

BOOK AND VIDEO REVIEWS

***Anthropology, Economics, and Choice.* Michael Chibnik. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011.**

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Economic anthropology has always had a divided nature. On one hand, it seeks to empirically identify and discuss the kinds of “economic” practices of different cultures: their trading, saving, gifting, and decision-making. On the other hand, economic anthropologists have been conducting a running quarrel with economists about human nature and the adequacy of economic theory, the self-professed predictive mathematical science of behavior. For the most part, economists have not paid much attention to anthropological gadflies; they have been too busy running the world economy and collecting large paychecks. Only in the last few years, following the spectacular failure of conventional economists to understand or predict the housing-bubble crisis of 2007 to 2008 (and its continuance in contemporary Europe), has academic economics become vulnerable. There are even a few anthropologists, like Gillian Tett and David Graeber, among the chorus of public voices that are now questioning the hegemony and power of neoclassical microeconomics founded in utilitarianism.

To some extent, a critique of economics is implicit in the concept of culture deployed by most sociocultural anthropologists; unless some kinds of economic thinking are hardwired into our brains, we expect any economy to be culturally constructed. Take something that seems as concrete as the value of gold or diamonds, and an anthropologist can show you how magic and fetishism lurk behind the jeweler’s door. This is why the two-dimensional rational-maximizing individual decision-maker that makes an appearance in introductory economics textbooks has been anathema to anthropologists since the time of Malinowski. But among economic anthropologists, there has always been a minority of “formalists” who have argued that *some* of the tools of economic analysis should be used by anthropologists, because human beings often do act like rational maximizers. Many anthropologists, particularly those who do applied work in policy, are regularly called upon to produce numbers, models, and more rigorous predictions and estimates of benefits, and formal economics sometimes provides at least a

starting point in thinking through the material consequences of different actions or programs.

The early hardcore formalists like Harold Schneider used fairly basic tools of microeconomics, ideas such as diminishing marginal returns and indifference curves. Archaeologists and bioanthropologists were the largest users of formal mathematical methods like cost/benefit analysis, optimal foraging theory, and locational analysis. But more recently, cultural anthropologists have shown a new interest in agent-based modeling, game theory, experimental economics, formal analysis of household budgeting, migration decision-making, and the management of common-pool resources. We might call this a “new formalism” to distinguish it from the old; it is often heavily funded by government agencies and NGOs and depends on computers, modeling, and tools like geographic information systems (GIS) and remote sensing.

Michael Chibnik has had extensive experience in exactly the kinds of settings where formal economic methods might be expected to be the most useful: among mixed subsistence-farming and cash-cropping households in Belize, floodplain farmers in the Peruvian Amazon, and handicraft-producing communities in Oaxaca. In each setting, people face complex choices among a wide array of possibilities – the classical economic problem of allocating limited time to many activities. These choices often involve the allocation of labor and the expectation of different returns, as well as the calculation of both risk and uncertainty, a distinction that Chibnik emphasizes. Chibnik explains that Belizean farmers faced with complex and often unfathomable calculations of the costs and benefits of wage labor, subsistence farming, and cash cropping often ended up poor, no matter what they did. His work on Oaxacan wood carvers shows that caution and risk aversion are often wise; many people resisted becoming full-time carvers because they recognized that the market was easily flooded, and eventually the tourist art boom would end.

The book takes the reader on a kind of intellectual expedition through many of the key sites where new formalist economic anthropology is being done, using Chibnik’s own ethnographic work as a critical mirror. In the process, Chibnik provides an excellent critical guide to a literature that is widely scattered but bound together by shared assumptions about the predictability of human action and an implicit notion that all people share some innate reasoning powers.

In each chapter, Chibnik reviews a different kind of formalist analysis. He gives some intellectual history and probes for logical inconsistencies and contradictions with the ethnographic record. He often takes his own earlier work to task and shows how his own evidence could be interpreted in other ways. He is highly critical of evolutionary psychology, particularly as it is loosely used in cross-cultural experimental economics, where people from different cultures play varieties of the “dictator” and “ultimatum” games to reveal how “altruistic” they are. Chibnik is skeptical that these studies are revealing anything about human nature or even something novel about variation between cultures. Chibnik also finds serious problems with formal theories of how people cope with risk and make household and individual decisions. He is a bit more positive when it comes to common property theory, where anthropologists have made major contributions and formal predictive modeling is less common.

Chibnik does not see literary “interpretive” ethnography as a viable alternative to formalism and professes dislike for highly theorized critical anthropology. In places, it seems like he is trying to steer an intermediate course, sympathetic to the *goals* of formal methods but not to the methods themselves. It is not, he says, that formal approaches are *impossible*, but that in practice they are always oversimplified, ignoring important cultural and historical contexts. His solution is not to develop more complex and realistic formal analysis or models but instead to use ethnography to describe the diverse beliefs, actions, and thoughts of real people. Most chapters, and the book itself, conclude with statements to the effect that life is always much more complex than formal models can predict, so ethnography is the only legitimate way to understand human action. In the real world, behavior does not fall into categories like “altruistic” and “selfish” but is ambiguous and difficult to pin down, and people often work hard to maintain that ambiguity. Things that look altruistic in the short term may end up being selfish in the long term and vice versa. Even in retrospect, people have trouble explaining their own actions and the decisions taken by others.

