy (from traditional to modern sectors) that would eventually be superseded. At the same time other scholars, in Latin America, such as José Nun (1969) and Anibal Quijano (1980 [1971]) theorized this duality not as a transitional moment of capitalist development but rather as a structural aspect expressed in the permanence of a surplus population that survived in a “marginal pole” of the economy.

Meanwhile, in peasant studies during the 1970s, there is a long and diverse history among anthropologists of considering capitalism as a total subversion of other forms of gainful existence. We turned to Chayanov’s (1986 [1925]) insights about the demographic household cycle and the consumer/ producer balance of households. We witnessed the destruction of ways of making a living that were not guided by a logic of accumulation: peasants left the countryside and their farms, went to cities, became proletarians and so on. We often forgot that the peasants we found so distinct from capitalist agriculture were nonetheless part and parcel of an agricultural world far broader than that of the peasant household, whether in Europe or elsewhere. We also forgot that there were many different peasantries. Many peasants and their households were tied to landlords through various types of fidelity bonds, through emphyteusis and other obligations. They coexisted for centuries with free day laborers, with bonded labor and with communal forms of production in many places all over the world. They shifted from one position to another during their lifetime as well as from one generation to the next. Often, the peasant households we were studying

were an example of pluriactive situations where different household members participated in the local, regional, national and international economies in different positions at different moments. We witnessed the tensions between what we described as two modes of understanding the material pursuit of life: the logic of simple reproduction (subsistence, community cohesion, symbolic identities) and the logic of accumulation or expanded reproduction (making wealth through commodity production and circulation). Often enough, however, these two modes were located in the same spaces, and were enacted by the same subjects. If we adopted a Marxist methodological framework these observations forced us to use the concepts of formal subsumption, petty commodity production, and articulation of modes of production. If we used a “modernization” framework we tried to account for the adoption of modern models of thought and decision-making (rational action) in previously traditionally oriented practices guided by such (non-rational) objectives as prestige, kinship obligations, family wellbeing, religious piety, and so on. Alternatively, we chose to account for those non-rational decisions in economic terms, trying to force them into a formal marginalist model of rationality in order to make them comparable to modern, rationally oriented, action.

I am drawing attention to this “old” debate because it expresses the first step of what I want to say. Modernity constructed an image of the world in terms of dualities, structural dichotomies that helped us make sense of experience, and also helped us define the forces of evolution, of history, configure our moral realms according to values of good and bad pegged to these dichotomies.<sup>2</sup> The image of the “other”, the primitive in the past or the present, was as salient for the structuring of an economic imagination as it was for that of a political imagination or a social imagination. Family and communal forms of production and distribution were produced as distinct from, and opposed to regular, modern, rational economic practices. Forms of obligation and responsibility linked to kinship, religious, or political value domains were considered to be obstacles, residues from another epoch, to be superseded by the logic of modernity.<sup>3</sup> As a result, thinking of the ambiguous values at play in the lives of real subjects in the processes of making decisions about material provisioning was difficult. It required the intellectual ability to find ways of putting back together practices, ideas and values that had previously been separated, opposed and hierarchically ordered. In this endeavor Polanyi’s (Polanyi 1971 [1944], 1957) concept of embeddedness appeared as particularly useful to anthropologists for recapturing some of the messiness of real life that we could observe ethnographically. Put simply, the concept enabled us to re-socialize the economy, to think of it as entangled in “other” social relationships. It also recaptured the Marxian idea that relations among people appear as relations among things only through the mystifying magic of the market. It pointed to the fiction that particular factors of production such as humans and nature appear as things that can be treated as commodities in capitalism, but they are not things and they are not commodities. They are

part of value realms produced by social relations in history.<sup>4</sup> Polanyi thought that the disembedding of economic relations that was the natural trend of capitalist evolution would destroy society (and capitalism itself). Therefore, it was the role of the State to regulate and limit this process in order for capitalism to be reproduced. But re-embedding, in the context of the hegemony of a capitalist system, was about introducing limits to the penetration of capitalist logic into all domains of social life. State regulation had to carve out spaces that would preserve humanity, and those other spaces were now imagined as more natural, human, primordial, and *good*.<sup>5</sup> The dichotomy persisted and it got expressed in an opposition between “economy” and “society” two analytical concepts that seemed to emerge from empirical reality itself and were diversely articulated through history.<sup>6</sup>

