Local and Not-So-Local Exchanges:
Alternative Economies, Ethnography, and Social Science

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In a very autobiographical talk, Edgar Cahn is describing some of the life events that led to the creation of the type of alternative currency for which he is famous: time dollars. Time dollars are a way of logging volunteer time through a local exchange (sometimes called a "time bank"), in which people can "deposit" hours of volunteer work and make withdrawals based on the volunteer time of other members. Cahn notes that he was influenced by his late wife, the African-American leader Jean Camper Cahn, who cofounded the national legal services program with him. He adds that seventy percent of the time-bank members are women, and his twin sister calls time banks feminist economics. Because the use of time as a form of exchange levels the playing field of labor value, he argues, time banks address social injustices created by the contemporary market economy. Whereas the market economy often fails to reward caring for children and elders, community service, efforts to promote democracy, and other forms of work, time banks provide a way to provide some compensation for such activities.

Cahn is just one of many speakers at the conference "Local Currencies in the Twenty-First Century," hosted by the E.F. Schumacher Society and held in the Hudson River Valley. Among the networks and local experiments, time banks are most attuned to issues of inequality, but there are many other types of alternative currencies under discussion, and their purposes and politics vary considerably. For example, the alternative currencies that are most visible to the media and public are physical currencies such as Ithaca Hours, Burlington Bread, and Berkshares. Unlike time banks, they address another type of inequality, the absence of policy support for the independent, small business sector (see also Maurer 2005, Seyfang 2003, 2004). By exchanging local currencies, the small-business sector can draw attention to its existence and unique contributions to a community. Another type of alternative currency is the script. In Great Barrington, Massachusetts, a restaurant that could not get bank financing for an expansion issued coupons that customers could purchase and later redeem at a premium with purchases of the store's products. The informal bonds, known as "deli dollars," enabled the business to expand without support from the banks. Much more numerous are local exchange trading systems (sometimes called "LETS"), which are computer-based systems that do not require a currency and can carry debits. As Michael Linton, the famed founder of the first LETS system (which he said originally meant "Let's," as in "Let's do something"), explained in a talk, the goal of the original LETS was to provide a source of alternative income and employment in an economically depressed community. For some young men with whom I had lunch, the LETS that they had developed was devoid of social change aspirations and was simply a temporary way for a group of friends to swap "stuff."

Although the conference organizers used the phrase "local currencies" in the title, there was no general agreement about what to call the diverse alternative currency projects: local, alternative, or community currencies; time banks; LETS; and so on. There was much exchange of information about the merits of different types of alternative currencies, and many of the sessions focused on the significant problems that advocates had faced after launching their local exchange systems. I certainly came away from the conference with a good awareness of pitfalls to avoid, the central features of successful systems, and the labor that would be required should I ever become involved in establishing such a project. Back home, when some members of the localist organization with which I am involved suggested starting a local currency, I cautioned them about the work and skill that would be needed in order to get one to work successfully. Subsequently, an international research project was launched to catalog and analyze the diverse projects across the world (Seyfang 2010).

Although there is a side of the alternative currencies movement that is, like the young men I mentioned above or stores that issue coupons, not very connected with social change aspirations, the more prominent sentiment was connected with a political critique and social change project. Frequently speakers stated that official fiat currencies were instruments of a system that enabled an unfair concentration of wealth. Most of the people who presented at the conference recognized the need for official fiat currencies, but the general aspiration was a populist one of returning financial power from the large banks, central government, and multinational corporations to the small-business sector, local governments, and the "people." One speaker, David Boyle of the New Economics Foundation in the U.K., drew clear parallels with the nineteenth-century populist tradition. Another speaker and leading figure, Thomas Greco, articulated the relations between alternative currencies and a broader political project. Although he made such connections at the conference, he subsequently published a more detailed statement of his views in *The End of Money and the Future of Civilization*: "power and control need to be decentralized; wealth must be more fairly distributed; local economies must be nurtured; the commons, especially the credit commons, must be restored; monopolies must be eliminated or circumvented; the basic necessities of life—especially water, air, food, and energy—must be brought under popular control; and ecological restoration must be a high priority" (2009: 230). Achieving the goals is not possible, he argued, within the "present politicized global debt-money regime" (ibid.). Such views are consistent with a wide range of social movements that have opposed a model of corporate-led globalization that has led to increased environmental destruction and social inequality. Moreover, the views have become even more popular after the financial crisis of 2007 and the subsequent Great Recession.