Therefore, rather than the lawlike statements that would allow us to model or predict people’s actions and behavior, Chibnik pursues the more modest goal of showing how people can be understood as *reasonable*. This is a very traditional anthropological standard: use the anthropologist’s knowledge of culture, history, and environment, along with peoples’ own statements and behavior, to show how their actions make sense. This is a feature of classics like Evans-Pritchard’s “Witchcraft Explains Unfortunate Events,” featured in many introductory anthropology textbooks, through Sahlins’ explanation for why the Hawaiians suddenly killed Captain Cook (Sahlins 1981).

Most of Chibnik’s examples in this book take this form, in the process showing how a formal analysis misses crucial, and often unexpected, contextual information. As Chibnik well recognizes, this is exactly the kind of approach that makes economists and other development specialists roll their eyes when the anthropologist starts speaking, as the first words are usually something like “It is really very complicated. . . .” It is also hard to verify – another anthropologist might come up with an entirely different result. And anthropologists’ arguments and predictions are rarely tested empirically – their veracity and authority depend on the credibility of the anthropologist.

Stylistically, the book is skillfully crafted and well written and moves at a steady pace. A student will come away with a very good knowledge of recent economic anthropology, and the book should provoke revealing debates in a seminar on economic, ecological, or development anthropology. Some parts of the book seem to be written as this kind of text, but in other places the argument is pitched more toward experienced colleagues. I would have liked to hear what Chibnik thinks of other formal approaches like agent-based modeling, GIS and remote sensing, or the analysis of resilience – all currently popular research areas that are providing jobs for anthropology graduates. The existence of these new openings for anthropologists suggests that formalism is never going to die, nor will it leave an interpretive anthropology behind. In a strange way, the formal and explanatory, scientific and expressive, are very deeply connected to one another; and, as this book shows, they provide a continuing source of inspiration for creative minds. As neoliberal philosophy continues to advance the thesis that everything should become a commodity exchanged in free markets, Chibnik is there to remind us that quality matters, that not everything can be reduced to costs or benefits, and that skillful ethnography and anthropological analysis are becoming ever more important and valuable.

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***Cooperation in Economy and Society*. Robert C. Marshall, ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010.**

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The contributors to *Cooperation in Economy and Society*, a collection of articles based on papers presented at an annual meeting of the Society for

Economic Anthropology, consider ways in which human beings come to organize themselves beyond competition and government controls. This book brings together 12 ethnographic studies produced by scholars from a range of backgrounds – covering anthropology, economics, social work, and environmental studies – which is appropriate for a concept that has no official home in any one discipline. From these diverse perspectives, the authors demonstrate that cooperation, in practice at least, takes shape in many facets of human group life, even in places where it is commonly thought that competition reigns supreme. They reject the marginalization of this concept and its subordination to “competition.”

In the editor’s introduction, Robert Marshall challenges the reader to consider cooperation not just as a supplement to competition, operating on the fringes of modernity, but as central to economic organization and social life more generally. The challenge is not dissimilar to the one made by Marcel Mauss in his 1923 essay *The Gift*, where he theorized the central importance of gift exchange in all societies, including those that emphasize formal commercial exchange. Marshall argues that a sharper focus on cooperation will enable a better understanding of how particular groups and society at large operate in the present, even if they are assumed to operate according to a competitive model. He states that we need to think beyond the standard concept of rationality in approaching the ways people organize themselves through their interdependence, but he does not want us to lose sight of the strategic nature of sociality. The case studies forefront the dynamic elements of relationships, which are sometimes neglected in studies of decision-making. Such is not the case here. The studies in this collection deal with the complexities of cooperation in a variety of ways, from the formal modeling of Rahul Oka and Agustin Fuentes (chapter 1), who relate “cooperative infrastructures” to “socioeconomic evolution,” to the denser ethnographic descriptions that comprise the majority of these works. Cooperation and competition are each presented as having different and variable requirements for their emergence, sustainability, and suitability – all of which hinge on the context in which the mode of organization is based.

This book champions research on cooperation, but it refrains from idealizing it and indeed demonstrates that cooperation has its negative side. Cooperation can lead to exploitation, a criticism often leveled, albeit often with justification, at competitive models and practices. Ronald Rich analyzes the relationship between contractors and contractees in the Illinois hog farming industry (chapter 5). The industry is now characterized by contractors who own hogs and effectively employ contractees to feed and raise the hogs through their life cycle, before they are sold. This

arrangement forces contractees to sell their *labor*, rather than their *products* as they had previously done, which Rich asserts is the source of their exploitation. He focuses on the structure of the agreement, which cannot be strictly enforced by either side because neither has the ability to monitor the other’s practices. However, manipulation is minimal, as he finds contractors personalizing their relationship with contractees. Participants valorize characteristics such as “honesty” and “trust,” which leads to greater cooperation in a hierarchical system in which the two parties are effectively in conflict. Rich concludes that while the participants hold these cooperative practices in high regard, they also reinforce the exploitation of the relatively powerless contractees.

The authors are realistic about the place of cooperation in modern society, suggesting that it is not the solution to all problems of group life. Their findings show that neither cooperative nor competitive practices can lay claim to being the default state of human relations, as the more appropriate mode of interaction depends upon the circumstances under which they occur. Carolyn Lesorogol gives a history of grazing rights in Siambu, a pastoralist community in northern Kenya (chapter 11). Traditionally based on a communal management system, which controlled access to natural resources, the mid-20th century brought various pressures, particularly through colonization, to divide and privatize the land among pastoralists. More recently, and despite recognition of individual property rights and certain benefits of privatization, communal land rules are reemerging and reestablishing communal influence and control. Lesorogol points out that this resurgence of cooperation is not an ideological revolt against a colonial history, nor has an economic decline necessitated it. Cooperation has reemerged because it suits the wealthier pastoralists with larger herds, who benefit from sharing semiarid rangelands, which are prone to drought, making their private parcels inadequate for their holdings of livestock. Not inconsistent with Rich’s argument about cooperation being a tool of exploitation, Lesorogol offers a history whereby cooperation and competition models can both be functional, with neither being an inherently superior mode of organization.