In any case, irrespective of ideology and political objectives, modernity constructs a primitive slot (paraphrasing Trouillot 1991) that represents particular modes of relating as non-economic, situated in different value realms and generally considered as an obstacle to economic progress. Often however these value realms are highly esteemed in themselves as means of producing social cohesion: family values, religious values, patriotic values, are deemed to help hold people together in meaningful communities that project into the future. One of the most fascinating contradictions lies in the way economic models have tried to eliminate these other value realms while political models of economic social relations have tried to put them back in. One such case has been the Social doctrine of the Catholic Church and its political economic model of industrial paternalism (Rodríguez 1959; Holmes 2000). But we can see similar processes in the more recent appeal to family responsibilities in relation to dependent care in many Western societies (Pitrou 2002).

It is not surprising that the most radical ruptures in recent economic models have come from feminist approaches. Women’s work was long portrayed as part of this “other” value realm, the sacred hearth, the natural family bond, and responsibilities. Feminism (both Marxist and liberal) upgraded this work to the realm of the economy proper through accounting for it in market terms. It upgraded it also by pointing to the labor force (a commodity) as the product of women’s domestic unpaid labor in the context of patriarchal relations of production (Dalla Costa and James, 1972; Rapp 1979; Harris 1981; Edholm, Harris and Young 1977; Hartmann 1981; Beechey 1978). A later wave of feminism, building on these insights, would put reproduction at the center of the economy, highlighting care and dependency links as the main objectives of ordinary people’s economic decisions and practices (Robinson 2006; McDowell 2004; Lawson 2007; Elson 2001; Razavi 2007).

## ALTERNATIVE ECONOMIC MODELS AND PRACTICES

With the increased awareness of the centrality of these other economic practices and value realms for the regular economy an interesting phenomenon

can be observed. From different ideological and political positions, a serious attempt has been made to incorporate these other realities into economic analysis and political economic policies and projects. On the liberal side, the concept of social capital has been forwarded by the World Bank in its development projects (Grootaert and Van Bastelaer 2001)<sup>7</sup>. The concept tries to co-opt non-market social relations and values such as kinship, trust and reciprocity and turn them into valuable (in market terms) economic assets. On the alternative side, the concepts of reciprocity and the maussian “gift” have become key to describing and explaining social realities that emerge on the margins and cracks of the hegemonic market system, often following systemic crises. They have also become the argument for different projects of the economy, sustained on models that are meant to be more human, more moral, centered on a different ethics of responsibility (the caring for others). In both cases social science concepts and actual practices are tied together in the making of political projects, although actual practice often emerges from the dire necessity of making a living in moments of crisis or endemically marginal situations.

I will explore the case of the Argentina 2001 crisis that led to the development of a series of economic practices on the margins of the market system: the *empresas recuperadas* (ER), the barter exchange networks, the special money (Pearson 2003; Powell 2002; Sosa 2002; Dávalos and Perelman 2005; Rebón 2006; Fernández Álvarez 2007; López 2008;<sup>8</sup> Svampa 2008; Primavera 2002<sup>9</sup>). All of these systems appeared initially as an “ersatz” economy, that is, as a mode of getting by when firms closed, jobs were lost, money was scarce, and access to goods became difficult through the usual market distribution mechanisms. They were often organized through union branches (ER), political networks (*Movimiento piquetero*), or neighborhood collectives (*Asambleas barriales*), and referred to in terms of an ideology of opposition to capitalist exploitation. They also referred to a variety of political transformation processes and memories of struggle in the past. In the realm of production, the ER took the form of worker cooperatives, framed by the law and unevenly backed by the State’s willingness to support expropriation procedures. In the realm of distribution, local exchange systems and barter markets rapidly expanded, and articulated with the regular market at the production end. People bought inputs in the regular market, produced homemade goods, and bartered them in the local exchange node. In some provinces local taxes could be paid in barter-credits while some firms paid their workers in this alternative currency. The social movements that carried off this transformation were a mix of spontaneous responses to the provisioning crisis and an attempt at social innovation that had been breeding since the late 1990s in progressive middle-class intellectual circles oriented to finding self-help systems for marginal people and the increasing new poor. Barter networks started in 1995, developed slowly but steadily, and boomed after the 2001 crises, decreasing steadily after 2002. Barter networks also eventually divided into two different perspectives one more oriented in



