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Culture, Practice and Politics

Anthropology and the study of social movements

Arturo Escobar
Smith College, Northampton, MA

Anthropology, it is now widely accepted, has experienced deep changes during the 1980s, to the extent that, according to some, a significant 're-imagining' of the discipline has been set underway (Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Clifford, 1988; Rosaldo, 1989). During the same period, a whole body of literature has appeared, mostly in western Europe and Latin America, dealing with the nature and role of social movements in relation to the crisis of modernity and the possibility of new social orders. This work emerged in an epistemological and political conjuncture not unlike that faced by anthropology today. Anthropologists, however, have remained largely absent from this lively debate; this marginalization, regrettable in itself, given what anthropology can contribute to this field, is the more important given that social movements research highlights precisely the questions of political practice that can help anthropology work out some of its deeper predicaments.

This paper argues for a type of anthropological research that is informed by recent social movements theory and research and that, while building on current critiques in the discipline, pays more attention to its own politics by focusing on the political practice of collective social actors. After discussing the invisibility of social movements in anthropology (part I), the most important notions currently used in social movements theory are briefly presented with the aim of demonstrating the relevance of social movements research for anthropology (part II). This relevance is illustrated with a brief example from the recent work of an anthropologist inspired by contemporary social movements theory (Part III), after which the article concludes with a discussion of the consequences of the previous analysis for current debates in anthropology (part IV).

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I. The invisibility of social movements in anthropology

Since the late 1970s, interest in social movements and other forms of collective action has grown steadily, indeed flourished, in many political and scholarly spaces (political science, history, sociology, philosophy, plus interdisciplinary fields such as women's studies, Latin American Studies, and ecology) in various parts of the world. Today's social movements are seen as playing a central role in producing the world in which we live, its social structures and practices, its meanings and cultural orientations, its possibilities for change. Social movements, it is argued, emerge out of the crisis of modernity; they orient themselves towards the constitution of new orders, and embody a new understanding of politics and social life itself. They result in the formation of novel collective identities which foster social and cultural forms of relating and solidarity as a response to the crises of meanings and economies that the world faces today.

Anthropologists have been largely absent from this extremely active and engaging trend. It is important to examine why this has been the case, and what specific and perhaps important problems are associated with this absence. Conversely, it is important to think about why, and in what ways, anthropologists could begin to pay serious attention to the issues raised by contemporary social movements. It might be possible, perhaps, to think about a type of anthropology-informed social movements research in ways that say something new about anthropology as well. If, as theorists have shown, social movements take place at the intersection of culture, practice (collective and everyday), and politics, what does anthropology have to say about the processes by which these intersections are established? What new concepts, or what displacement of current concepts, would anthropology have to effect in order to participate in the examination of such processes? In other words, how would anthropology have to change to accommodate the interests of social movements, and why would anthropologists want to do so? Although anthropologists have given attention to political issues at various points in time, the discipline as a whole is not well equipped to examine the ways in which contemporary social actors shape their world through *collective* political action. What does this say about anthropology?

Strathern (1988) has best stated the general thrust of a discussion of this nature, as far as anthropology is concerned:

> Far from throwing out such [established anthropological] frameworks for understanding, I argue instead that we should acknowledge the interests from which they come. They endorse a view of society that is bound with

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> the very impetus of anthropological study. But the impetus itself derives from Western ways of creating the world . . . It becomes important that we approach all such [political] action through an appreciation of the culture of Western Social Science and its endorsement of certain interests in the description of social life. That affords a vantage point from which it will be possible to imagine the kinds of interests that may be at stake as far as Melanesians [and others] are concerned. (Strathern, 1988: 4)

In other words, one would have to look for the roots of the absence of attention to contemporary collective political practice in anthropology in that space that defines anthropology as bound with certain 'Western ways of creating the world'. What is the 'culture' of anthropology, its set of interests, that has blocked attention (at least recently) from these important aspects of social life? How have anthropology's modes of knowledge worked in order to exclude them from serious consideration? If anthropology's analytical constructs have made visible certain social, cultural and economic realities, why have anthropologists in general turned a blind eye to the crucial issue of collective political practice? What kinds of social interests and politics has anthropology incorporated instead?

The interest of this paper is not so much to conduct this type of critical reflection about anthropology, but rather to indicate in a general way the relevance of social movements research for the discipline. This relevance derives from the basic fact that today's social movements are seen not only as political struggles in pursuit of socio-economic goals but also, and essentially, as cultural struggles. Some reasons have already been given of why anthropology is ill-prepared to deal with questions of collective action and political practice, and it is worth mentioning some of them here. Rosaldo, for instance, has indicated the bias in anthropology towards synchronic, static and objectivist modes of inquiry. In recalling his first fieldwork experience in the early 1970s, he tells us how the 'broad rule of thumb under classic norms to which Michelle Rosaldo and I still ambivalently subscribed seems to have been that if it's moving it isn't cultural. In emphasizing social hierarchies and self-enclosed cultures, the discipline encouraged ethnographers to study the crystalline patterns of a whole culture, and not the blurred zones in between' (Rosaldo, 1989: 209). These classic norms, as it is well known today, are eroding, and ethnographers are now studying issues that were previously excluded or marginalized, including processes of rapid change, questions of cultural heterogeneity and interculturality, peasant resistance in the context of global economic forces, and so forth. But the organized aspects of collective resistance still prove elusive for anthropology.

The 1980s have provided us with other clues as to why this is the case.

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Within anthropology, the emphasis on practice and resistance, as well as some recent developments associated with what has been called the 'postmodern turn in anthropology' and with feminist anthropology, have contributed other explanations and presented possibilities to close the gap that exists between the discipline and the study of social movements. In an influential piece published in the early 1980s, Ortner (1984) highlighted the growing importance of the concept of practice for anthropology. Elaborated initially in response to Parsonian/Durkheimian views of the world as ordered by rules and norms, and as a complement to the study of structures and systems, a new emphasis on practice, Ortner argued, arose in order to account for the role of human action in the genesis, reproduction and change of socio-cultural orders. Contrary to earlier attention to socialization and ritual practices in reproducing the 'system', the new tendencies focused on everyday practices in the belief that it is the temporal, spatial and social orderings underlying daily activities that sustain social systems. In sum, the practice perspective in anthropology would have examined how society and culture are produced by human action. Coupled with more carefully conducted historical analyses (Rosaldo, 1980; Price, 1983, 1990; Fals Borda, 1984; Sahlins, 1985), these two trends, Ortner predicted, could afford a more complex view of the interaction of system and practice in the historical production of societies.

As we now know, the 1980s in anthropology ended up being not so much about practice as about representation and textuality (or, more accurately, about those practices that inform representation and its politics). But before we shift to this aspect, it is important to highlight the importance of practice. As we will see, this concept is central to contemporary social movements research. Despite important advances, understanding of the nature of practice can be said to be just beginning. Philosophers have made us aware for some time that it is as participants in practices that we develop knowledge and beliefs, that we acquire rationalities and understanding. Social sciences themselves are seen as a practice, to the extent to which the grounds on which they are based and the activities of the scientists are the product of social practices.[1] The dynamics of discourse, practice, domination and resistance, however, are less well understood. Building upon Foucault's work, de Certeau has provided the most general conceptualization of this dynamic from the point of view of local practices. If domination proceeds, de Certeau argues (1984), through strategies that organize space and knowledge in ways that lead to the colonization of physical, social and cultural environments, the 'marginal majority', that is, all those who have to exist within structures of domination, are not merely passive receivers of the conditions of

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domination. As 'users' of these conditions, people effect multiple and infinitesimal transformations of dominant forms, in order to adapt them to their own interests and partially subject them to their own rules. Popular tactics, in de Certeau's view, thus effect a sort of 'anti-discipline', and 'art of making' that operates at the level of everyday life and which is very significant in shaping the world. Some of these issues will be further discussed in the third part of the paper.