The authors also demonstrate that mutually beneficial cooperative practices can arise in the most unlikely of places. Kathleen Millar analyses the informal economy of *catadores*, collectors of recyclable material from the dumpsites of Rio de Janeiro (chapter 8), seeing those who work on the dump as autonomous individuals who operate according to their own schedules. In one sense, the *catadores* are in direct competition with each other, as the collection of material by one makes it unavailable to another. However, the work’s (lack of) structure affords them

opportunities to socialize, leading to a group identity. This is the basis, according to Millar, of sustained cooperative efforts to repel external threats to their livelihoods. Like several of the other authors, she finds that cooperation can exist within competition, showing how both can only be properly understood in relation to each other. The repeated demonstration that competition and cooperation are not mutually exclusive and can occupy the same space is a great strength of this book.

The final section, "Cooperation Rising," includes two chapters, one of which is Lesorogol's. In the other, James Acheson discusses the cooperative efforts made to conserve natural resources in the Maine lobster industry (chapter 12), where fishermen resist opportunities to serve their self-interest at the expense of others. As such, both authors consider the emergence of cooperative practices in situations seemingly dominated by competition. However, concluding the book with a section focused on the rise of cooperation amid competition also affirms the larger message that the concept of cooperation is becoming more important to scholars, something Marshall alluded to in his introduction. Although it never left us in practice, social thinkers are increasingly realizing cooperation does not belong on the sidelines, used only to help pick up the pieces where competition fails. It is starting to take its rightful place alongside competition in the center of the field. *Cooperation in Economy and Society* is part of this realization.

***Transforming Culture: Creating and Sustaining a Better Manufacturing Organization.* Elizabeth K. Briody, Robert T. Trotter II, and Tracy L. Meerwarth. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.**

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The increased number of books published about work organizations in the last decade suggests a growing following for the field of organizational anthropology. A significant contribution to that literature is *Transforming Culture: Creating and Sustaining a Better Manufacturing Organization* by Elizabeth Briody, Robert Trotter, and Tracy Meerwarth. It recounts the story of General Motors (GM), a great institution of 20th-century American life, as it struggles to stay relevant and profitable in the new millennium. The authors, two of whom are practitioners, aim to provide guidelines that those embroiled in organizational change will find useful, even if the organization in question is not a manufacturing plant.

Specifically, the book describes the Ideal Plant Culture project, a 6-year, multisited project involving over 400 GM employees. The book also delves into larger issues as it provides an account of automobile manufacturing in the United States. The authors describe the early history of the automotive industry in the United States, the advent of Henry Ford's mass production process, the introduction of Toyota's flexible and lean production system, and the adaptations made at General Motors for over a century. The book benefits from the experience of its authors, especially Elizabeth Briody, who worked for decades as a researcher at GM. With the inclusion of Briody's first-hand ethnographic description of GM plant culture since the 1980s, this book is one of few based on detailed and purposeful fieldwork in a single organization over such a long time span.

Published in 2010, the book was finalized during the fury of GM's bankruptcy and restructuring in 2009. While the authors rightly suggest a "core strength of the book is that it is an ethnographic case of a company that represents American culture and American cultural transformation at a critical time in history," it is also a chilling description of what went awry in American manufacturing (13). They describe how, at the close of the 20th century, GM's "customer base continued to slip due to cost disadvantages and lagging customer perception of their product quality" at the same time that the corporation was "overstaffed, lacking a strategic plan and making decisions consistent with its parochial Midwestern mindset rather than a global orientation" (3).

Their Ideal Plant Culture project came about because an innovative and globally aware senior GM executive wondered, "How can we transfer the highly successful organizational and work culture we experience in Mexico to the United States?" (6). Beyond telling the story of GM and the dream and decline of American manufacturing, the authors' purpose is to explain organizational culture, describe the processes needed to change culture, and provide tools for organizational culture change. They define culture as "assumptions, expectations, beliefs, social structures, and values guiding behavior" (2). Using culture change and evolutionary theories, they develop two models. The first is the Cultural Transformation Model, which explains the connections between adaptiveness and responsiveness in cultural problem solving to achieve cultural transformation. Next, they develop the Bridge Model of Transformation, which builds on the Cultural Transformation Model by adding a focus on cultural and environmental conditions, obstacles to change, and enablers of change. The final section of the book is devoted to a toolkit they developed to help GM plants transition to a new culture of collaboration.

The authors build their findings about ideal plant culture around Hall's concepts of low and high context (Hall and Hall 1987, 1989). They describe how GM and other U.S. organizations emphasize tasks and processes and rely on written directives (low-context behavior) rather than building relationships among employees where social rules and verbal interaction are valued (high-context behavior). They suggest that the reason Toyota has outperformed GM is at least partially due to the strong Toyota emphasis on relationships, which in turn encourages organizational learning and the diffusion of new ideas. By contrast, at GM, employees described the culture as one characterized by an "authoritarian" management style and rigid status distinctions where employees were not allowed to give opinions. One employee explained the result: "You really took ownership away from the people and made them feel like a number [back then]. Everybody has ideas, and who knows better than the team who's actually doing the work?" (89). Weakness in GM plant culture centers on a lack of cooperative workplace interactions and collaborative problem solving. Briody, Trotter, and Meerwarth's ideal plant culture requires the development of collaboration throughout the plant, a change that would be marked by high-context characteristics. The use of Hall's work makes sense here, especially with the contrast between U.S. and Japanese manufacturing styles so salient to the automobile industry. However, the use of the high and low context distinction does raise concern about essentializing national difference, and the importance of collaboration could readily be made without this framing.