This essay will begin with the argument that movements in support of alternative economies should be considered alongside protest-based movements as part of a broad family of antiglobalization movements, then it will consider the puzzle of how to theorize community-based antiglobalization and localist movements as both place-based and transnational. The essay will then step back to consider broader methodological and theoretical issues that have emerged in this volume and in my own research, specifically ethics in the ethnographic study of antiglobalization movements and the broader problems of ethnography understood as a humanistic product and as method for social-science research.

Alternative Economies and Antiglobalization Movements

The decision to call the networks of advocates of alternative currencies a movement is a matter of definitions. Many of the participants used the term "movement" as a self-designation, but because the meanings of alternative currency advocacy can stretch from social change aspirations to business promotion to a hobby-like activity, I have tended to prefer the broader term "alternative pathway." Likewise, I prefer the term "reform movement" (in contrast with "social movement") to describe collective social change action that does not use a protest repertoire. That this reform movement is transnational is obvious from the description of the conference just given; the alternative currencies movement is maintained through a global circulation of writing, knowledge, and people, punctuated by brief gatherings. Given the location of the conference, most of the attendees were from the United States and Canada, but there were also community currency advocates from Japan, Europe, Latin America, India, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries and regions. It was evident from the many references that people made to experiments around the world that knowledge about the these heavily localized reform projects was circulating globally. As a result, the conference could be considered an example of the "networked space of transnational encounter" described in this volume's introduction.

The idea that locally-based advocates and activists connected through transnational networks will occasionally gather for global events of collective effervescence, or at least non-local exchange, is hardly new or exciting. But the designation of the conference as "local currencies" does entail something of more general interest in the study of transnational social movements: the question of the local in the world of transnationl antiglobalization or alterglobalization movements. Although the conference described and local action that preceded and followed it were not the kinds of antiglobalization activity that entailed tangling with security forces in street protest against a global financial institution, it is fair to think about advocates of alternative currencies as part of a broad family of antiglobalization movements. Antiglobalization movements are highly diverse, but they share a common feature of opposition to a form of globalization that benefits large, multinational corporations. Like many other social movements, antiglobalization movements embody both a politics of opposition—to a corporate-led, neoliberal vision of globalization—and a politics of alternatives—in favor of a more just and sustainable economies and policies. As indicated above, at least some local currency advocates share with antiglobalization activists a strong sense that the neoliberal model of corporate-led globalization needs to be changed, but they differ by emphasizing a pathway to change that leads through building organizational alternatives to multinational corporations, often via cooperatives, small businesses, and social enterprises. Whereas the antiglobalization protest mobilizations tend to fit more comfortably with the traditional analytical category of a social movement, alternative economies movements often operate as reform movements that take place more within institutional structures and appeal to a broader range of participants. The alternative currencies movement is closer to, and sometimes intertwined with, the social forum movement that is discussed in this volume (see especially Jackie Smith and Janet Conway).

The primary site of the alternative economies strand of antiglobalization movements tends to be local communities rather than global events. However, when people build local currencies or other types of local exchanges, they usually do not do so in isolation. Take the example of Berkshares, a local currency project launched by the E. F. Schumacher Society in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. I have been fortunate enough to have both Susan Witt and Sarah Hearn of the E.F. Schumacher Society speak about local currencies in a lecture series that I ran on local social enterprises. My students have generally never heard of local currencies, and their imaginations are often lit as their hands hold the beautifully designed alternative currency notes. But as they learn about the local currency, they also realize that the Berkshares project is part of a much larger vision of building an alternative global economy to that of the large, multinational corporation. The Berkshares project, its coordinators, and the E. F. Schumacher Society are networked with many similar organizations, both in their region and throughout the world.

A conceptual problem emerges. A transnational movement, which we might call the local currencies movement, can be viewed as part of the family of antiglobalization movements, which have been a focus of attention in the study of transnational social movements (e.g., Della Porta 2007, Della Porta et al. 2006, Juris 2008a, Smith and Johnston 2002). But when one follows the local currencies movement back home, it is embedded in an ecology of related reform efforts that do not have a global focus. I use the term “localism” to describe the wide range of efforts that rebuild or create local ownership, such as family farms, independent small businesses, local nonprofit organizations, community media, food cooperatives, credit unions, farmers’ markets, community gardens, cooperatives, community financial institutions, and municipal electricity. Activists who build community currencies in a specific region are therefore not lone rangers; their work fits into an ecology of regional organizations and reform efforts that are also attempting to build alternative economy institutions in their region. So how might one think of the relationship between localist movements and transnational antiglobalization movements? To answer that question, it is necessary to explore more deeply a localist scene that I know very well.