terms of complementing capitalist economy—Red Global de Trueque—the other oriented to developing a post-capitalist structure—Red de Trueque Social. What I want to underline here, however, is the fact that social scientists became central actors in the process and produced a different *model* of an economy, one centered on “life” instead of capital accumulation. As José Luis Coraggio (2004) one of its best known proponents has defined it, this “work economy” which is a “social and solidary economy” centers on the household, “the elemental form of micro socioeconomic organization of work” (151) and he adds “households may then extend their reproductive logic through associations, organized communities, informal and formal networks of various types, consolidating socioeconomic organizations oriented toward improving its members’ condition for the reproduction of life” (152). For social scientists such as Coraggio this new work economy goes beyond the spontaneous form of the popular (informal) economy of marginal populations in that it becomes a political project<sup>10</sup>, a “systemic alternative” with a will to transform the capitalist system. The proposal is one of a quiet revolution, arising through economic pluralism (meaning the coexistence of different models of the economy). One of its main characteristics is the ambivalence toward the state: while these projects ask for state support (laws that facilitate takeover processes and the organization of cooperatives such as the *Ley de expropiación y quiebras*—expropriation and bankruptcy law, subsidies, etc.) they want to retain autonomy and the energy and legitimacy of grassroots social movements, and they also want to retain the drive of individual interest, while framing it in a collective project (the cooperative, the community, the household).

With some variations due to historical and context specific situations, most present day alternative economic models are similar: non-rupturist, possibilist, and tolerant. As is quite clear in the above quote by Coraggio, the model of the other economies (family economy, community economy) and its attached forms of social relations (sharing, reciprocity, solidarity) and values (morality, care) is central to the academic discourse surrounding these alternative economic projects. Moreover, central anthropological concepts such as “reciprocity” or “gift” are explicitly used and elaborated by scholars that are also activists of these new forms of economy, often participating in social movements or policy orientation (Santos 2004; Laville 2000; 2003; Caillé 2003; Lipietz 2002; Gibson-Graham 2006). Coraggio is a particularly interesting example because he is a major presence in alter-economy forums in Latin America and is himself very active in producing conceptual tools that are part of the intellectual framework that enables processes of social innovation such as the barter networks or the *empresas recuperadas*.

But he is not the only one: Jean-Louis Laville an active member of the Polanyi Institute is a key intellectual in ATTAC [Association pour une Taxation sur les Transactions financières pour l’Aide aux Citoyens].<sup>11</sup> His idea of *économie solidaire* is that of a third sector, a complementary domain of economic action, bridging the “non-monetary economy” of the household

and reciprocity obligations, the “non-market economy” of the State and its redistributive structure, and the “market economy” guided by profit and the logic of accumulation (Laville 2000). This solidary economy is based on “voluntary reciprocity” and is part of the public sphere of civil society, which makes this reciprocity very different from the classical anthropological reciprocal obligations found in undemocratic domains such as the kinship group or the community. Here the framework is one of economic pluralism where there is no contradiction between speaking of entrepreneurship and simultaneously speaking of replacing sterile competition by reciprocity (principle 3 of the Global Barter Network).<sup>12</sup> Indeed, Heloísa Primavera, one of the major activists of the barter network in Argentina, asserts that “It is not about going back to primitive barter as some people think the *Red Global de Trueque* wants to do, but about the conquest of new technologies together with a reinterpretation of the social phenomenon of money. This requires a strong and organized civil society for its application, as well as a State who acts as promoter and facilitator and a business sector who stops being a speculator and becomes again entrepreneurial.” (2002)

For Alain Caillé, (1996) a founder member of the *Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste en Sciences Sociales (MAUSS)*, also with strong links to activist alter-economy networks in France and Canada and increasingly in Latin America, the gift, generosity, is part of primary sociality, an incommensurable bond which is a necessity of being-together. On the other hand, secondary sociality, based on general principles of an abstract and universal nature is what makes pluralist democracy possible. The ensuing communication among diversity of world views makes the relation with strangers possible and is the foundation of citizenship.