To this reviewer, the most compelling single chapter is the one on seven obstacles to organizational culture change. For example, one of the obstacles is "cultural dilemmas," which the authors explain are created when opposing cultural themes, such as hierarchy and empowerment, seem to clash and cause tension. They provide the following employee quote as an example: "You can be creative and make things work for the long haul, but there is also a rigidity. You have to do it this way" (99). Double binds like this one between creativity and rigidity are common in organizations undergoing culture change. Another obstacle discussed is "cultural drift," which is the tendency to revert back to the old ways of doing things when there is stress at work. One employee told the authors, "We'll see some slippage. I am not sure how you guard against it. We will have new people" (101). The list of obstacles and the accompanying explanations and employee quotes are useful to anyone dealing with culture change.

The following chapter is about enablers, meaning "processes within the existing culture that support cultural transformation" (117). These, the authors say, are specific to the organization but share

a set of six identifiable characteristics. The enablers include physical changes that would help employees transition, as well as a list of behaviors that would make it easier to be more collaborative.

The succeeding chapter describes the 10 tools the team developed for GM employees to help them move to the new collaborative culture, four for understanding collaboration and six for practicing and measuring collaboration. The last tool, based on an incident the research team witnessed involving the breakdown of a stud gun on a manufacturing line, is a video game employees can play to better understand the repercussions of decisions on the plant floor. Unfortunately, the short descriptions of each tool are not sufficient for the reader to grasp what these tools look like and how they are used. It would have been helpful if the authors had included the actual materials from at least one of these tools. Understanding the tools is central to their argument about the value of their project.

The authors planned to put these tools to use in GM plants and did so in one (new) plant but failed in two attempts to convince the leaders of existing plants to use the tools, despite clear enthusiasm among GM's top leaders. The authors explain that this is partially a consequence of external events, as GM was about to begin its 2007 national labor negotiations with the United Auto Workers. The reader is left feeling unsure about the success of the project and, given the lack of specifics about the tools, unsure how helpful the tools would be.

There is much in this volume of value for scholars of the anthropology of work. We have few work organization studies with such thick description over a 2-decade period. Additionally, it adds to our understanding of work culture, manufacturing, organizational culture, and culture change. The two culture models the authors present are useful as well. Beyond its relevance in the anthropology of work, the study is important as a commentary on the broader theme of industry in the United States over a 100-year period. The analysis of GM's successes and failures and the description of practices on the shop floor are reasons enough to read this book and also to consider it for class adoption. In a larger and possibly more important context, the book is a cautionary tale about the death and hopeful rebirth of manufacturing in the United States and provides important social commentary on the American dream at the beginning of a new millennium.

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Advances in Speech Recognition: Mobile Environments, Call Centers and Clinics. Amy Neustein, ed. New York: Springer Science and Business Media, 2010.

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In this edited volume, Amy Neustein brings together a collection of intriguing studies of the development and use of speech recognition (SR) technology in different workplaces. Cultural, linguistic, and medical anthropologists who study communication at work will be intrigued but perhaps overwhelmed by the ways engineers, linguists, and information technology specialists are increasingly placing computers between people in their speech acts with one another. *Advances in Speech Recognition* is more readable than many other collections about SR technology. The majority of the tables and figures are simple. Most importantly, each essay contains a clear introduction and conclusion that can be tied to research in social science. Anthropologists can use the book to teach themselves and their students about the world of SR technology research and the variety of SR technology researchers. It explains common abbreviations, such as GUI (graphic user interface), AXML (artificial intelligence markup language), and IVR (interactive voice response [systems]). The book also explains abbreviations for less well-known phrases, such as WIMP: “windows, icon, mouse, and pointer (WIMP)-based machine” (Selouani 2010:109).

The chapters are divided into three groups – the first concerning the use of mobile technology, the second concerning the creation of automated customer service in call centers, and the third concerning the use of SR technology in medical settings, particularly with regard to building electronic medical records. Some representative topics are a history of the development of Google Search by Voice, the evolution of studies to create satisfying experiences with automated verbal responses, and a discussion of how computers analyze the communication patterns of individuals with medical conditions such as autism spectrum disorders.

The research reported in this book emphasizes advantages of SR technology, pointing out, for instance, that computers equipped in this way cost less than human workers and also noting that it saves human workers from having to engage in repetitive and challenging tasks, such as data entry in medical

transcription. Regrettably, the accounts do not quantify the number of jobs lost due to the use of SR technology and rarely touch on how human communication patterns of customers and workers are changing in response to SR technology.

Anthropologists can use this collection to understand how SR technology is affecting different populations. It can help them design studies to collect data about the changes in language, culture, and personality that occur when people come into contact with SR technology. Two of the essays in particular showcase research that could benefit from future analysis. “‘For Heaven’s Sake, Gimme a Live Person!’ Designing Emotion-Detection Customer Care Voice Applications in Automated Call Centers” concerns customers’ frustration with automated responses. “‘You’re as Sick as You Sound’: Using Computational Approaches for Modeling Speaker State to Gauge Illness and Recovery” explains how individuals with different disorders sound to people without these disorders.