As we shall see, this micro-production of the world through tactics in the terrain of everyday life is essential for understanding the action of contemporary social movements. In anthropology, these 'arts of the weak', or 'weapons of the weak', to use Scott's (1985) catchy label, have been the subject of study since the late 1970s, especially in 'ethnographies of resistance' (for instance, Taussig, 1980; Guha, 1983; Fals Borda, 1984; Comaroff, 1985; Scott, 1985; Urla, 1986; Ong, 1987; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991). Although very important in and of itself, this literature, with few exceptions, has not pushed the question of resistance towards one of its possible logical conclusions, namely, that point at which resistance gives way to more organized forms of collective action or social movements. To be sure, Scott's analysis was explicitly set to study 'everyday forms of resistance', as opposed to open, broader social and political confrontations. Closer to recent social movements research is Comaroff's study of the Zionist movement among the Tshidi of Southern Africa (1985). Her weaving of the social practices, historical processes, and cultural mediations that defined this movement in the context of global cultural and economic transformations represent an insightful and useful approach to the study of social movements. As we shall see, however, there is something to be gained by making a more explicit connection between practice and resistance concerns in the anthropology of the 1980s, on the one hand, and the new theorizing on social movements, on the other.[2]

There have been other important forerunners of studies of social movements within anthropology. Studies of cargo cults and religious political movements are perhaps the most important historical referent within the discipline in this regard. Millenarian, nativist, and revivalist movements were paid growing attention during the 1940s, 1950s and early 1960s.[3] Although an in-depth retrospective look at this literature is beyond the scope of this paper, it can be said in general that the historical context (colonialism), the types of movements, the goals and practices of the movements, and the theoretical frameworks (anthropological and otherwise) used by the researchers were largely different from those at stake in contemporary movements, although some overall similarities remain, such

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as the importance of cultural and symbolic aspects of resistance, their link to politics, and their positioning vis-a-vis western forces. A handful of anthropologists also theorized and studied social movements generally at an earlier period (Gerlach and Hine, 1970).

More recently, certain advocacy anthropology, such as the one practiced by Cultural Survival, can be said to be involved with indigenous people's social movements. To this extent, anthropologists, much before political scientists, have been attuned to the political dimensions of the cultural. Actually, the expansion of the political domain to encompass the cultural is one of the central features of contemporary social movements theory, and this expansion suggests unprecented questions in both political science and anthropology, actually bringing the two fields closer together. Some of these questions, as Lynn Stephen (1990) argues, are not necessarily new. Besides cargo cult studies, studies of informal networks in Latin America such as those based on kin, *compadrazgo*, friendship, religious and ethnic ties have been studied by anthropologists from the perspective of their role in political movements and the merging of culture, politics and religion, although it must be pointed out that these questions take on a novel significance within contemporary social movements theory, as will be discussed shortly.

Finally, one could think of political economy inspired studies as linked to social movements research. A number of studies carried out in the 1950s (Worsley, 1957; Wolf, 1959) presaged the 1970s concern with placing communities within a world system, namely, the capitalist world economy. They represented, however, marginal trends within economic anthropology, and would achieve salience only in the 1970s (Ortner, 1984). Wolf-type studies (1969, 1982) belong to a historically oriented political economy which sought to recapture the participation of non-western people in the making of the world. But even if this type of peasant studies brought a new interest in the political activity of the rural poor, peasants tended to be seen as merely responding to international capitalism, while their role in the active construction of peasant movements and alternative political cultures went largely unexamined.

As Ranajit Guha asserts in his analysis of peasant studies in colonial India, the rebel's acts were always seen in this literature as elements of another history with another subject, such as capitalism or nationalism, thus denying that 'the insurgent can rely on its performance to recover its place in history' (Guha, 1988: 84). In other words, peasants were portrayed as lacking the kinds of historical agency that would make them into social actors in their own right. More generally, peasant studies that relied on totalizing narratives paid little attention to the problems of meaning and

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identity that are essential for understanding rural forms of protest (Starn, 1992), thus participating in what Guha eloquently calls 'the prose of counter-insurgency' (1988). It is precisely this type of historical agency that social movements literature tries to capture, in part through its rejection of totalizing narratives.[4]

In sum, although there has been a current within anthropology that has looked at certain types of social and political movements, highlighting the role of cultural and symbolic factors for the political, there recently has arisen a gap between these very same sets of concerns – generally speaking, the link between the cultural and the political, and the nature and modes of political practice – and anthropological practice. This gap is most evident if one looks at the rich social movements literature that has been produced during the 1980s in other sectors. This absence of attention originates in a number of factors, including the concentration on representation as a political arena during the 1980s, which, although of great importance, shifted attention from other political terrains; an individual-oriented notion of practice; divisions of labour within the academy; the nature of academic practices themselves, which make unlikely certain styles of research (see part IV); and perhaps even the decline of collective action in the United States during the same decade. As we shall see, there is a lot to be gained from raising again the questions of culture and political practice within the new conceptual terrain that social movements theory has brought to light, and without disregarding current epistemological critiques within the discipline.

Anti-colonial struggles and, more recently, the forceful emergence of the voices and political interests of 'other' actors (women, 'minorities', subaltern groups of all kinds) have fractured the once unproblematic representation of the world in terms of a western, male understanding that either made differences invisible or that, through totalizing representations, assigned them to places where they would by necessity have a subordinated and, to the extent possible, harmless role to play. At the basis of the current crisis of forms of representation and paradigms of modernity, thus, there is this veritable explosion of other realities, as some scholars have clearly pointed out (Said, 1989; hooks, 1990; Quijano, 1988; Anzaldúa, 1990; JahMohamed and Lloyd, 1990). But much theorizing about postmodernism, including that taking place in anthropology, has paid insufficient attention to the political impetus that motivated the crisis of modernity. It is only by recognizing this aspect of the crisis that the cultural and epistemological critique of postmodernism can have a radical projection.

Current discussions on the nature of social movements address their

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potential for transforming the social and cultural orders brought about by modernity. The basic thrust of these discussions, for instance, in Latin America, where perhaps more than anywhere else they have an explicit political content, is that the social movements of today can be seen as both a reflection of the crisis of modernity and a privileged domain for understanding the processes by which new realities are coming into being.[5] This thinking is accompanied by an effort to understand the concrete ways in which modern practices have created the world and how those practices might be today under scrutiny, beyond the more general aspects provided by theorists of postmodernism about the crisis of 'metanarratives', conventional epistemologies and the like. More importantly perhaps, it affords important clues for rethinking how groups of people participate collectively in fashioning their worlds in their everyday life, grounded in their own cultures and meanings. Various theories of social movements, sketched in section II, provide valuable approximations to these questions.

II. Culture, practice and politics in social movements research

As was already mentioned, research and writing on social movements have grown steadily since the late 1970s, especially in western Europe and Latin America.[6] This interest is the result of an intellectual and political conjuncture, which, of course, has different characteristics in various parts of the world, but which is broadly associated with the crisis of modernity. In Latin America, the crisis is seen chiefly in terms of the failure of the policies and strategies of development pursued during the past forty years, on the one hand, and of the inability of the State and conventional political institutions – especially political parties of all kinds, right or left – to deal with social problems and provide workable and convincing definitions of cultural, social and economic life. Development and Revolution, the two great organizing principles of the previous decades, are no longer tenable. Not only did development fail to insure a minimum level of material prosperity for most people, but people failed to behave in the ways predicted by dominant theories: neither did they embrace 'development' and the rationality of modernity and economic efficiency, as modernization theorists predicted, nor did they jubilantly and decisively join revolutionary struggles, as Marxist analysts had prognosticated. This dual crisis of paradigms and economies is forcing a new situation, a 'social reconfiguration', as a Latin American commentator has aptly put it (Mires, 1987).