And of course we could go on and we would find, perhaps surprisingly, a close kinship here with turn of the twentieth century scholars of modernity such as Durkheim, Töennies or Weber and their distinctions between “mechanic” and “organic” forms of solidarity, or between “community” and “society”.

What I want to underline here is that there is a kind of reification of these “other” economic relations that tends to endow them with a “moral” (i.e. good) aura that refers to the primitive or primordial slot where they have been positioned, one before the “fall” into capitalism. Simultaneously however, they are brought into the presently hegemonic ideology of individual freedom of choice and decision making capacity, which is in fact the “moral” realm of mainstream economy (i.e. liberal individualism). In this process, anthropological concepts are made present and contemporaneous by being torn away from their historical ethnographic specificities and conceptual developments, and reconfigured as timeless “principles” of human relations. They are produced as abstract tools that support a political project, one which builds on an idea both of the “good” in the “primitive”, and of the “good” in the “enlightenment” project of liberal democracies.

This explains Third Sector propositions, and the economic pluralism approaches, where voluntary association substitutes for adscriptive traditional communities. Thus, individual decision making capacities and entrepreneurial drive are theoretically maintained, while reciprocity relations, trust values and caring responsibilities are also highlighted. The epistemological framework that enables this alternative ecumenical perspective to emerge is a post-structuralist one where modernity is not a singular and unitary phenomenon that would produce its “other” as an externality. Rather, as Arturo Escobar (2005) would put it, there are “alternative modernities” and “alternatives to modernity” that coexist within different regimes of truth, and these “other” economies are now part of the same multiplicity of possible trajectories in the present. They are no longer modernity’s “other” to be eventually superseded and incorporated by its expansive drive into modern capitalist economy.

Instead of an either/ or we now have a with/ and approach to different modalities and moralities of provisioning and economic growth, where people’s actions are framed according to different value realms. The objective then is not a total systemic transformation that replaces capitalism by some other system. Rather, because the idea of a universal, over-arching, system has been theoretically dismissed, transformation comes about in an ad hoc emergent manner and without a predefined structured objective. The realm of compatible possibilities widens. In a sense, there is no apparent need to produce an hegemony that would guide the process of development of the “alternative” economies, precisely because there is no “alternative economy” (in the singular) prefigured.

I would like at this point to address the potential for change of these alternative models of the economy, set in this post-structuralist framework of economic pluralism. The example of the *Empresas Recuperadas* is significant. An initial heroic period leads to a confrontation with capitalist practices that have to be subverted in order to effectively take over the factory and maintain its social use, namely gainful employment. Social relations of production (ownership of the means of production) and in production (management and control) are radically transformed. However, a second period of stabilization follows when the *Empresa Recuperada*, now under the guise of a worker cooperative, has to become a viable enterprise in the capitalist environment of circulation. The demands of competition lead to pressures for increased productivity, which lead to a return to disciplinary measures and often management privileges, and redistributive differentials within the ER. Alternatively, self-exploitation, increased flexibilization, decreased health and security measures bring the cooperative very close to the ideal neo-liberal industrial firm. On the other hand, dependence on the State, whether through tax cuts, subventions or State contracts becomes a central asset for survival. The extreme case of the ER in Argentina is very similar to most consumer and worker cooperatives around the world, where economic pluralism and market hegemony force particular patterns

of economic relations through the circulation phase (Atzeni and Ghigliani 2007; Fields 2008; Ghibaudi 2004; Rebón and Salgado 2009: 12–18; but see Meyer and Chaves 2008; Aiziczon 2007; for the Zanon takeover).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would want to point to several issues. First, it seems particularly shocking that it is still modernity's *other* relations and values (reciprocity, the gift) that are reconfigured as an "alternative" to capitalism which as a result gets defined and confirmed as *the* "modern" form of economy. Second, it is mostly scholars who produce a *project* out of what appears as a mere *necessity* for the subjects involved in the alternative forms of production and distribution. Third, in practice, the projects have to reproduce in a context where capitalism is hegemonic, and this eventually forces the alternative projects (cooperatives, local exchange systems) either to remain as un-threatening enclaves or to be co-opted by the productivity, competition, and profitability demands of the hegemonic system. Fourth, anthropological concepts such as the gift, reciprocity, or embeddedness have become *symbols* of a "moral" economy structure, old symbols in a new structure of the "good" economy. It is interesting to note that in fact this is not at all new, and Mauss's moral conclusions to the *Essai sur le don*, Malinowski's emphasis on reciprocity as the means for social cohesion, Polanyi's plea in the Great Transformation for the need to re-embed the economy in order to avoid total destruction, all use ethnographic data to produce anthropological concepts such as "gift", "reciprocity" or "embeddedness" that they transmute into symbols of a better life model.