Localism, Scale, and Transnationalism

I became involved in a corner of the North American localist movement when I joined with people from the local credit union, food cooperative, and some other independent businesses to help form Capital District Local First in the region near New York’s state capital. The primary goal of the organization is to promote the locally owned, independent business sector in the region and to enroll the sector in a project of making the regional economy more fair, community-oriented, and environmentally sustainable and to connect those efforts to others going on throughout the country and world. The organization is locally oriented, but it is networked with efforts across the United States and Canada through the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies and some other organizations, such as the New Rules Project of the Institute for Local Self-Reliance.

As has been shown by some national studies, organizations like ours, with support from the alternative newsweeklies, are having a significant impact on consumer spending (Mitchell 2009a). There are many examples of communities and state governments that have responded to criticisms of policies that heavily favor the large corporate and retail service sector. Policy reforms include formula business and size-based zoning restrictions, legislation that requires community impact reviews for big-box development projects, shifts in public procurement policies, Internet sales taxes, community renewable energy initiatives, and decisions by state and local governments to move some of their money to local banks and credit unions. Although some of the people associated with Capital District Local First have occasionally talked about starting an alternative currency, and a few other people in the region have also talked about it, to date the project has not been launched, partly due to the awareness of the level of work required that has flowed out of the experience of the transnational networks. Instead, the closest projects are coupon books that serve local, independent businesses and a range of community financial institutions that have flourished in the region.

The impact of localist mobilizations is great enough that there are emergent corporate strategies to counter localism, such as efforts by Wal-Mart to promote the sale (albeit limited) of local products and by Starbucks to offer debranded coffee houses that appear to be independently owned (Mitchell 2009b). Likewise, internet retailers have made strong efforts to stop state governments from passing legislation that enables Internet sale taxes. The model legislation in New York State was passed with strong support from the state’s small business community, including one of the most active member businesses of Capital District Local First. Although local-first activities generally are not openly hostile to big businesses (the idea is to encourage some shifting of patronage to small, independent businesses from the region and around the world), there is a general sentiment that the global economy would be much fairer and democratically accountable if it were organized along alternative principles.

Although consistent with traditional leftist politics on the issue of shared opposition to the corporatocracy, localist politics differ from the traditional leftist strategy of advocating public ownership of the means of production by national governments or the social liberal strategy of strong antitrust and regulatory legislation. Instead, localists focus more on building democratically accountable economic organizations from the bottom-up. Here, I think there is an important general insight into the study of transnational social movements, especially those that oppose a vision of neoliberal globalization based on control of economies by large corporations. The issue of scale should be central to the theories of such movements. As I have seen in the day-to-day work with people in the region where I live, at a local scale it is possible to mobilize people across traditional left-right political divisions when their attention is focused on a shared identity with a place and a threat to that place posed by large, multinational corporations. But the potential for building new kinds of political coalitions also creates tensions with the traditional socialist and social liberal vision of social change based on higher scale institutions, especially national governments and international organizations. The division within antiglobalization movements between opposition politics with repertoires of street protest and alternative politics with repertoires of alternative institution building is to some degree also a division in scale as a strategic site for action.

To movement leaders and social scientists who think in traditional socialist or social liberal terms, the emphasis on building alternative economic organizations may be suspect. One cause for suspicion is the idea that localist politics operate at the wrong level of scale and are therefore condemned to ineffectiveness. There is sometimes an underlying assumption that the best or most appropriate level of scale on which antiglobalization politics must be enacted is transnational. But if one accepts the proposition that antiglobalization movements, like many other social movements, are divided into opposition and alternative wings, then one opens up the question of a range of interacting issues: strategies of oppositional and alternative politics, repertoires of protest and institution building, and levels of scale.

The study of localism therefore may have some general value for the study of transnational social movements by broadening the study of scale from the mechanisms and processes (Della Porta and Tarrow 2004). The issue here is not a problem of the scale shift that accompanies mobilizational success but the variable politics and forms of social movement activity that occur at different levels of scale. For example, in localist politics, the more hands-on advocacy work occurs at the local and state government level, whereas at the continental and global level the work is more information-sharing or establishing alternative trading networks such as fair trade.