While at the level of theory there is still significant disagreement and

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confusion regarding the extent of the transformation and the nature of the new actors, the phenomenon itself seems well substantiated by an already sizable amount of empirical research. In Latin America, for instance, a host of social movements have irrupted in the theoretical and political landscape. Urban popular movements, Christian base communities, new types of peasant and workers' mobilizations, and a vast array of novel forms of popular protest (for instance, for basic needs and local autonomy) have been extensively investigated. Increasing attention is being paid to women's, ethnic and grassroots movements of various kinds, whereas a few excellent studies already exist of the gay and ecology movements. Human rights and defense of life issues, as well as youth forms of protest, have been important in some countries. Citizens' movements of diverse nature, as well as movements for regional autonomy, complete the list of the most visible movements as they have appeared in Latin America today.[7]

The new questions faced by researchers concerning unprecedented social processes have led to important theoretical reorientations and the emergence of new topics, such as the reappraisal of civil society and the State, the importance of the micro-sociology and politics of daily life, the possibility for new types of pluralist democracies, alternative ways of satisfying basic needs, and so forth. The cultural and symbolic aspects of today's social movements are widely emphasized, and this by itself would suggest an important role for anthropologists. An exhaustive presentation of even the most important of these theories is clearly beyond the scope of the paper (see Escobar, 1992). In what follows, some of the most salient theoretical issues are briefly sketched, especially from the vantage point of their relevance to anthropological concerns.

Theoretical issues in social movements research

The works of Alain Touraine, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, and that of Alberto Melucci and his co-workers in Italy are the most developed and well-known of the European theories. Touraine's work, which spans over two decades of research in both Europe and Latin America, is undoubtedly the most comprehensive theoretical system in the area of social movements. Central to Touraine's conception is the insight that, for the first time, (post-industrial) society is becoming the result of a complex set of actions that society performs upon itself. These actions are performed by social actors who may have conflictual interests but who nevertheless share certain cultural orientations. For Touraine (1981: 29), thus, social movements are not 'dramatic events' but rather 'the work that

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society performs upon itself'. The goal of this action is the control of *historicity*, that is, 'the set of cultural models that rule social practices' (1988a: 8), and which are embodied in knowledge, economic, and ethical models. What then is a social movement?

> A social movement is the action, both culturally oriented and socially conflictual, of a social class defined by its position of domination or dependency in the mode of appropriation of historicity, of the cultural models of investment, knowledge and morality toward which the social movement itself is oriented. (Touraine 1988: 68)

The essential feature of this definition is that actors recognize the stakes in terms of a cultural project; in other words, what is at stake for contemporary social movements, according to Touraine, is historicity itself, not merely organizational forms, services, economic gains and the like. Touraine, however, draws a sharp distinction between post-industrial and Third World societies in this respect. In the Latin American, 'dependent' case, for instance, most social mobilization, he insists (1987), does not constitute social movements but rather struggles for the process of social change and development. Moreover, given the centrality of the State in guiding the process of modernization and development, the stakes are not historicity but greater participation in the political system and the State. Touraine's conclusion is that only post-industrial society has reached the 'highest level of historicity', that is, that of self-production. Traditional societies still 'lie within history' (1981: 105), meaning that their ability to produce the models by which they function is more limited since the distancing that historicity requires (from God, oneself and the world as object) has not been achieved. Latin America and other Third World societies would be in the process in achieving this highest level through industrialization and development.

This is a problematic aspect in Touraine's work. As in other eurocentric discourses (including, as we will see, that of Laclau and Mouffe), the Third World is represented as having reduced historical agency in relation to the European. But why, one may ask, must this type of objectifying distancing – which, as Foucault (1970) has shown, is an outstanding feature of modernity – be the only route to historicity? For if it is true that the modern West was the first society to turn the apparatus of objectifying knowledge upon itself, it is also true that this kind of self-reflection on social life is not the only possible one. Anthropology's lessons in this regard have been exemplary. From recent studies one learns, for instance, about the sophisticated historical consciousness of the Saramakas of Surinam (Price, 1983, 1990), 18th-century Hawaiians (Sahlins, 1985), the Ilongot of the

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Philippines (Rosaldo, 1980), or today's Colombian peasants (Fals Borda, 1984, 1986); or one is instructed about the manifold forms of resistance – with varying degrees of self-reflective consciousness – practiced as a defense of their way of life by Third World people under conditions of neo-colonialism (Taussig, 1980; Guha, 1983; Fals Borda, 1984; Scott, 1985; Comaroff, 1985; Ong, 1987); or, finally, one is forced to recognize the weighty presence of myth in real life and history, and, in general, the powerful effects of seemingly unconscious constructions on meaning and reality (Favret-Saada, 1980; Taussig, 1987). In relation to Latin American social movements, this point has been made forcefully by Calderón and Reyna: 'what is important', these authors assert, 'is that society can think itself consciously' (1990: 12). This, of course, is historicity.

Despite the fact that Touraine seems to remain within a philosophy of history which is not free of certain teleology and rationalism, his insistence that social movements cannot be understood independently of culture is of paramount importance. His notion of historicity, more precisely, insinuates many ways in which anthropologists could contribute to the understanding of social movements and their relation to social and political life. Historicity, anthropologists may argue, originates in a background of cultural meanings, according to a dynamic that includes the interaction of tradition and modernity, domination and resistance, as well as the discursive articulation of cultural contents, the establishment of social and cultural orders, and struggles around all of these issues. These processes are by no means well understood. The effect of social movements on inter-subjective meanings and cultural forms has remained largely intractable, and so have related issues such as the self-definition of the movements, their interpretation of dominant identities, and their building of contestatory positions based on those interpretations. Moreover, one may ask, how is a 'political culture' carved out of the background cultural domain within a given society? What in this background, and through what processes, is articulated into political discourse? How are culture and politics intertwined in the practices of the 'new actors'? All of these issues are profoundly anthropological, and even if sociologists and political scientists are paying increasing attention to them, the potential contribution of anthropologists is great.

The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985; Mouffe, 1984, 1988; Laclau, 1985, 1988) provides a different set of elements to rethink the nature of the political in relation to today's movements. Clearly located within post-structuralist and post-Marxist theorizing, these authors take as their point of departure the inevitable discursive character of all social practice. The implications of this assumption for understanding

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social movements are profound. Since meaning – as anthropologists recognize as well – cannot be permanently fixed, but is always changing and contextual, social agents are left with the only possibility of building collective identities through processes of articulation of meaning. Dominant hegemonic practices attempt to achieve some sort of closure of the social, that is, to produce a relatively unified and normalized set of categories to understand reality; in the process of doing so, however, antagonisms emerge, and these antagonisms, in turn, make possible the appearance of new actors and discourses. In post-industrial society, for instance, the main antagonisms are the result of the hegemonic formation that arose after World War II, characterized by pervasive processes of commodification, bureaucratization and cultural massification of life, and it is as a result of these antagonisms that contemporary social movements – such as the women's, gay, ecology and peace movements – have emerged.

A new political situation, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) argue, has arisen as a result of a general phenomenon, namely, 'the decline of a form of politics for which the division of the social into two antagonistic camps [the bourgeoisie and the working class] is an original and immutable datum, prior to all hegemonic construction' (1985: 151). In the new situation, there is no privileged political subject (such as the proletariat, as in the previous model), but a plurality of collective actors each struggling within their own sphere (workers, women, students, ecology activists, peasants, etc.). Politically, the main problem is to explore the process through which each actor or social movement articulates a position or identity for itself; also important, of course, is the articulation of movements with each other, and, in the long run, perhaps the possibility of building a counter-hegemonic formation through the articulation of movements. This form of articulatory politics, which Laclau and Mouffe refer to as 'the hegemonic form of politics', opens the way for a 'radical pluralist democracy', one in which the gains of the democratic imaginary is extended to ever deeper domains of social life through the autonomization of spheres.