My research at this point is oriented towards proposing a model of economic processes that goes beyond the classical dualities of market versus non-market, as they appear in their contemporary reconfigurations. I think that these dualities, which remain implicit even in models that propose their articulation, represent an obstacle to the understanding of real people's economic life projects. By superseding dualities we are drawn to observe ordinary practice as the outcome of complex, tension laden domains of conflicting responsibilities. Moreover, in order to think alternative economies that can radically transform the hegemonic market economy it is necessary to go beyond the primitive slot of the economy. Trying to overcome this in a post-structural manner that upgrades economic alterity as an equivalent truth and practice is one possible way, the one followed by scholars such as Arturo Escobar, Boaventura da Sousa Santos, JK Gibson-Graham, to name but a few. This however, often leads to an economic pluralism which may eventually end up as a convenient complement to hegemonic market capitalism.

I propose, instead, to think of these alterities as categories and practices historically produced by/ with/ for the development of capitalist relations.

If we think historically *and* anthropologically we can see how the concepts that are used to define the savage slot of the economy start to take a particular “alter” dimension with the expansion of capitalism. They define what is available for *primitive accumulation*. Simultaneously with the process of defining “others” as available for being “civilized” through work and culture, and defining “empty” territories as available for being colonized. My point here is that there is no “other” economy unless structurally dependent of a particular hegemonic system that needs to produce it as different *and* disposable or consumable/subsumable. From this viewpoint, there is no natural boundary between substantively different ways of provisioning, the boundary that separates is formal and historically produced as part of a performative toolkit framing the stage for primitive accumulation and hegemonic expansion. At the same time, whatever was there to begin with, whatever the social relations were *before* “contact”—as anthropologist used to say—gets thoroughly transformed by the new structural position, and the forced practices that accompany it.

So, thinking about alternatives needs to take into account the real fact that all of the anthropological ethnographical cases and most theoretical concepts that we often use as instruments to think about other possible worlds *have been a central part in the construction of the system which has become hegemonic*.<sup>13</sup> There is no alternative economic “outside”, because, in Moebius like fashion, the outside—the other—is our innermost core, the most necessary part of our system. Capitalism needs it (and produces it constantly) in order to proceed through accumulation by dispossession phases (Harvey 2004), and people need it in order to feel that some spaces are preserved from the alienating forces of economic rationality; spaces where something different happens. This, in turn, serves as a check to the “social question” by embedding a part of the economic process in forms of moral obligation that are non-contractual, often naturalized, emotionally and spiritually charged, uncritically defined as “good” (family, community, Church). These are the spaces where hope is produced as project and utopia, but also those that obscure the consciousness of crucial parts of the process such as they are. This was the insight of feminist scholarship in the 1970s: that other economies, other forms of obligation and responsibility, are parts of a larger structure where a hegemonic force sets the pace. Moreover, spaces of semi- or de-commoditized production and circulation have also been shown to be fully articulated and entangled with the formal market economy and its social relations (Portes and Sassen-Koob 1987; Narotzky and Smith 2006). Here again, the process of generating “otherness” as opposed to “proper” economic processes is simultaneously the process of situating workers in differentiated positions in the larger structure. It is, also, a process of producing different entitlements and forms of exclusion from the body politic, generating selective hegemonies (Smith 2010). In this process, the common good gets segmented and qualified, often bounded in particular spaces of conflicting moralities. Many of the present-day experiments in alternative

economies often become self-conscious political transformative projects through the participation of intellectuals, mostly social scientist, and our concepts and descriptions of other possible economies. While this is potentially a toolkit for transforming the hardships of earning a livelihood, we should bear in mind that the concepts that we highlight as beneficial are not part of a different reality, and never were.