As an example, researchers in the study in “‘Gimme a Live Person!’” determined that certain qualities of human speech, including pitch and loudness, indicate anger. They attempted to measure changes in these qualities to understand whether customers were becoming angry when interacting with automated response systems. It would be relevant for future investigations to determine the meaning of such qualities in human speech across cultures. Anthropologists might be able to discover whether people from different national and ethnic groups changed these qualities in their speech, and to the same degree, when frustrated with call center systems. Such work might help industry professionals design culturally sensitive software, which would be responsive to data suggesting that an American customer’s change in pitch tends to mean something different than a Chinese customer’s change in pitch.

Although the field may seem highly technical and specialized, anthropologists studying workplaces should be aware of the devices and coded programs that are replacing speech acts with exchanges of data. Advances in cloud computing and near field communication (NFC) will soon allow individuals and groups to send each other data packets that reduce the need for verbal communication. Cellular phones enabled with NFC technology are already able to read data on skin patches and blister packages. Software programs in the phones can determine whether a patient has taken a prescribed medication and how the patient’s body is processing that medication. Patients can send the data directly to a medical professional, eliminating the need to go to the hospital to be assessed or even to call and update a medical professional about their condition.

These essays may also become critical in understanding how individuals and groups come to perceive speech acts as stressful. A passage from Stephen Springer's " 'Great Expectations': Making Use of Callers' Experiences from Everyday Life to Design a Satisfying Speech-only Interface for the Call Center" illustrates a frustrated customer's attempt to escape the stress he was experiencing. Responding to a verbal command in a software program, the caller exclaimed: "Lady, if you can understand English, you can understand what I'm sayin' – I want to speak to a living body, please" (182).

In " 'Life on-the-Go': The Role of Speech Technology in Mobile Applications," William Meisel states that speaking on a "voice channel" may become an important way for people to use services on smartphones, adding that the number of "voice sites" supported by advertising is likely to increase. If individuals are asked to listen and speak extensively to automated systems as well as real people, they may become fatigued and reluctant to communicate.

The research reported here should help anthropologists design studies that will chronicle the development and impacts of different SR applications and document the changing significance of speech acts in the workplace and beyond. James Larson remarks in the epilogue that speech and text may come to be seen as equal and interchangeable. Imagining an Internet and communications network on which user comments on websites can be heard, with unique, identifiable voices, reveals that the anonymity of text may soon disappear. If speech and text are conflated, privacy is likely to be defined far more narrowly than it is today. As Stephen Swigart (2008:93) reminds us in reference to the insights of Pierre Bourdieu, "every linguistic exchange, no matter how seemingly insignificant, carries within it traces of the social structure it both expresses and helps to reproduce."

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Emotions in the Field: The Psychology and Anthropology of Fieldwork Experience. James Davies and Dimitrina Spencer, eds. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.

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Anyone who has had fieldwork experience should read this book. It begins with an excellent review of recent developments in the ways we understand and utilize our emotional reactions to what we live through in the field. Ten essays follow, written by researchers addressing specific fieldwork reactions in relation to the topics they studied. The essays raise interesting questions and offer insights for understanding our data and ourselves better. In the simplest terms, such reactions provide glimpses into the lives of informants and their communities. By being human – that is, by reacting to what people are saying and doing, by making mistakes, by understanding that we have been swallowed up in the otherness and must present that otherness to our peers and the outside world – we illuminate our mutual humanness.

I do not want to spoil your spontaneous pleasure in reading the book, so I will use examples from my own fieldwork to illustrate the point. When I researched a Catholic parish, I once made the mistake of being a bit too casual with one of the nuns with whom I was working. I asked how she was doing spiritually and, thankfully, was not reprimanded. Rather, we got into a long theological discussion about meaningful work, which turned out to be crucial for my fieldwork. Another time, I was researching first-time parents. I made sure that our own children were attended to – bathed and read to – before I went out to my informant couples. I asked them how they were dealing with their newborns. Then I shared our own difficulties when our kids were younger and gave them tips. The data I already had collected were not affected, and our discussions enhanced my understanding of their subjectivity in caring for their infants.

As we read each essay, we can ask ourselves: Did I experience this? How did I handle it? How could I have handled it better? How did it affect my data collection, outcomes, and conclusions? How have I changed? The essays range from a person becoming a monastic practitioner and writing about her reactions both as anthropologist and initiate to a person being "hit on" by an attractive informant to another person learning to be somewhat of an adept in the world of people actually claiming to practice magic. To revert to some old-fashioned jargon, reading these essays feels "head trippy," "processing" one's reaction to the outside and the inside.

A person's reactions are a normal part of any work experience. Anthropological field experience, with its emphasis on engaging the other without losing the self, may be fundamentally different from other work. As both an anthropologist and a practicing psychologist, I recognize similarities and differences between the two disciplines. In future assessments of this sort, I would like to see a more systematic comparison of anthropologists with other practitioners who have similar experiences. These might include Peace Corps volunteers, missionaries, colonial administrators, in-country consultants, and so on.

A sociology of fieldwork analysis is suggested by this book. One might be able to examine not just the age, class background, gender, upbringing, academic, and personality traits of the anthropologist going into the field but also see how they correlate and contribute to explanations of her or his results. One might also explore whether it makes a difference if the anthropologist goes to a highly different culture versus a similar one or stays "at home," whether one is cut off almost or completely from sources of personal support, or whether one is accompanied by one's partner or spouse, as well as considering living arrangements and how long one stays in the field.

As a psychologist, I applaud the various writers who argue for a self-examination, including understanding countertransference. I have experienced that reaction in my fieldwork and in my clinical practice. I think exploring it with knowledgeable others is the best way to proceed. I also think it can serve as a beginning guide for training in the field and collegial discussions afterwards. I have often been able to use my emotional reactions to understand why I had difficulties with a certain person or issue.