Like Touraine, Laclau and Mouffe draw a significant distinction between the 'advanced' countries and the 'Third World'. The hegemonic form of politics, they state, only exists 'in societies in which the democratic revolution has crossed a certain threshold' (1985: 166). In the Third World, on the contrary, given the economic and social precariousness of the situation, struggles are of a more 'conventional' nature, namely, between two clearly demarcated camps (the ruling class and the people). As we shall see shortly, Latin American social movements clearly invalidate this claim. After all, has not the post-World War II hegemonic discourse of development resulted in the Third World in a multiplicity of antagonisms

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and identities (e.g. 'peasants', 'urban marginals', 'those belonging to the informal sector', 'women bypassed by development', the 'illiterate', and 'indigenous peoples who do not modernize', that is, all those victims of development who are the subjects of new forms of protest? It would seem more appropriate to say that Latin America oscillates between two forms of politics: a logic of popular struggles in a relatively unified political space (against oligarchies, imperialism and developmentalist states); and a logic of 'democratic' or autonomized struggles in a plural space. Both are the result of articulations, given the precarious and unstable character of the social.[8]

Laclau and Mouffe's notion of politics as an articulatory process, as Touraine's concept of the self-production of society through the control of historicity, foreground the production of social life by social actors in changing and conflictual fields of meanings and cultural practices. The role of cultural innovation in everyday life as the stuff of social movements, however, is most developed by Alberto Melucci (1980, 1984, 1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1989), whose work offers rich insights for anthropologists. For Melucci (1985: 797), social movements 'announce to society that a fundamental problem exists in a given area. They have a growing symbolic function; one can probably speak of a *prophetic function*. They are a kind of *new media*.' Contemporary collective action, moveover,

> . . . assumes the form of networks submerged in everyday life. Within these networks there is an experimentation with and direct practice of alternative frameworks of meaning, in consequence of a personal commitment which is submerged and almost invisible . . . The 'movements' emerge only in limited areas, for limited phases, and by means of moments of mobilization which are the other, complementary phase of the submerged networks . . . What nourishes [collective action] is the daily production of alternative frameworks of meaning, on which the networks themselves are founded and live from day to day . . . This is because conflict takes place principally on symbolic grounds, by challenging and upsetting the dominant codes upon which social relationships are founded in high density informational systems. The mere existence of a symbolic challenge is in itself a method of unmasking the dominant codes, a different way of perceiving and naming the world. (Melucci, 1988a: 248)

Movements, thus, emerge out of the very experience of daily life under conditions of domination, and cannot be understood independently of this 'submerged' cultural background. This also suggests that it would be more appropriate to speak of movement networks or movements areas, in which the movement itself would be included along with the 'users' of the cultural goods and services produced by the movement. 'The normal situation of today's movements', Melucci stresses (1985: 800), 'is a network of small

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groups submerged in everyday life which require a personal involvement in experiencing and practising cultural innovation.' In the Third World, of course, movements have to practice both cultural innovation and techniques of survival and of social and economic transformation.

This, however, does not diminish the importance of the cultural. Interpreting Venezuelan social movements, for instance, Uribe and Lander (1988) find that these movements elicit changes in the political system and the cultural-symbolic framework that result in new modes of construction of political facts. Given the growing importance of mass media, political facts are increasingly constituted through the symbolic effectiveness of the movements associated with the expansion of the cultural terrain. (This is clearly the case of the ecology movement, for instance; see also García [1992] for the Venezuelan ecology movement.) Social movements, in sum, bring about new social practices which operate in part through the constitution of spaces for the creation of meaning. To the extent that they are inevitably concerned with matters of economic and social transformation, they link together economic, social and political problematics within an overarching cultural field.

What this also means is that questions about daily life, democracy, the state, and the redefinition of political practice and development are closely interrelated and that, moreover, social movements might be a particularly suitable arena in which to explore these interrelations. Jelin has expressed this notion in an insightful manner:

> For a model of participatory democracy, the question [of the meaning of political practice in daily life] is one of how and where systems of social and cultural relations are articulated with mechanisms of power and what are the mechanisms of intermediation. *We believe that daily life and social movements are privileged spaces in which to study these processes of mediation*, since social movements are situated, at least in theory, in the intermediate space between individualized, familiar, habitual, micro-climactic daily life, and socio-political processes writ large, of the State and the institutions, solemn and superior. . . . Our intention is to point *to a field of construction of democracy* that, in the first place, is important in itself, that of *the social relations of daily life* (as Chilean feminists say: democracy in the home and democracy in the state). (1987: 11, emphasis added; my translation)

Many questions come to mind regarding the complex inquiry proposed by Jelin and others. For instance, if it is true that it is the practice of those engaged in the movements that have to be studied, how is this study to be carried out? How is social science to make visible the domain of popular practices, and the intersubjective meanings that underlie them? How can we account for the self-interpretation of agents? What is the field of

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meanings in which popular actions are inscribed, and how have these fields been generated by processes of domination and resistance, strategies and tactics, scientific knowledge and popular knowledge and traditions? How do social actors contribute to create new cultural models through the construction of collective identities as a means of self-affirmation? To problematize everyday life, more generally, is to provide the conditions for a different social theory and interpretive framework. After all, everyday life involves a collective act of creation, a collective signification, a culture. Reflection on everyday life thus has to be located at the intersection of micro-processes of articulation of meaning through practices, on the one hand, and macro-processes of domination, on the other.

Recent trends in the study of popular culture contribute important clues and methods to explore further the relations between daily life, cultural resistance, and collective political activity, although they can only be mentioned here (see Angus and Jhally, 1988; Fiske, 1989a, 1989b; Willis, 1990). The work of Michel de Certeau, already mentioned, has been pivotal in this regard. Building upon de Certeau's work, Fiske has proposed an 'ethnosemiotic approach' to the study of popular culture that focuses on the uses that people make of the products of the culture industries (such as TV, music videos, shopping centers, fashion and the like). This approach moves from the dominant 'text' (cultural form or product) to their concrete appropriation by the people (its 'users'), focusing on the role of people as 'agent[s] of culture in process' and as 'structured instances of culture in practice' (Fiske 1990: 86). It assumes that confronted with dominant products people engage in 'semiotic resistance' and creativity, a fact which cannot be reduced to 'escapism' but which, on the contrary, has profound cultural and political significance. 'Ethnography', Fiske summarizes,

> . . . is concerned to trace the specifics of the uses of a system, the ways that the various formations of the people have evolved of making do with the resources it provides. Ethnosemiotics is concerned with interpreting these uses and their politics and in tracing in them instances of the larger system through which culture (meanings) and politics (action) intersect. (1990: 98)

Inquiry into social movements from this perspective seeks to restore the centrality of popular practices to the analysis, to vindicate the value of the practices of the majority in producing the world in which we live. A word of caution, however, must be placed in connection with the possible use of this approach in Third World contexts. If it is true that in post-industrial societies 'people make popular culture at the interface between everyday life and the products of the culture industry' (Fiske, 1989b: 6), in the Third

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World the dynamics of cultural production cannot be reduced to the 'uses' of dominant products or texts. In the Third World, given the State's inability to provide for the needs of the population, the production and circulation of meanings are not completely overdetermined by the commerical forms of western capitalism. As the following examples show, there still exist practices, 'residual' or 'emergent' (Williams, 1980), that have a decisive collective character, and which still have the potential to provide a different basis for resistance and collective action. In other words, and despite the pervasive influence of modernity's technologies, there still exist, in the Third World, *socially significant* groups (even if never 'pure', of course) that represent alternative cultural possibilities.