Another way in which localist politics may provoke some suspicion from traditional socialist and social liberal critics is their class address. As contributors to this volume have shown and many other social movement scholars before them have noted, transnational social movements often highlight not only relations of global inequality between elites and the rest of us but also power differentials within movements. (See also Juris 2008b, Smith et al. 2008). Here, scale is sometimes associated with power and privilege; those people within the movement who are able to circulate at a translocal scale tend to be from the more privileged strata of the movement. Furthermore, the result of their translocal circulation is access to greater knowledge, social networks, and other resources that enhance their position of leadership within a movement. As a result, transnationalism may actually magnify differences of power and status between the cosmopolitan movement leaders and the locally anchored movement rank-and-file.

Returning to the local currencies conference, such issues were very evident. The speakers and participants at the local currencies conference were largely male, well-educated, and, aside from representatives from Asia, white. The observation reflects not a bias on the part of the organizers as much as the characteristics of the field. As I have moved through diverse alternative economies movements over the years, this network was especially white and male. It contrasted with the alternative food movements, in which women are more heavily represented, and within alternative food movements community gardening, in which people of color, often with low-incomes, are more prominent. However, it would also be a mistake to generalize that the alternative finance space is a zone of completely white, male, and privileged class position even within the broader field of alternative economies projects in North America and Europe. To make the point I opened the paper with a pointer to the "community development" side of the alternative currencies field.

In the region where I live, the Capital District Community Loan Fund is one of the best examples of organizations that have a social address (and actually a physical address as well) in the low-income, African-American and Latino neighborhood of Albany, New York. Although the loan fund is affiliated with Capital District Local First and partners with it for some events, the demographic of the local-first organization is much more middle-class, middle-aged, and white (but with women in many of the prominent leadership positions). Based on my interaction with other local-first organizations and the national BALLE conferences, the demographic is widespread in this particular segment of the alternative economies movement. At the national level BALLE has developed an initiative to deepen connections in low-income communities. In other words, as in some of the other social movements, diversity is a shortcoming, an opportunity, and a goal.

The fact that local-first organizations are largely middle-class and white (but gender mixed) may cause some activists and intellectuals to be suspicious, but again it may be valuable to use the social address as a point of departure for inspecting assumptions about the social address of antiglobalization politics. Just as those politics may not necessarily have as close a relationship with the transnational scale as might first be assumed, so antiglobalization politics may not necessarily have the close relationship with the youth in rich countries and poor people in low-income countries that is sometimes assumed. Local-first organizations are about class injustice, but they are primarily about the plight of the petite bourgeoisie in the context of the predatory practices of corporate-led globalization. In the process of working with the organization, I have come to see the need for better research and theory on the petite bourgeoisie as a source of radical politics (see also Johnston 2003). For example, there are significant divisions within this class. There is an independent working class of small mom-and-pop shops that have somehow found a place to survive in the niches of industries dominated by chains, franchises, and large, corporate retail and service enterprises; and there are larger enterprises that are locally owned, privately held, and loyal to the region but sometimes more identified with the policies and politics of the large corporate sector. In my experience, these two types tend to divide on some crucial issues, such as attitudes toward unions. Those divisions suggest both the potential for and limitations of possible cross-class coalitions.

In summary, although it may seem contradictory to talk about localism in the context of the study of transnational social movements, there are some good reasons for doing so. The study of localist movements posed in the context of the study of transnational movements suggests a reflexive question about the particular valuation and devaluation of some levels of scale over others. Moreover, the study of localist movements also suggests the need to pay attention to possible assumptions about the social address of transnational antiglobalization movements. I suggest that there is a need to attend more to the trafficking of activists, ideas, politics, and strategies across levels of scale and social divisions, and to explore the particular kinds of politics that may be enabled by or constitutive of those different levels of scale and social address.