I end with a certain amount of pessimism regarding the capacity of the present day models and practices of “alternative” economies for being something more than a useful bandage for the structurally marginal populations of the world.<sup>14</sup> I do not have an answer or a new model to propose. But I do think that anthropology, because of its experience with the production of alterity and its consequences, has to play a critical role in imagining radical alternative economies while avoiding the traps of a primordial reified economic alterity.

## NOTES

1. A first version of this chapter was presented as a Keynote Lecture in Vienna, Austria, on April 22, 2010 during the Tage der Kultur- und Sozialanthropologie (Days of Social and Cultural Anthropology), organized by the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Vienna. Research has been possible thanks to grant SEJ2007–66633 from the Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (Spain).
2. Töennies’ society vs. community; Maine’s contract vs. status; Weber’s modernity vs tradition; Marx’s family or community economy vs. capitalist economy
3. Even if Marxism lamented the alienation that the new (capitalist) relations of production brought forth, it deemed them necessary to the general social progress that would eventually bring a new form of communal responsibilities and modes of organizing production and distribution into existence.
4. The critical literature on development pioneered by Arturo Escobar (1995) has been central to our shedding of some of the assumptions of modernity that still weigh heavily in mainstream economics.
5. It is interesting to note that those “other” spaces had been described as “bad” and despotic by the enlightened fathers of the French Revolution.
6. There is a clear weberian influence in Polanyi, one that infuses his socialist thinking.
7. Retrieved December 18, 2010 from: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTTOSIALCAPITAL/0,,contentMDK:20194767~menuPK:418848~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:401015,00.html>.
8. Retrieved December 18, 2010 from: <http://www.iigg.fsoc.uba.ar/empresasrecuperadas/PDF/Lopez.pdf>.
9. Retrieved April 19, 2010 from: <http://www.nodulo.org/ec/2002/n007p04.htm> access.
10. “Popular economy” refers to the informal processes described among others by Hart or Lomnitz in the 1970s for people surviving in the margins of the economy.
11. Retrieved December 18, 2010 from: <http://www.attac.org/fr>.

12. Retrieved December 18, 2010 from: <http://redglobaldetruque.blogspot.com/2007/05/principios-de-la-red-global-de-truque.html> access December 18th 2010. Principle 3: “We maintain that it is possible to replace sterile competition, profit and speculation with reciprocity between people” [Sostenemos que es posible reemplazar la competencia estéril, el lucro y la especulación por la reciprocidad entre las personas].
13. We just have to think about the centrality of the construction of the ‘family’ for the production of labor, as has been pointed by feminists in the 60s and 70s.
14. This perspective has been put forward by Salvia (2004) for the recent transformations in Argentina, and has been strongly criticized for going back to the 1960s Nun (1969) and Quijano (1980 [1971]) marxist theory of the marginal surplus population. My take on this issue, however, follows Gavin Smith’s recent work on the generative aspect of capitalism in its new phase of selective hegemony based on the total assumption by the State of the productivist project (Smith 2010).

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# 15 Afterword

## In Defense of Historical Realist Anthropology

*Gavin Smith*

Confronting Capital? It could well be argued that the outcome of a confrontation between a small contingent of anthropologists and *capital* would be a foregone conclusion. After all, many are those who have confronted capital and yet there it remains regnant in its shape-shifting serpent-like presence, strangling those it has not already poisoned. Yet confrontation itself can take many forms. We may for example confront somebody with the evident chasm between what they claim to be doing and what they are actually doing. In more vigorous form, Gramsci (1971) distinguished between a frontal attack like that on the Winter Palace and what he called “a war of position” which had civil society sitting out a long campaign of trench warfare. A common complaint we hear today is that capitalism and its instruments of regulation seem so dispersed and disguised that were we to storm its winter palace we would not find it there nor would we know quite where to build the trenches for our war of position. While to float like a butterfly and sting like a bee (as Mao once advised) seems to do no more than inoculate the beast against future attacks.