One final aspect that must be mentioned, even if it cannot be developed here, is the changing nature of 'the political', which, with the exception of the work of Laclau and Mouffe, is assumed but insufficiently theorized in most social movements literature. While a number of authors recognize the inadequacy of thinking about the new movements in terms of existing (western) political theory, few have broached the task of theorizing the political in a broader fashion. At the root of this difficulty is the fact that political science and political sociology are ill prepared to provide a general theory of the political, to the extent that they take for granted a particular form of society, that of the modern West, and a domain – 'politics' – that has to be delineated as an identifiable and particular sector of social life by objective, positive knowledge. For a number of theorists (for instance, Taylor, 1985; Lefort, 1986, 1988; Castoriadis, 1987, 1988), political science and sociology do not provide grounds for a definition of 'the political' that transcends these cultural limits. This task, as these authors argue in their respective ways, has to be advanced in the domain of political philosophy, a terrain that must also be travelled by political anthropology in rethinking its categories in ways that make them less dependent on western historicity.

For Lefort (1988: 219), a general understanding of the political in relation to the principles that generate different forms of society must be guided by 'a different requirement of knowledge', one that attempts to situate itself behind the theoretical constructs of specific societies; this, of course, assumes that the task always has to be recommenced, since it inevitably depends on what is given to the investigator by his/her historical position. In other words, to the extent that the inquiry implies a certain form of institution of the social, the philosopher must account for the modes of differentiation and articulation that make the specific social formation possible (a point that Laclau and Mouffe seem to overlook when they discuss 'articulation' only in reference to the West). Any social

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formation implies both a system for giving meaning to social relations (a culture) and for staging them (a set of practices). In the modern West, these systems entail the experience of the world as object (external to the observer), and a pre-given schema of actions, practices and relations encoded in the domains 'political', 'social', 'religious', and the like (Lefort, 1988: 216–21).

Like Lefort, Castoriadis (1987) stresses the fact that it is impossible to posit a total theory of the political, society or history, because 'every thought of society and of history belongs to society and to history. . . . And the fact that it knows itself as such does not take it out of its mode of being as a dimension of social–historical doing.' Instead, the theorist must embark upon a task of elucidation which, 'even if it takes an abstract turn, is inseparable from a political aim and a political project' (Castoriadis, 1987: 3). General political theories are, for Lefort and Castoriadis, 'pure fictions'. Charles Taylor's (1985b) advocacy for an 'interpretive' political science is akin to Castoriadis's notion of elucidation. For Taylor, empirical social science is incapable of accounting for the background of understanding – intersubjective meanings which are constitutive of social reality but which cannot be captured by brute data or empirical categories – that necessarily underlie its object. Meaning, and the communal, are inevitably bypassed by these sciences.

A final complication is added by Foucault (1982, 1991), to the extent that his definition of power as the structuring of the field of thinking and action of others brings in another dimension to the political. This 'structuring', in Foucault, is achieved through 'technologies of government' effected and stabilized through discourse and, again, is specific to each historical period. 'Culture' itself, it can be argued, is the result of discourses and practices of governmentality (concerning health, the body, planning, the population, etc.). One then has to practice a sort of interpretive analytics, or, in Foucault's words (see Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982), an 'historical ontology of ourselves', that is, an investigation of how we have come to be constituted as subjects by specific discourses and practices of modernity. Any theory of the political must take this variable into account. A politically oriented anthropology of modernity can also be envisaged along the same lines.

Our discussion of European social movements theories should not imply that they should be taken at face value. Moreover, the qualification of these theories as 'European' is problematic; after all, most of its leading proponents (Laclau and Mouffe, Touraine, Castells) have spent significant periods of time in Latin America. For these theorists, Latin America has been a 'center' of knowledge production. It might seem more appropriate

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to interpret intellectual production in this area along the lines of 'travelling theories and theorists' proposed by Said (1983: 226–47) and Clifford (1989). For these authors, theory production in the post-colonial world cannot be seen as simply produced in one place and applied in another, but as a complex process of productions in a discontinuous terrain.[9] The presentation of these theories here is meant to convey, provisionally, the importance of social movements inquiry for anthropology, on the one hand and, on the other, to give an idea of the complex processes of constitution of the subject in today's societies within the space of collective action. If it is true that the social subject has been decentered in important ways, it is by no means clear how various recenterings and reconstructions are taking place. Social movements theory provides clues to rethink the constitution of the subject.

III. Recent anthropological studies of social movements

Few studies have been conducted to date that take as a point of departure the trends in social movements theory and research outlined in the previous section. What follows is an account of one such study in some detail, plus a brief mention of a few others. What is crucial to these studies, and to the argument of this paper, is that social movements be seen as cultural struggles in a fundamental sense, that is, as struggles over meanings as much as over socio-economic conditions. This is doubly important because social movements in the Third World, for understandable reasons, tend to be seen primarily as struggles over economic means of survival. As central to the socio-economic aspects is the defense, creation and reconstruction of meanings at all levels, from everyday life to national development.

One of the best examples of anthropological studies of social movements inspired by the recent literature discussed here is the study by Orin Starn of a peasant movement in Peru, one of the largest and most sustained peasant movements in 20th-century Latin America. The movement grew out of vigilante patrols (*rondas campesinas*) started in rural towns throughout northern Peru in the late 1970s. Increasing robbery, disenchantment with the official justice system, the economic crunch of the period and other factors such as previous experience with agrarian reform, a renewed role of the church and the presence of activists formed the background for the emergence of this movement. But vigilantism soon evolved into a whole system of dispute resolution, involving issues ranging from land ownership to family fights, wife beating and robbery itself. It also resulted in the development of a new spirit of local cooperation and autonomy, most

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manifest perhaps in the implementation of small public works projects such as the construction of community halls, health centers, irrigation channels, road construction and the like. In short, in some sense at least, it resulted in alternative 'development' proposals (Starn, 1989, 1991a, 1991b, 1992).

The *rondas campesinas* now operate in over 4000 communities of Peru's northern Andes. What is most interesting about them, however, is their innovative political practice. Starn's analysis starts with the recognition of the long engagement of peasants with patterns of power and meaning. Peruvian peasants, he insists, do not constitute a separate, timeless 'Andean world', as many anthropologists and rural economists and sociologists have assumed (Starn, 1991b). They are, so to say, 'impure products' (Clifford, 1988), actively placed in regional, national and transnational flows of food, commodities, ideas and people, a fact that is reflected in their political practices. The very idea of anti-thievery patrols, for instance, originated in the old hacienda *rondas* of the 1920s, which landowners used to repress and discipline the peasantry. Today's *rondas* also borrow from military procedures, well known to the region's peasants through compulsory military service and their participation in wars. 'Patrols', they call the *ronda* activity, as in the military. But peasants do not merely reproduce the practices of these repressive institutions, but transform them into an original and more democratic system, relying not on authoritarian ways but on coordinated committees, and always using elements from peasant culture such as dress, songs and dances.

Similarly with their practices of organizing and the delivery of justice. Even if *ronderos* borrow notions of hierarchy and bureaucracy from the State and the justice system, they transform them in unique ways. Gathering in wide circles in community settings, *rondas* impart justice with a more egalitarian and communal feeling. In all these new practices, or 'new ways of doing politics' – as new social movements theorists would have it – peasants do not mimic dominant models; they appropriate them and remodel them into their own distinctive system. Of course, this new peasant system still exhibits some of the old features, such as their entanglement with traditional political parties, some partisan division and populism, control by men or organizations, partial continuity with conventional political strategies, some use of violence, and a feeling of both respect and resentment towards the State and the law. But it is also true that the *rondas* have brought about very visible benefits to their communities, that their use of violence in punishing thieves is contained and much less severe and widespread than that of the army or the Shining Path, that women have found in the *rondas* a forum to denounce wife beating and punish the culprits, that the *rondas* have contained the

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advancement of the Shining Path, reduced peasants' dependence on the State and its bureaucratic and unfair justice system, brought about an unprecedented sense of security, and, finally and more generally, that they have renewed a powerful sense of independent identity among the peasants.