Ethics and Ethnography

Issues of class, race, and gender within an organization and movement are always very delicate, and they raise the general problem of how a researcher should or should not write about those issues and other sensitive information. (See also the discussions in this volume by Stinger and Conway.) I have had two main roles with respect to the localist movement in the region where I live. Within the university, I have taught a course on social entrepreneurship and sustainable communities. The title was a compromise that enabled access to university entrepreneurship funding that supported a lecture series of local social entrepreneurs in the region. (Some of the speakers considered themselves activists and were surprised to find out that they were being redefined as social entrepreneurs, but they were happy to receive the honorariua.) The money also allowed me to hire a graduate student to write case studies for use in teaching about alternative economies by exploring the life histories of leaders such as Edgar Cahn (time banks), Paul Rice (TransFair USA), Mary Houghton (Shorebank), Muhammed Yunas (Grameen Bank), Robert Swann (Community Land Trusts), and Amy Goodman (Democracy Now). My other role has been as a board member of the organization described above. Within the organization, I ended up doing the legal work during the early phase, but as the organization evolved I tried to shift more into a role of making presentations to local groups, such as the chambers of commerce and business improvement districts; serving as a liaison with similar organizations across New York State and the country; and doing some of the writing for the organization. At present, there is some sentiment that my talents would be best used in leading initiatives for policy reform.

There are at least two major ethical issues that emerge when one has separate roles as an organizational leader and a researcher who writes about the broader social field in which the organization is positioned. Among some social scientists the coexistence of two roles or identities means that it is impossible to write with objectivity about the movement. Certainly if a researcher has one foot in a movement, the researcher is not likely to write highly critical treatises on it. But similar concerns arise for any kind of ethnographic research in which the researcher has established long-term relationships with people associated with a field site or sites. It seems that the proper way to handle possible conflicts is to disclose the relationships so that other researchers can weigh the potential conflict when evaluating one's research. As long as the position is disclosed, the research field benefits from the superior background knowledge of someone who has long-term, real-life experience in the movement.

The second ethical issue concerns not the obligations of a researcher to a research community but of those of an activist or advocate to an organization or movement. The ethical issues are more pressing the more deeply one is involved. For example, at the local currencies conference, I was attending as an observer and taking notes on public talks and informal corridor conversations. But as an insider and a leader of a localist organization, I have access to a high level of confidential information, and there is a presumption that my primary role is one of community service, advocate, or activist. The role places restrictions on the use of the ethnographic vignette in scholarly writing. Much as a court has rules for admissibility of evidence, I have developed inclusion and exclusion rules for the admissibility of some forms of the ethnographic vignette in final, published writing. To some degree the development of the rules is also informed by my experience serving on the university's institutional review board for human subjects research. After years of thinking through research ethics, I have come up with two basic rules for ethnography when one has a role that is different from that of a researcher.

A primary rule is as follows: when the ethnographic vignette reveals non-public knowledge about an organization or individuals, then it is off limits. I treat the information obtained as a member of the organization in the way that journalists describe as "deep background," that is, information that can be used to inform general analyses but not in a way that provides a description of a specific event or person. An example is the discussion above about the divisions in the petite-bourgeoisie and attitudes towards unions. I have access to some very colorful ethnographic vignettes, but rather than capture that information as a vignette or even group of vignettes, I watched for more statements, and I gradually built up a pattern about the divisions in the petite bourgeoisie. As will be discussed below, the exclusion rule has implications for the genre of writing. The second rule, the inclusion rule, is that if I want to use specific information that I have acquired in my service role, then I draw on published statements or formal, recorded interviews with signed consent forms, where it is clear to the interviewee how I will use the material and there is a right to be anonymous and to approve and edit quotations. Otherwise, I use only general descriptions of public events, such as the description at the opening of this essay, or summaries of highly anonymous conversations (see also Hess 2010 and the case studies at www.davidjhess.org).

The choices that I have made with respect to exclusion and inclusion rules in turn are related to a broader issue of what the term "ethnography" means. The term can refer to both a method of research—at its best, long-term fieldwork in which one gains an insider's knowledge of a social field—and a genre of writing—usually a descriptive and interpretive mode of writing based on a humanities style of alternating patterns of vignette-text followed by exegesis-analysis. However, ethnography as method can be separated from ethnography as genre, and the separation is commonplace in sociology and some of the other social sciences. The difference raises deeper questions involving what might be called the "two cultures" problem of ethnographers. Because the problem is of great importance for an interdisciplinary volume on ethnography and transnational social movements, it is worth discussing in more detail.

Two Cultures of Ethnography

The central question that this volume explores is apparently simple: can ethnography can be of value for both the scholarly study of transnational social movements and the political strategizing of transnational movement activists and advocates? The immediate answer may be an obvious "yes," but the question leads to some very interesting and complex issues.