Yet, as the subtitle to this collection suggests, and as the chapters that precede this one show, before we can choose among direct engagements of these kinds we need to do the intellectual work of critique. And the political economy approach in anthropology that is most closely influenced by Marx’s epistemology has long taken as its *raison d’être* the exploration of the ways we might critique a present which perforce has been a capitalist present. Another way of putting this is that the kinds of problematics addressed by the authors in this volume arise ineluctably from politically engaged scholarship. And yet this starting point for enquiry does not lead to uniform approaches or identical conclusions. What these chapters exemplify is the fruitfulness of a dialogue in which authors enter the discussion from a variety of perspectives: different time periods, different spatial scales, different locales, and so on.

Yet there can be a frustrating circularity about conversations. When people enter into a discussion and soon discover that they seem to be getting nowhere, it is often because what each takes to be the baseline assumptions upon which all participants agree are themselves open to

question. What is the purpose of scholarship? What sort of balance do we accept between reality as a construction and its materiality? How much are people taken hold by ideas or are free to choose their own? And so on. So what prevents such circularity in *this* conversation is that, broadly speaking, as each of us has engaged with an issue, a setting, a dilemma, we have done so from a common baseline. Here I will say a little about what that baseline might be, and then I will say something about the different contributions themselves.

There are of course many ways in which scholarship might be critical and even politically engaged. Indeed it is not hard to imagine a wide range of scholars who would deeply resent the suggestion that they practised anything other than the hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970). So what makes the approach shared by the authors here distinctive? I would suggest three inter-connected elements having to do with history, reality, and difference.

Anthropologists have long had a fascination with history—a favor sometimes returned by historians (Davis, 1981; Ginzburg, 1981; Medick, 1987). We can think of Levi-Strauss's *Race and History* (1952) or Marshall Sahlins's *Islands of History* (1985), and no doubt every anthropologist would have her or his own battery of examples. But what they would reveal above all would be the widely diverse ways in which the idea of history inflects anthropologists' work. Of course when anthropologists speak of their interest in history there are a number of ways in which the word "history" might be understood. To begin with there is the difference between history as the past (as opposed to the present or future) and history as *the study* of the past, which is what historians do. Some anthropologists insist that ethnography must always take very seriously the materiality of the past: the way it impresses itself on the present in such a way that an a-historical present is simply inconceivable. Just as there is no such thing as "man" above and beyond society, so there is no such thing as society without history. It was Eric Wolf's insistence on such an understanding that led him to the irony in his title *Europe and the People without History* (1982).

Most anthropologists who follow in the tradition of Wolf have great respect for historians but the history alluded to here is not quite the same thing as "history" understood as what historians do. There are many anthropologists who, when they speak of their profession and its relation to "history", mean this second sense of history rather than the first. It is for example sometimes said that history is a deeply western idea, very different from the way in which *some cultures* [sic] relate to the past or relate the past. Here the reference can only be to the second sense of the word: the study of the past *as history*.

And then there is a further element: there is not just the study of the past and the different methods that might be used to do so, but also the *presentation* of those studies as finished works, that is as coherent accounts that make a claim to represent what the past was. At this point the challenges

that face the historian-as-author are not unlike the challenges that face the anthropologist-as-author and much of the dialogue between the two guilds arises along these lines. Anthropologists have been especially attracted by the degree to which *this* point of reference allows them to speak of history as pre-eminently *constructed*. If Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1825–26) is just one story that Gibbon chose to tell among the many that could have been told and if, further, Gibbon's magisterial position at the time had the effect of authorizing his narrative as opposed to any other, then we are getting a long way from history as a material force.

This is not the place to pursue what this might mean for notions of truth or our ability to have access to the past in anything approaching its actual reality. But we do need to note that it was not just those anthropologists especially attracted to the power of ideas over and above the power of material historical processes who found this sense of history especially fascinating. The people we often studied were also aware of the fact that history—their history—could be understood in both these ways and that the authorization of history of the latter kind could very much be tied up with the power of the narrator.

Struggles over history then, had and have these two elements. It is often said that what distinguishes today's political economy as practiced by anthropologists from an older brand, is that the former takes much more strongly into account the role of "culture". It may be, however, that what we are seeing here is not so much the gradual auto-enlightenment of young professionals as they are blinded by the light of culture on the road to Damascus, but rather the fact that, in the course of their fieldwork, they have encountered (and had to account for) people who are quite aware of how the writing of history affects the possibilities for their agency in the present. The relationship between material history and the production of histories has not itself changed—the gold standard remains some purchase on what is or was real. What has changed is the extent to which the people anthropologists currently study are aware of the stakes at play not just over the material conditions of their lives, but over the way those conditions and their place within them are made to seem coherent—through recourse to historical narratives.