This type of rural organizing thus represents a relatively new form of political culture and identity. As the theorists of popular culture discussed in the previous section, Starn (1992: 3) stresses 'the need for close hermeneutic readings that convey the unique cadence of every rural movement . . . a firm grasp on problems of meaning and identity can assist greatly in making sense of why rural protest occurs and how it unfolds'. For Starn, it is not sufficient to study the everyday forms of peasant resistance; it is also to open peasant movements, he contends, that we must direct our attention if we want to develop a more realistic understanding of how peasants, through active construction and creation, fashion visions, symbols and procedures for organizing. In other words, what is at stake is an examination of how peasants construct their identities and communities through innovation and recombination of elements, through local synthesis and innovation, resistance and accommodation. It is this cultural dynamics of identity formation, this analysis of cultural politics that pays close attention to the role of meanings in a struggle that cannot be bypassed, Starn argues, if we seek a more nuanced and satisfactory reading of collective social action in the contemporary world of today.

Starn's work thus demonstrates, as he explicitly states it, how contemporary social movements theory can provide valuable insights for reexamining topics that have for long been of interest to anthropologists, such as rural protest. The converse is also true, to the extent that much of the 'new social movements' literature has not paid attention to peasant movements, as these tend to be seen as a 'traditional' political arena. The Peruvian example clearly shows that peasants do partake of the 'new forms of doing politics' so much hailed by today's theorists. But it also shows, as a corrective to conventional peasant studies within anthropology and other disciplines, that peasant collective actions are not only the determined product of large structures of domination, nor can peasants be defined by a set of 'essential' features or by appealing to certain 'objective' criteria that would bring to light a preconstituted category; the 'Peruvian peasant', on the contrary, is a heterogeneous and varied collectivity, and the movement itself the result of a self-creating process of identity formation through the articulation of manifold elements originating in plural cultural, geographical and socio-economic spaces. In sum, no less than their postmodern counterparts in post-industrial society, peasants also construct their

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'subjectivities' through the articulation of 'subject positions', as post-structuralist theory would have it. By the same token, the movement is multivalent, and cannot be seen simply as 'purely oppositional' or 'power serving', but as practicing an innovative politics of challenging, shifting, and sometimes accepting established forms of power.

Other anthropological studies of social movements have demonstrated the value of analysing collective action from the perspective of both critical anthropology and social movements theory.[10] The 'constructivist' approach to the study of collective identities, focused on a close reading of the discourses and practices that account for them, has been important in studies of movements as varied as those of indigenous peoples, squatters and gays. Questions of historicity, cultural innovation and symbolic mediation are generally important. Although there is some coherence of approach, resulting from the researchers' reliance on recent trends in both the anthropology and social movements theory, the field can be said to be just beginning, and many questions remain to be answered. For instance, how are these studies modifying certain features of standard anthropological practice? How do anthropologists negotiate their participation in a movement? What does it mean to become involved with an openly political movement? What constitutes your 'community', and how is fieldwork to be approached? If the movement is divided, or if it takes place in a vast and decentralized space, how would this modify the methods of study? The possibilities for exploring these questions – and others such as the textual representation of social movements, the connection between theory and practice, the dissemination of knowledge obtained by the researcher and, more generally, the ethics and politics of knowledge at stake in these types of situations – offer rich possibilities for the future.

IV. Social movements and the 're-imagining' of anthropology

At the same time that other social scientists were trying to reformulate their understanding of collective action and political practice, in anthropology the character of the ethnographic enterprise, of representation, and of the politics of the discipline as a whole became topics of heated debate (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Clifford, 1988). What is now at stake, Clifford says, 'is an ongoing critique of the West's most confident, characteristic discourses' (1986: 10), which, in anthropology, has led to the realization that 'no one can write about others any longer as if they were discrete objects or texts' (1986: 25). A new task thus insinuates itself: that of coming up with 'more subtle, concrete ways of

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writing and reading . . . new conceptions of culture as interactive and historical (1986: 25). Innovation in anthropological writing taking place within this context is recognized as 'moving [ethnography] toward an unprecedently acute political and historical sensibility that is transforming the way cultural diversity is portrayed' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 16). It is thus not a question of dismantling anthropology, but of re-imaging it in the light of new epistemological and political challenges.

True to good academic fashion, these prominent critics have already become the object of various critiques, some of them more pointed or convincing than others. The whole notion of culture, some say, has not been sufficiently problematized; on the contrary, the new trends propitiate a relativization of culture which is not sufficiently aware of the ways in which hierarchical differences among cultures are created and maintained (Friedman, 1987). The critics are also found to overlook in their theorizing matters of crucial political import such as American imperialism and a host of articulate and increasingly audible Third World voices that denounce it (Said, 1989). The concern with the literary and ethnographic practice, it has also been argued, has not been accompanied by a de-categorizing and re-situating of the literary 'as the place where social code is challenged', a step that would be required for a more radical approach to writing culture (Trinh, 1989b: 7). Some also find that the 'textual focus . . . may curtail our understanding of more fundamental [socio-historical] processes', that is, the need to convey 'the complexities of life that both differ from and articulate with our own' (Gewertz and Errington, n.d.: 4, 28).

Other sets of critiques have focused on the 'dialogic' emphasis of the new ethnography. It is argued that this emphasis – linked to the attempt to arrange textual space so that informants or others can have their own voices – may actually hide the real processes that obtain in any fieldwork situation, that is, the emotional, power-laden dialogic engagement in which gender, ethnicity and class identifications become strategic tools (Page, 1988). Moreover, the metaphor of representation as dialogical comes close 'to a contemplative stance by ignoring praxis and the plurality of subjects that negotiate the historical and political process' (Ulin, 1991: 64). More generally, as the same author argues, postmodernist anthropology, although important in providing correctives to positivist epistemologies, pays insufficient attention to the concrete social conditions in contemporary capitalist society that shape the representation process to begin with, and which a reformed political economy must account for. In a similar vein, postmodern anthropology is found wanting when it comes to the question of for whom we write, and how; this

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disregard for the audience is seen as a serious drawback in anthropology's attempt to write socially and politically committed works (Sutton, 1991).

Perhaps the most visible critique of the critics has come from a group of feminist anthropologists who see in the postmodern-inspired 'new ethnography' a dangerous model (Mascia-Lees et al., 1989). Many of the insights of the new ethnography, these authors argue, have actually been active concerns within feminism for several decades. This makes even more paradoxical the dismissal of feminism by the proponents of the new ethnography. More pointedly, they argue that postmodern theorizing may work to preserve the privileged position of western white males, to the extent that their questioning of textually constituted authority may actually preserve their socially constituted authority as powerful academics who control anthropology's agenda. In other words, postmodern inspired anthropology critics are blind to their own politics. Feminism, on the contrary, is clearly grounded in a politics that emphasizes the collective construction of a feminist project, 'in a practice based on the material conditions of women's lives' (p. 23). More generally, postmodernism, with its emphasis on the breakdown of metanarratives, 'is a new synthesizing allegory that is being projected onto white women and Third World peoples who only recently have been partially empowered' (p. 32). In sum, the authors conclude, anthropologists should turn to feminism rather than to the new ethnography for inspiration for their work.