I suggest that this book first be read for enjoyment – to see what others have experienced. That is why I have avoided detailed discussion of the substantive contents of the book: we can use it as a mirror for ourselves first. It then can be read as part of the aforementioned anthropology of fieldwork from a personal perspective.

***Indelible Inequalities in Latin America: Insights from History, Politics, and Culture.* Paul Gootenberg and Luis Reygadas, eds. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.**

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In "Funes and the Toolbox of Inequality," the afterword to this book, Javier Auyero recalls a story by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges in which the protagonist Funes forgets absolutely nothing. Borges writes that "he was not very good at thinking" because

to think is "to ignore (or forget) differences, to generalize, to abstract" (193). The story reinforces a core argument of the book about the power of ideas: indelible inequalities are institutionalized categories. The elaboration of this insight adds to a long anthropological tradition of research on modes of classification and how they organize the social world. Auyero and the other authors also draw from Charles Tilly's *Durable Inequalities* (1998) in specifying the relation between categorization and social inequality. Rather than settling for empirical "measurements" of inequality, they explore complexities in the production and reproduction of inequalities and develop a vision of inequality as relational, multicausal, and multiprocessual.

Contributors to the volume, representing various disciplines, participated in an exploratory project called "Durable Inequalities in Latin America," carried out from 2003 to 2006 at the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Center at Stony Brook University. The first of three parts offers "New Approaches, Old Disciplines" in two theoretical and methodological chapters by the editors. In "Latin American Inequalities: New Perspectives from History, Politics and Culture," Paul Gootenberg characterizes Latin America as the most unequal world region, although neither the poorest nor the most divided culturally. He contends that

Latin American inequality is certainly durable in Tilly's sense, as well as being historically, socially, and culturally "constructed," which suggests the unnatural origins of hierarchy and subordination. But we prefer in this volume the guiding term "indelible inequalities," which underscores the human agency and culture at play in their creation and perseverance, their complexity and camouflage beyond stark categorical divides, their fluid and peopled possibilities of change. (5)

Gootenberg reviews the approaches of anthropology, political science, economics, history, and sociology in defining his position on the need for thinking in relational and historical terms, anchored in cultural processes. He summarizes some of the themes that appear throughout the book: the historical long term, hybridity and difference, transitions and metamorphosis, agency and resistance, transnational flows of ideas and people, inequality as culture, and qualitative equalities and revolutionizing inequalities.

Luis Reygadas's chapter on the "Construction of Latin American Inequality" complements Gootenberg's. For him, the problem can be attributed neither to a "lone gunman" (isolatable cause) nor some historical "original sin" (primordial cause). Inequality results from the connection and accumulation of many processes in conjunction in a variety of contexts. Areas of overlap between social class and racial and

ethnic divides are reinforced by social barriers. The existence of categories is not as important as the social processes that form and weaken them, the boundaries that separate them, and the flows of resources channeled by these divisions. Since persistent inequalities require the persistence of elites, relevant research focuses not only on subalterns but also on those who dominate them.

The second part of the book, "History, Subjectivity, and Politics," contains three chapters. In "Health Policy and Inequality in Peru," Christina Ewig investigates how policy formation institutionalizes class, race, and gender inequalities in health care. She distinguishes the social security system for workers from the public health system that serves the poor. Historically, shifting power relations replaced the dichotomy of "indigenous" and "white" with a third category of *mestizo* workers between the indigenous poor and the white elite. Ewig centers her analysis on the discourse that favored and co-opted these workers as well as middle-class professionals. Through union organization and participation in political parties, both groups obtained government health insurance programs and gained access to advances in health care. Meanwhile, public health care services were stigmatized as a "welfare" benefit for those categorized as poor. How these processes and categories are appropriated and lived by the social actors is not articulated in this account.

The other two chapters in this section are less relevant for the anthropology of work. Another Peruvian case study examines survival strategies and self-improvement projects of people categorized as "poor" in the shantytowns of Lima. Households deploying all their able-bodied members in the labor market are threatened with "meltdowns" because, among other causes, they are trapped in limited occupational niches prone to economic downturns. The third chapter shows how deficiencies of political information in poor neighborhoods deprived the poor of their voice in the Brazilian executive and legislative election of 2002. This reinforced inequalities by increasing the gap between the rich and the poor. Questions remain, however, about the differences more knowledge about candidates would have made and about other possible means of political participation beyond voting.

The last part of the book is called "Cultures across Borders." In "Between *Orishas* and Revolution: The Expression of Racial Inequalities in Post-Soviet Cuba," Odette Casamayor examines "the indelible inequality between whites and blacks under an ethical-aesthetic lens, one that approaches racism from the intimacy of being, one rejecting determinism yet incorporating the suggestion of economic, political social, and historical analysis" (140). In the work of a

painter and multimedia artist, she shows how artists denounce racism in Cuba and try to make it visible. Despite attempts to efface ethnic differences as a legacy of the Cuban Revolution, the deep roots of racism are revealed in stereotypes about black people that limit their access to jobs in the post-Soviet era. Song lyrics and other artistic forms express such valorizations, which reinforce the reproduction of inequalities. Thus, artists are engaged in resistance work.