A first layer of issues involves the problem of writing for scholarly and nonscholary readers in a single text. In publishing there is a term for this kind of project—the "crossover" book that can reach both a trade audience of educated lay readers and a scholarly audience—but in practice it is exceedingly difficult to write. For example, two books that I coedited during the 1990s as part of my research project on the alternative cancer therapy movement in the United States were based on interviews with advocates, researchers, and clinicians (Hess 1999, Hess and Wooddell 2007). The books were influenced by the writing culture critiques of the 1980s (e.g., Clifford and Marcus 1986) and the idea that researchers should make room for the voices of the people with whom they work. The volumes carried that idea to the point that they essentially ended up as edited volumes with each chapter devoted to an interview. Although the books had moderate general circulation and press coverage, and both health-care professionals and patients found the books helpful, they produced almost no citations in the scholarly literature. I came to the conclusion that the crossover book was a myth for most fields, with the possible exception of feminist and popular media studies, where there does appear to be a popular audience for academic work. Since then, most of what I have written with respect to knowledge, technology, and social movements is for scholarly audiences. However, I have also produced white papers and case studies for more general audiences. The divisions of genre are a deep part of the reward system of academia and, with a few exceptions, fairly intractable to change (Woodhouse et al. 2002).

A second issue that is embedded in the question is the proposition that ethnography can have value for the scholarly study of transnational social movements. At one level, it is obvious that the method of ethnographic fieldwork has widespread value across a range of disciplines, but at another level, one can construct a more specific argument that a particular type of genre of writing up the results of ethnographic fieldwork, one that is associated with an interpretivist strand that is prominent in North American cultural anthropology, has potential value for interdisciplinary social movement studies. As someone who was trained in that and other traditions of anthropological ethnography but also has circulated and published widely in interdisciplinary social-science circles (mostly sociology, environmental studies, and policy studies), I have become acutely aware of some of the disciplinary differences and boundaries that can occur.

As a method and genre, "ethnography" is a socially contested field that stretches across a wide range of scholarly disciplines. Anthropologists may feel a particular ownership over ethnography, but the sense of ownership is not shared. Sociologists, for example, were writing urban ethnographies early in the twentieth-century, even before the genre of the functionalist monograph became established in anthropology. Moreover, the *Handbook of Ethnography* shows that the concept of "ethnography" is deployed across a wide range of fields even beyond anthropology and sociology (Atkinson et al. 2001). At one extreme, I once attended a communications conference where two hours of classroom observation were called "ethnography." In contrast, I had come to think of ethnography as requiring years of experience in one or more related field sites. Often ethnographers cannot see anything until they have known people and organizations for over a decade and watched how they have changed. In my essay in the *Handbook of Ethnography*, I suggested some characteristics of "good" ethnography in the more extensive tradition and also discussed some issues related to intervention and activist-scholarship. In general, good ethnography as the result of long-term ethnographic fieldwork is a form of knowledge that approximates the competencies of one's informants but that can interpret it from broader theoretical frameworks (Hess 2001).

As noted above, for anthropologists the term "ethnography" tends to include both the method, ethnographic fieldwork, and the final product, an "ethnography" or ethnographic monograph. Furthermore, there is generally a sentiment, at least in the United States since the 1970s, that the final product is an interpretivist one. There can be feminist, culturalist, critical, postcolonial, structuralist, poststructuralist, deconstructive, constructivist, and many other flavors, but the peace in the feud remains the shared project of interpretation, including a form of interpretation that might be considered critique. When used in this wide-tent sense, the term "interpretivism" is best defined negatively, as Geertz (1973) did, in opposition to an experimental science in search of laws. From this perspective, "ethnography" as an interpretivist product is something that varies greatly but might be likened to the work of a literary critic, cultural historian, journalistic commentator, or philosophical ruminator. The project may articulate assumptions, draw connections, explore complexity, and chart tensions, but its primary goal is not social science in the sense of contributing generalizations to a body of knowledge.

Furthermore, anthropological ethnography has no inherent position with respect to peoples that it writes about. It can be tilted in the direction of a project that is aligned with or against a movement. For example, there is a growing level of poking fun at and criticism of localist movements, often from journalists with a loyalty to an ideology of corporate-led globalization, who see the movements as anachronistic and romantic. There are also criticisms from those on the socialist or social liberal left, who view localism with suspicion as either ineffective or implicitly market-oriented. The ethnographic interpretation can be aligned with the critics of either the right or the left, or it can be turned on critics and marshal ethnographic knowledge to discredit the discreditors.