Of course, the choice does not have to be 'either/or', but that, as other critics of the critics suggest, anthropologists should lean on both feminism and postmodernism (and on political economy, one might add) with certain qualifications, as Deborah Gordon (1988, 1991) has convincingly argued.[11] In other words, there is much in the new ethnography that can be of value to feminism and feminist-inspired anthropology and, conversely, there is a lot that the theorists of the new ethnography can learn from feminism. A recognition of the importance of women's struggles – and, as bell hooks adds, particularly those of women of color (1990) – of the last decades does not mandate that we should overlook the important conceptual and methodological contributions of the new ethnography and, more generally, of poststructuralism and postmodernism. The dangers for feminism in adopting uncritically modern epistemologies and universals has also been brought to light, particularly in relation to ethnocentrism and classism within the women's movement (Spelman, 1988; Trinh, 1989a; hooks, 1990). Ong (1988) and Visweswaran (1988) have warned about the complexities of building a feminist anthropology that is fully aware of the advantages white feminists have in relation to Third World women. This, of course, applies to anthropology as a whole. It can be added that the

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epistemological and political decentering of the (white bourgeois male) subject is essential for the claiming of alterity, which means that not all postmodernisms are without politics, as Latin American discussions on postmodernity, as well as the profusion of feminist writings consciously inspired by postmodernism, tend to demonstrate.[12]

One aspect that has not come to light in discussions about the new critiques in anthropology and its shortcomings is the extent to which both critique and its discussions are shaped by its taking place within the (US) academy. Actually, both critics and the critics' critics share this space of enunciation. They are certainly situated in terms of class, gender and race, but also in terms of shared disciplinary practices that have important normalizing effects for those who engage in them. The whole debate (this paper clearly included) is not immune to the pressures of the academy, such as the need to demarcate terrains, set agendas, compete for publications and positions, and the like. Within the new ethnography literature, Gordon (1991) and Rabinow (1985, 1986) have referred briefly to this aspect of what Strathern (1989) has broadly called 'an ethnography of western knowledge practices'. More recently, and with great insight and passion, Trinh (1989a) and hooks (1990) have taken up the issue, framing it within certain salient debates in cultural studies. Both authors point to the difficulties in keeping a radical political commitment within the university, given the professional demands faced by academics; both authors also advocate different practices of knowing and writing which might allow academics to maintain and express such a commitment.

For hooks, the problems and dangers of working within the academy are manifold:

> If there is no mutual exchange between the cultural subjects (African–Americans, for example) that are written about and the critics who write about them, a politics of domination is easily reproduced wherein intellectual elites assume an old colonizing role, that of the privileged interpreter-cultural overseer . . . I am constantly aware of the way our very location in an academic setting, where one's work is periodically reviewed, judged, evaluated, etc., informs what we write about and how we write. On the one hand, 'cultural studies' has made writing about non-white culture more acceptable, particularly in the humanities; yet, on the other hand, this work does not emerge within a context that necessarily stresses the need to approach these subjects with a progressive politics or a liberatory pedagogy. Therein lies the danger. *Cultural Studies could easily become the space for the informers* . . . When this happens, cultural studies reinscribes patterns of colonial domination, where the 'Other' is always made the object, appropriated, interpreted, taken over by those in power, by those who dominate. (1990: 9, 125; emphasis added)

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Cultural studies, in other words – particularly those that remain at the level of the literary – is in danger of becoming the equivalent of the 'armchair anthropology' of the 19th century.[13] This has profound *political* consequences. For academic practices are part of those 'western ways of creating the world' that Strathern talks about; part of modernity and of anthropology's 'endorsement of certain interests in the description of social life'. They are, indeed, those parts most invisible to us, because they give us the right to speak and the right to know ourselves and others. These practices cannot be dispelled arbitrarily, but they have to be historicized, as part of dominant modern modes of knowing and possessing the world, and transformed accordingly, from the inside. Essential to anthropology is its reliance on modern (western) modes of knowledge; at the same time, anthropology has failed to construct a politics that problematizes this dependence and the relationship between the knowledge that makes it possible and the social positioning from which it operates and which it tends to reinforce.

Feminism provides a partial model for the politicization of the academy, even if the difficulties in cross-cultural contexts are real.[14] The possibility for doing theory 'in other modes of consciousness' advocated by writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa, Trinh T. Minh-ha, Patricia Williams (1991) and bell hooks also has to be taken seriously. But above all, anthropology must move away from the organization of knowledge in which it exists – abstract, disembodied and disembedded from popular social contexts, accountable primarily to the academy – and start to participate more explicitly in local questions and activities. It is here that the potentially catalyzing role of social movements theory can be most fruitfully investigated. A more dynamic understanding of culture, a new theorization of the political and of otherness and difference – coupled with a transformed sense for the connections between collective political practice and the macro structures of domination – might provide an arena in which the politics of anthropology itself – as a practice entrenched in and dependent on a western will to knowledge – might be posed with renewed poignancy.[15]

In sum, the investigation of something so varied, heterogeneous and complex as contemporary social movements is a challenge that can deepen anthropology's self-critique, having important implications for fieldwork, ethnographic writing and political expression. For whom we write, and how.[16] This remains at the crux of anthropology's predicaments. Social movements research is one way (among many) in which both political and epistemological aspects of the crisis of representation can be fruitfully investigated. It is an arena in which anthropologists can pursue a novel

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hybridization between theory and practice, between knowledge and action, by innovating with forms of knowing and writing applied to our understanding of the new social practices of collective social actors.

Conclusion

Contemporary social movements are about the negotiation of the practices and rationalities of modernity and postmodernity in the envisioning and reconstruction of social orders. Recent literature on social movements is a reminder of how people continue to shape their world through types of political activism that include the fashioning of visions, symbols, and alternative meanings as much as concrete forms of mobilization and organizing. Although anthropologists in the past have shown sensitivity to the cultural aspects of politics and resistance, recent theorizing on the nature of social movements unveil a profound transformation in the structure of collective action and political practice, one that requires new concepts and modes of understanding. The new concepts being provided by theorists offer a particularly rich opportunity for anthropological research.

To understand contemporary social movements, one must look at the micro-level of everyday practices and their imbrication with larger processes of development, patriarchy, capital and the State. How these forces find their way into people's lives, their effects on people's identity and social relations, and people's responses and 'uses' of them have to be examined through a close engagement and reading of popular actions. Social movements theorists today speak of a proliferation of political and cultural identities, the fact that these identities are constructed through processes of articulation that start out of submerged networks of meanings, proceed through cultural innovation in the domain of everyday life, and may result in visible and sizable forms of collective action for the control of historicity. These processes can be gleaned clearly from studies of social movements in Latin America and the Third World. In some sense at least, it can be said that the current crisis of capital has placed Latin America and the Third World at the forefront of the transformation of modernity. Even in a provisional and perhaps precarious fashion, the new conditions for collective action in Latin America are already propitiating novel organizational forms which might lead us more clearly in the direction of a different politics.

In the post-*Writing Culture*[17] era of anthropology, we must assume that writing about social movements will have to adopt modes that avoid or problematize the monologic, realist representations of past studies of

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politics and resistance. If one were to bring the concerns with representation and ethnographic writing to the social movements arena, one would have to deal with questions such as: how do we write about them? Who 'speaks for' the movements? How can we account for the fact that social movements rarely speak with a single voice? The fact that the social movements of today are of a different nature than those of the past (at least as analysts perceived them yesterday and today) entails that today's studies must also be different from those of the past. That the task of representing cultures is now admitted to be 'strategic and selective' (Clifford, 1988: 231) takes on unprecedented dimensions in social movements studies to the extent that the cultural and political significance of the many voices that converge in a fieldwork situation, the discursive positioning of researchers, activists and collective actors, and the complex epistemological and political negotiations inevitably at stake will not be amenable to facile simplifications. A radicalization of discursive models of ethnographic field-work and writing ('dialogical', 'polyphonic' and the like) may be possible.