The most thorough integration of labor dynamics appears in the last chapter, "How Latin American Inequality Becomes Latino Inequality: A Case Study of Hudson Valley Farmworkers" by Margaret Grey. Four broad processes have led to the marginalization and powerlessness of migrant laborers in New York State: inequalities in their home countries, especially in education, that limit their opportunities; hierarchies established around race, ethnicity, and class that facilitate their exploitation; "farmworker" as a job category, which excludes them from protective labor laws; and their status as undocumented migrants, which exposes them to a "constant climate of fear." Gray conducted interviews to discover how these conditions are expressed in the workers' subjectivities and reproduced in work processes. She did not explore the construction of identities, but she found a dynamic employer/farmworker relationship emerging from previous racially and hierarchically paired relationships, such as white versus Latino, master versus slave, and citizen versus undocumented person. Rather than becoming passive, the farmworkers generated collective action to gain rights, resisting employers' "incessant drive to find workers they can profit from by adopting reigning categorical pairs to their advantage" (189).

Overall, the book provides, as Auyero points out, a kind of "toolbox" to apply to problems of persistent and indelible inequalities. Its conceptual strength corresponds to the difficulty of inquiring about such long-term, multifaceted, and heterogeneous phenomena. How do these categories overlap in the local production of inequalities, how can their local and national meanings be generalized, and how are they intertwined and lived in local traditions? In regard to work, the case studies raise penetrating questions. Precisely how, for example, do the experiences of citizen and noncitizen migrant farmworkers or black and white job seekers develop differently? At this level of analysis, we can see how labor relations themselves reproduce the inequalities. In sum, the demonstration of complex, relational, and multicausal similarities underlying the inequalities in these case studies is a fundamental contribution of the book. Beyond economic exploitation and gaps in income, the authors address fuller dimen-

sions of inequalities. Differential access to health care and political information, and other forms of discrimination against individuals placed in categories such as “black,” “Indian,” and “Latino,” influence their access to a decent life. The possibility of obtaining better employment or other forms of work, then, is only one component of the experience of indelible inequality.

Reference

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***Ethnic Entrepreneurs: Identity and Development Politics in Latin America*. Monica C. DeHart. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010.**

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In *Ethnic Entrepreneurs*, Monica DeHart investigates the growing interplay between participatory development and ethnic identity. The book is an ambitious study of development discourse and practice that captures the ways in which the figure of the “ethnic entrepreneur” has become commonplace in development efforts; it further demonstrates how this emphasis on ethnicity facilitates, hinders, and modifies political and economic engagements at the local level.

In the introductory chapter, the author defines ethnic entrepreneurs as shape-shifting, but increasingly paradigmatic, development agents drawn from “indigenous community residents, working-class migrants to the United States, and elite Latino diasporas” (1). The ethnic entrepreneur embodies “values, relationships and forms of knowledge deemed particularly useful for the community-based, participatory development paradigm applied throughout Latin America” (1). In this light, the purpose of *Ethnic Entrepreneurs* is to show how the micropolitics of development come to constitute particular kinds of subjectivity, knowledge, and practices that are associated with ethnic difference.

The rise of the ethnic entrepreneur, argues DeHart, is symptomatic of changing forms of governance, from welfarist to neoliberal, throughout Latin America. She does a good job of demonstrating how changing policy contexts have affected the kinds of development strategies available to ethnic entrepreneurs. For instance, chapter 2 discusses the ways in which a Mayan social enterprise in Guatemala (*Cooperación para el Desarrollo Rural de Occidente*, or CDRO) embraces Mayan cultural values, such as “total

community participation, mutual support, and horizontality” (32), to design projects that are seen as alternatives to Western development strategies. As DeHart rightly points out, these values are highly compatible with the policy agendas of the Guatemalan state and international donors, who increasingly push for decentralization and a smaller role for the central state. In fact, while espousing “traditional” and “authentic” Mayan culture, CDRO’s goals seem to promote “global capitalist ideals” inasmuch as their projects have increased market participation and fostered the growth of modern financial institutions (35).

Chapter 5 explores another aspect of the interrelation between ethnicity and global capitalism. Here the focus is on how CDRO changed the production strategies of its communities so that they could benefit from greater integration in the world market. Specifically, it details how these communities stopped producing “traditional” goods for sale in local markets, such as corn or artisanal crafts, and instead reached an agreement with Wal-Mart to produce cosmetic goods that bore no trace of their “ethnic” origins. In this chapter, DeHart successfully captures the complex interaction between global development and local ethnic identity. She demonstrates that while these two social processes may often seem to be at odds, their interrelationship often produces new social forms that remain grounded in traditional cultural practices. For instance, the author explains that, although commercial production for global markets represents a new subsistence strategy for the communities, the process of production itself draws heavily on traditional Mayan ways of life, since “underlying forms of personhood and place” remain intact (101).

Taking a slightly different approach, chapters 3 and 4 turn to the ways in which transnational migrants have become important ethnic entrepreneurs. While chapter 3 looks at the case of Guatemalan migrants to the US and the importance of remittances for structuring gender relations back home, chapter 4 focuses on a UN-sponsored conference for elite members of the Latino diaspora in the United States. From the perspective of states and donors, migrants exemplify an entrepreneurial drive, but they also maintain strong communal ties back home. As a result, migrants become quintessential development agents, thanks to their potential for transferring wealth, knowledge, and skills to their home communities. Of course, DeHart argues, this perspective overlooks the importance of class, gender, and nationality dynamics that actually undergird most migrant communities. Additionally, the use of migrants as development agents seems to further neoliberal agendas in which responsibility for development shifts away from the state and instead becomes the moral duty of autonomous translocal actors (79). Ultimately, these two chapters show how

states, multinational corporations, lower-class migrants, and Latino professionals have become complementary partners in regional development efforts (93).