The ethnographer may also choose to explore some of the problems or tensions in the movement itself. At its worst, the writing can result in a snobby and elitist airing of the shortcomings of a movement's politics with a problematic use of the vignette. In the case of alternative currencies and more general localist and alternative economies movements, the project could involve the social address issue of the movements' locations in the middle-class of progressive professionals and small business owners. I have addressed the issue, but I do so by exploring it under the framework of problems as well as potential for future development. In other words, I look for points where localist politics are in alignment with social justice and environmental sustainability problems. The analysis requires a balance between articulating a future vision and developing a critical analysis that can contribute to discrediting forces. (See also Conway, this volume).

Whatever stance that the ethnographer ends up selecting with respect to the movement, there is little doubt that the ethnography as interpretivist genre can produce valuable insights. However, it also faces limitations as a scholarly project in an interdisciplinary social-science field. Anthropological ethnography can serve as a corrective to overgeneralization in the social-science literature (such as the blanket analyses that describe alternative economies as spaces of whiteness or as coopted by neoliberal market politics), but it also tends to eschew another type of conversation with interdisciplinary social sciences. To understand this difference, it may be helpful to provide a typological comparison of the "two cultures" of ethnography.

As I have suggested above, both anthropologists and other social scientists have used fieldwork, even long-term fieldwork, for decades. There are differences, such as the greater attentiveness to cultural meaning among anthropologists and perhaps a greater attention to organizational dynamics and ecologies among sociologists, but those differences are not as significant as a larger one that involves a relationship between theory and empirical data. For anthropologists, theory tends to be something that is used to interpret the fieldwork experience; it tends to be in the background, even in the footnotes. The text may be arranged as a weaving in-and-out of "data" in the form of an ethnographic vignette and an interpretation. The goal is to understand the case (the field site, the novel, the movie, the historical event) in all of its complexity and nuance.

In the interdisciplinary social sciences, the relationship between theory and empirical material is inverted. Ethnography as a research method is separated from the research product. The goal of the social-science project is some kind of generalization, and the "data" are selected often as cases to provide evidence for or qualifications of a theoretical proposition that advances a conversation in the literature. This type of project is consistent with theory-driven hypothesis testing in the quantitative social sciences, but in the qualitative social sciences the hypotheses may not be stated as explicitly as in quantitative research, and the data may be used to exemplify and explore propositions as much as to test explicit hypotheses. In either case, the genre of writing tends to be constructed differently from the text-exegesis format that is common in anthropological ethnography. A common form is the statement of the problem, a review of the literature, an argument about how the literature can be moved forward, an examination of empirical material that qualifies or exemplifies the argument, and a conclusion about general implications and future direction. This type of knowledge is more explicitly cumulative and engaged with other researchers; as a result the thought collectives of intellectual production are more dense, and (at least based on my own informal comparisons) the citation rates and the permeability (the accessibility of the literature to those in neighboring fields) are higher.

From the perspective of interdisciplinary social science, anthropological ethnography may appear to be loose, disorganized, and often without a main point. The work appears to invent new concepts that are quite similar to ones developed in other fields, but because there is generally an undeveloped literature review and no explicit statement about the theoretical arguments that are being advanced with respect to a referent literature, interdisciplinary social-science readers may find it easy to dismiss the project as uninformed and the new concepts as pretentious jargon or stylistic wordplay that hide a failure to engage existing literature. In contrast, the social-science method that carefully selects data for purposes of evaluating an argument may appear to those who write in the more humanistic form of ethnography as forcing a template onto the complexities of a field site, lacking in nuance, positivistic, clunky, and unsophisticated.

One result of the two cultures of ethnography problem is that in order to publish in journals that have an approach that I am describing here as interdisciplinary social science, those who prefer to write in a more humanistic mode face a choice. They may adjust the writing convention toward the social-science model, which is necessary in the higher prestige journals that will demand conformity to social-science conventions in exchange for a venue that brings more visibility to one's work, or they may opt to publish their work in a location where the humanistic premises are understood and accepted (but that interdisciplinary social scientists will ignore), or in a journal where publication acceptance rates are high, the concerns with conventions are less salient, and visibility is low.