Seen in this way the distinction that might most usefully be drawn among anthropologists as they deal with history is one in which for some this powerful *connection* between the conditions of history and the constructions of history is forcefully retained—to the point in some cases of providing the basic problematic of their work, as was the case for Roseberry (1989) and Trouillot (1995), and is the case for the contributors to this volume (see also Sider and Smith 1997). And those for whom the constructions of history—its forms and meanings, its nuances and evocations—have become sufficiently disconnected from what here we have called its gold standard that their *only* interest is its constructedness.

We have by now of course thoroughly entered into the issue of the second of our three elements: reality. When I speak of history as being “real” as opposed to simply a constructed narrative, I am not proposing some slavishly deterministic understanding of process but rather precisely the always-fraught relationship to which we have just referred. When we cross a field we are aware of the hedgerow on our left, the irrigation ditch to our right and the carefully laid stone wall behind us. These are the products of the labor of those who came before us and to deny their materiality can be a painful business. But we can measure our distance from the one or the other of these “things” in strides or metres just as we can measure the size of the field in acres and chains. When we make such measures it matters that the strides and acres—the worker’s walk and the time it takes his oxen to plough the field—came down to us from one element of society, while the other, the metres and chains—the tools for gathering taxes and rents—came down to us from another. It is these kinds of claims to history’s meaning that have a kind of purchase, as they explore the leverage gained versus the leverage denied of one narrative: one that places the agency in one quarter and the conditions for that agency in another, versus another that does the reverse. This is what historical realism is.

This brings us to the third of the elements to which I initially referred: difference. Just as it is inconceivable that we think of society without history, so too it is inconceivable that we think of the historical processes out of which societies emerge without understanding those processes as profoundly contradictory, conflictual and—while perpetually seeking out resolution—always condemned to the irresolvable. And yet while the outcome of these tensions is open-ended their production is not entirely contingent. Especially in capitalist societies the contradictions that arise as their essential relations unfold give rise to actual social conflicts. For example the property relation that is fundamental to these kinds of societies doesn’t incidentally give rise to explicit social tensions; it inevitably does so. It is a principle of a society based on capital that the holding of property gives the owner the right to earn money therefrom. S/he may do this, for example, by renting it out—charging for its use.

Alternatively—but not entirely distinctly—the wage relation may be brought into play along similar lines; for it is by making accessible this property (as tools) to people who have no (or little) such property, so that the tools-plus-the-labor can produce something, that the wage relation takes form. The owner of the property pays somebody to put the property to use and has the right to sell the results for his or her own benefit, giving over some of the proceeds as a wage to the worker. The workers, especially if well combined, can make a claim for what they consider to be a fair wage, a reasonable proportion of what their labor has produced, but in this kind of society, what is gleaned from the sale of what the labor-plus-tools has produced is the property of the tool-provider, not the labor-provider. Indeed if it is the worker who pays somebody for use of some tools so as to produce something and sell it

him or herself, then the relation is reversed, the difference being that between profit in the first place and rent in the second.

It is not hard to see how such a system is based on an essential difference, that is to say a difference that has to be in place before the relationship is entered into, indeed a condition for that relationship. Nor is it difficult—if we think about the owner of tools seeking to maximize his or her profit, and about the provider of labor seeking to maximize his or her wages—to see that the basic contradiction gives rise to a perpetual social tension. So this is the third plank in the baseline from which all of us begin our work: our understanding that the way in which the society (or societies) we live in are reproduced inevitably generates and perpetuates differences that have fundamental material consequences.

When we speak of “struggles over history” then, we are indeed speaking of different people’s various ways of asserting what the meaning of the past might be, if you like their constructions of history. But by refusing to place the real currency of history in parentheses, we are able to see as well that struggles over history are profoundly about the materials that come down to us through history as well as what we make of them to produce a history of the future. We are then “doing” history both in the reflective moments of interpreting the past and in the practical moments of producing the future. The social person is nothing but the historically produced and history-producing person.

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