If other chapters show the complex interrelations among global markets, the state, development projects, and ethnic identity, chapter 6 brings the whole book together by examining the role of knowledge in defining authority at the local level. Specifically, the chapter discusses the political implications of development projects where agents are perceived as embodying different sets of knowledge – in this case, “social capital and technical knowledge” (135). The chapter shows how different “ethnic subjects” – college-educated council members, Mayan microfinance experts, Latino professionals, working-class migrants, and ethnic-development organizations – draw on different kinds of knowledge to validate their positions of authority in the development process. Most importantly, ethnic entrepreneurs are presented as actors who successfully wield local knowledge as well as financial and technological expertise in ways that are valuable for development.

One of DeHart’s main conclusions is that “ethnic authenticity and community insidership are traits to be proven, rather than assumed” and that “the actual content of ethnic difference” is “contentious and contingent, rather than primordial and rigid” (141). In this sense, *Ethnic Entrepreneurs* is successful, since it considers diverse facets of neoliberal development – from microfinance and migration to global markets and the importance of knowledge – in order to illustrate how these processes helped construct the ethnic entrepreneur as a key mediating actor. It further demonstrates how, as a result of global trends, ethnicity has become an enhancement, rather than a hindrance, to development. However, the concluding claim that the book presents “a methodological and analytical approach that can capture the multiple places and encounters in which development and identity politics play themselves out” (144) is slightly overstated. Perhaps because the book attempts to produce a multisited ethnography to describe a regional phenomenon, the reader is often left with a frustratingly thin description of the communities and social practices mentioned – particularly in terms of underlying or preexisting inequalities and conflicts. Additionally, DeHart rarely contextualizes some of her more theoretical concepts, such as “subjectivity,” “personhood,” or “place,” and this detracts from the precision of the broader argument and weakens the book’s analytical framework. In spite of this, the book will be useful for students of development policy and indigenous politics in Latin America, especially Guatemala, as it captures the ways in which ethnic actors are becoming increasingly engaged in neoliberal development discourse and practice.

***Brother Towns/Pueblos Hermanos*. Charles D. Thompson, director. Reading, PA: Bullfrog Films, 2010.**

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Brother Towns/Pueblos Hermanos is a documentary video about Jupiter, Florida, and Jacaltenango, Guatemala. Charles D. Thompson, the director, is education and curriculum director at Duke University’s Center for Documentary Studies. Jupiter is a town of about 55,000 people with a median household income of about US\$55,000. The population is mostly white (90%), with English spoken by approximately 88% of the population, followed by Spanish by about 7.5% of the population. Many wealthy snowbirds from the northeastern United States live part of the year in Jupiter. Jacaltenango is a very poor town that has seen some improvements since migrants to the United States began sending significant remittances, which are used mainly for construction and agricultural inputs. Most of the population of Jacaltenango falls within the classification of extreme poverty (about 60% making less than US\$2.00/day). Those households that have sent migrants to the United States tend to be above the poverty line. The video briefly notes how 1 million Maya left Guatemala during the civil war, migrating to Mexico and the United States. Many settled in Florida, particularly Indiantown, and from there moved to the nearby town of Jupiter, where there was plenty of work.

The video moves back and forth between the two towns to describe the dire economic situation of many in Jacaltenango. It shows various individuals, men and women alike, discussing poverty in general as well as specific economic issues that directly impact their lives, such as low income, low profits, and the high cost of food. The documentary makes the point that out-migration to the US is an economic necessity. People don’t leave for “pleasure,” says one woman; they leave because they want to make a better life for their families. A tailor interviewed near the beginning makes an important point, which I paraphrase: If you were born here, he said, you could be like me, a tailor, or a farmer; you would also be poor. There is randomness to people’s destiny and place of birth, which can make the difference between poverty and wealth. The video also makes clear that Jacaltecos are hardworking people.

In Jupiter, where a considerable number of Guatemalans from Jacaltenango have settled, we are introduced to an organization called El Sol that provides a place to assemble, obtain information about jobs, learn English, and find solace from waiting to be picked up for work on a daily basis. In many southern Florida towns and cities, there are certain street

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corners where day laborers wait to be offered the occasional job. They spend many hours and days making themselves available, with little food and few places to rest. The video relates how the mayor and the city council, supported by segments of the town's population, participated in the creation of the center. Many residents also opposed its creation, and some who were interviewed feel strongly that undocumented migrants should not be given any support. Will they take the jobs of Americans? Do they bring "crime and disease"? Should not the city enforce the existing laws instead of protecting "law breakers"? By raising the arguments of local Floridians for and against the center, the video summarizes some of the main controversies in the U.S. immigration debate.

For many in the developed countries, it is difficult to imagine the lives of the poor around the world. This video does a good job of portraying the poor in their own homes and through their own words, not as victims but agents of their own lives in difficult and complex national and global circumstances. Poverty, discrimination, and a history constructed on the basis of colonial and neocolonial structures have framed the

lives of so many around the world with few alternative paths. Most relevant for the anthropology of work are portraits of some of the occupations of these mostly agricultural populations in Guatemala and later in Florida, which raise issues of gender and class in the context of poverty and migration. But it is the implications for the politics of labor migration that seem to be best addressed and that may open opportunities for productive analysis.

The video provides an opportunity for students of Latin America, globalization, economics, and work to explore the various and often divisive perspectives on the issues. To that effect, there is a web page, www.brothertowns.com, that offers study guides organized around the issues covered. The documentary is interesting and aesthetically pleasing, enhanced by a strong narration and sound track. I particularly appreciated the music, some of which was created especially for the video by songwriter and performer Santos Montejo.

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