My own writing has been mixed, drawing on both types of approaches. For example, I have explored some of the criticisms of localism from social scientists who have argued that it is in alignment with neoliberal policies of devolution and privatization. My argument is that there is a neoliberal current within the movement but that there are also other strands, such as the "local living economy" side, that are explicitly in opposition to the neoliberal model of globalization (Hess 2009). In other words, a more complex picture of the ideology of the movement emerges, and their is evidence for the picture in the texts and practices of the movement. Up to this point, I have tended to play ethnographic particularism (or what might be called, less favorably, intellectual NIMBYism) off against social-science generalization: your generalizations do not apply in my backyard. However, I depart from this mode by also seeking to build some generalizations and to contribute to a generalizing current of theory in the literature. Specifically, I am most concerned with theories of neoliberalism and social liberalism that tend to conflate the state-versus-market dimension of the ideologies with the hegemonic-versus-redistributive effects dimension. The alignments are especially prominent in the Marxist and post-Marxist theories of neoliberalism, which also tend to set up the distinctions as temporal regime changes. But rather than reject such work on the simplistic ground of overgeneralization, I have developed a method for analyzing political ideologies as a contested social field in which there are potentials for market-oriented policies to become aligned with redistributive politics, just as the state-centered politics of social liberalism can often used for hegemonic projects, and that those changes involve shifts of scale (Hess 2011).

With respect to this tension in the field of ethnography and social science, it may be necessary to state the obvious: there are many gradations in between the ideal types, and some scholars possess a high enough level of interdisciplinary knowledge to be able to understand and discount for the differences, much as one does after obtaining a level of familiarity with a foreign language and culture. Some can even write successfully in multiple genres. However, not everyone is attuned to the differences, and because the differences emerge in this volume, the schematic comparison offered here may be useful for developing an appreciation for different approaches to scholarship and for the book's argument, that ethnography both as method and genre may deserve a greater role in interdisciplinary social movement studies.

Possibilities

Within anthropology there is a comparativist, nomothetic, social-science tradition, but in the dominant networks of cultural anthropology in the United States since 1973 it was mostly rejected as dated, positivistic, and universalizing, if not masculine, white, and colonialist. In defining anthropological ethnography in opposition to an experimental science based on laws, Geertz skipped over the other, more salient alternative: a comparative social science in search of limited generalizations. Although the writing culture studies of the 1980s were founded on a critical reading of Geertz (1973), they left as an area of agreement the formulation of ethnography as an interpretive, idiographic project. In some cases the views have extended to critical social theory traditions, such as a rejection of at least some versions of feminist and Marxist theory as universalizing. The intellectual histories of what was left on the cutting room floor when functionalism was in its death throes and successor paradigms were developed have not yet been written, nor have the connections with political events of the 1970s and 1980s (Harvey 2005). But certainly a generalizing social science based on the study of power differentials—class, race, gender, and colonialism—was erupting out of the 1960s scholarship, and it was an option for many social-science fields. Although subsequent generations of scholarship seem to have superceded the post-functionalist research programs of the 1970s and 1980s, there are also continuities that have not been adequately studied.

Skepticism of the value of publishing at least some of one's work in a mode of generalizing social science seems unfortunate, and it contributes to the involution of anthropology (or, to be more specific, the dominant networks of American cultural anthropology) with respect to the other social sciences. Certainly, the universal generalizations of older generations of anthropological theory are justifiably rejected, but Geertz and his followers and critics threw the baby of comparative social-science generalization out with the bathwater of overgeneralization. I have tried to make the point in a visible way to anthropologists who study social movements (Hess 2007), but so far the argument has not had much traction. The result is, in my view, a condition in which both cultural anthropology and the interdisciplinary social sciences are impoverished. The former needs the latter to maintain rigor, and the latter needs the former to keep a check on runaway universalizing.

These metamethodological histories have implications for the relationship between scholarly and movement communities. Social movements certainly can benefit from both interpretive ethnography and ethnographically based social science. The latter is capable of producing valuable insights into issues of great strategic importance, such as how to generate backfire from repression, how to expand the scale of a movement, how movements become incorporated and transformed by elites, the conditions under which political opportunities may open and close, and so on. It would be interesting to test empirically which of the two cultures of ethnography is more valuable to activists by asking them to compare different genres of ethnographically based research. But the general point here is not to force a choice as much as to explore the grounds that would enable more fruitful conversations, both across scholarly fields and between scholarly work and the needs of activists and advocates. It is a tribute to the editors of this volume that they have allowed the uneasy tensions to be brought together.

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