In the long run, what is at stake, as far as Third World social movements is concerned, is the generation of new ways of seeing, of renewing cultural self-descriptions by displacing the categories with which Third World groups have been constructed by dominant forces. It is a matter of contributing to regenerating people's spaces or creating new ones by working with those who have actually survived the age of modernity and development by resisting it or by insinuating themselves creatively in the circuits of capital and modernization. As Ashis Nandy (1989: 265) puts it, 'the recovery of the other selves of cultures and communities, selves not defined by the dominant global consciousness, may turn out to be the first task of social criticism and political activism and the first responsibility of intellectual stock-taking in the first decades of the coming century'. Social movements, as symbols of resistance to the dominant politics of knowledge and organization of the world, provide some paths in the direction of this calling, that is, for the re-imagining of the Third World. And perhaps anthropology's own re-imagining has an important contribution to make in this regard.

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with me his valuable work; and comments by *Critique of Anthropology's* editorial group.

NOTES

1. One thinks particularly of Marx, Heidegger, Wittgenstein and Foucault as 'philosophers of practice'. The relationship between Wittgenstein, Marx and Foucault, especially from the point of view of their notions of human practice, is analyzed by Shaviro (1986). An insightful study of social theory as practice is found in Taylor (1985).
2. Anthropology's failure to address issues of collective political practice is not unrelated to the fact that inquiry into practice, especially in Europe and North America, has remained at the level of the individual or at some broad, unspecified 'cultural' level, a point that Ortner already noted in her piece. It is also related to an insufficient theoretical construction of 'the political' in anthropology.
3. See, for instance, Wallace (1956, 1970); Worsley (1957) (also for a list of pertinent bibliography); Linton (1943). 'So plentiful is the literature on these movements that no one person can hope to survey it all,' stated Worsley (1957) in his study of Melanesian cargo cults, referring to millenarian movements in general.
4. 'Wolf's commodity book', it has been said, 'proceeds in a straight line through History seen as progressive stages in the unfolding of a Totality [the logic of capital].' Moreover, Wolf's formulations 'reify history as something to be possessed,' resulting in a 'meta-irony by the surprising absence in his book of the people's-without-history Histories' (Taussig, 1986: 5, 6). Contemporary theory offers powerful correctives to this type of theorizing.
5. On the nature of modernity and postmodernity in Latin America, see especially Calderón (1988), Lechner (1988), Quijano (1988), García Canclini (1989). An analysis of this trend is found in Escobar (1992).
6. It would be impossible to review here the pertinent literature and debate on social movements and 'new social movements'. See Escobar and Alvarez (eds, 1992) for a thorough review of Latin American, Western European and North American literature in this area, including their relative emphases, points of contact and contention. There is a marked difference between the 'identity-centered' paradigms dominant in Europe and Latin America and the 'resource mobilization' approaches more common in North America. See Cohen (1985) for this classification of 'paradigms'. Cross-pollination of research between the two approaches is beginning to take place (Tarrow, 1988; Kriesi, Tarrow and Klandermans, eds, 1988; Alvarez, 1989). For North American social movements, see Epstein (1990), Flores and Yuidice (1990), Fantasia (1988).
7. It would be impossible to even summarize or list the relevant literature here. The most complete study of recent social movements to this date is the ten country study carried out by the Latin American Social Science Council, CLACSO (Calderón, ed., 1986). For a comprehensive review, see Alvarez and Escobar

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(eds, 1992). Another anthology in Spanish has been published recently by Camacho and Menjívar (eds, 1989). The only anthology in English on Latin American social movements from this perspective is Slater (ed., 1985).

8. Several important critiques of Laclau and Mouffe have been published already, and this is not the point to summarize them. Particularly criticized are their displacement of the class concept, and their unwillingness to theorize the unity of social labor, that is, the fact that despite the 'fragmentation' of social actors there is an underlying dynamics common to them all originated in the fact that all of them respond to capitalism in one form or another (on this last point, see O'Connor, 1988; also Rosenthal, 1988). It must be emphasized that Laclau and Mouffe are not 'doing away' with class, but with its *a priori* privileged status. Class can become a central issue, but it will always have to be through articulation. Class is not excepted from this logic. Now, if it is true that, particularly in the Third World, social actors are responding to capitalism of one sort or another, this response cannot be reduced to the logic of capital or its contradictions. Moreover, how various groups experience, understand and respond to the conditions created by capital makes a significant difference. This difference is particularly relevant at the level of culture. In sum, a political economy that takes into account the discursive nature of social reality as conceived by certain poststructuralist theories (and vice versa) still wait to be worked out. This reworked political economy must be fed back into social movements theory, from which it tends to be absent (for instance, in Melucci's case), as a way to strengthen those theories and the politics they inform.
9. For a fuller discussion of this point, see Escobar (1992).
10. Anthropological researches that address some of the issues raised in contemporary social movements theory include studies of the Basque nationalist movement (Urla, 1987, 1988, forthcoming); squatter movements in Mexico City (Díaz-Barriga, 1991); indigenous people's movements in Colombia (Findji, 1992, an historian with long experience of ethnographic research); the gay movement in Brazil (MacRae, 1991, 1992); a peasant movement in Korea (Abelmann, 1990); and religious movements in Brazil (Burdick, 1990, 1992); Sandra Morgen's work on women's health clinics in the United States (Bookman and Morgen, eds, 1988) is being reinterpreted in the light of social movements theory (Sandra Morgen, personal communication). A critical view of the implications of using European theories in Latin America is advanced by Stephen (1990), with special attention to anthropology and the role of women in contemporary social movements.
11. See the special issue of the Santa Cruz journal *Inscriptions* (Nos. 3/4) edited by Deborah Gordon (1988). This issue can be seen as an insider's critique of the 'new ethnography'. The most complete feminist critique of the 'new ethnography' is found in Deborah Gordon's recently completed doctoral dissertation, 'Engendering Ethnography', Board of Studies in History of Consciousness, University of California, Santa Cruz, August 1991.
12. The possible engagements between postmodernism and feminism are explored, in different ways, in the works of Diamond and Quinby (eds, 1988), Trinh

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(1989a), Haraway (1989), Fraser (1989), hooks (1990), and Nicholson (ed., 1990), among others. In these works, postmodernism contributes to rethinking categories such as race, gender, class, nature, science and culture. Nicholson, for instance, believes that postmodernism, if 'carefully constructed', can be a powerful ally for feminism.

13. I owe this point to Tracey Tsugawa.
14. Generally speaking, 'the feminist movement (like other grassroots social movements) provides anthropologists with an actual audience, in the public sphere, with which ideas can be engaged, discussed and disputed' (Sutton, 1991: 101). The issues are somewhat different when cross-cultural and cross-national situations are involved. But even in these cases, there is much that anthropologists can do. Taussig's first book in Spanish, published in Colombia under a pseudonym, for instance, had wide distribution among the Black populations it dealt with, and was useful in the beginning stages of their social movement. More recently, Starn (1991a) has published a short book in Peru reflecting on the current conjuncture of the *rondas campasinas*, intended for Peruvian audiences.
15. My discussion of anthropology from the perspective of the politics of knowledge has been sharpened by discussions with Shiv Visvanathan (from the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi) and my colleague Frédérique Marglin.
16. I am not advocating a simplistic principle that we have to write 'for the people' and in ways that the 'people' can understand (in any case, this sort of populist scholarship is rarely free of condescension). Nor that 'social movements' are a 'pure' space of alternatives, free of modern elements. This is far from being the case. What I mean is that we must situate ourselves in different spaces at the same time (the popular domains, the academy, the space of western knowledge, that of global cultural, social and economic factors, and the interrelations among them all), and let this complex scenario (and not only the needs of the academy) orient our work.
17. The term is Jackie Urla's (see acknowledgements).

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