RADICAL PLURALISM, *HOMO SACER*, AND THE SUBALTERN: RECONSTITUTING THE FIELD OF DEMOCRACY

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Introduction

In "Post-Marxism: Democracy and Identity," Chantal Mouffe discusses how an essentialist view, descendant from the Enlightenment, has served to reduce democracy through the creation of an identity based rationality which fails to acknowledge its constitutive outside. The solution is to advance a radical pluralism that reconstitutes power relationships consistent with democratic values. Such a radical pluralism is based in an agonistic conceptualization of society, which does not content itself with categorical heuristics, but rather wrestles with the aporias of provisional, relational (non)identities. Mouffe's vision is provocative, in that it inherently deconstructs identity relationships that have been productive of severe power differentials. The question becomes, upon what grounds can such a radical pluralism be constituted? And, given that social disparities both preceded the onset of enlightenment rationality, and were exacerbated by it, on what basis can agonistic struggle serve to reduce and/or eliminate such disparities?

These questions are particularly complicated by the very power differentials which radical pluralism seeks to address, through pockets of society that can best be defined by their non-inclusion in democratic society. This paper will

discuss how collectivities are theorized to challenge hegemonic structures; on what basis collectivities can be represented in agonistic conversations; and the particular problem of how unrepresented entities – the *homo sacer* and the subaltern, pose challenges in the field of collective action and representation.

Radical Pluralism and Contested Speech

Mouffe suggests that an essentialist rationality, by establishing categories of identity, sows the seeds of discrimination and subjugation through the creation of an "other" which must be destroyed. Here, Jacques Derrida's exposition of Walther Benjamin's "Critique of Violence" informs us. That is, following Derrida, the naming of a subject automatically serves to create its other, its outside. Nor is the acceptance of multiple identities able to encompass all possibility, for "by putting an exclusive emphasis on heterogeneity and incommensurability, it impedes us to recognize how certain differences are constructed as relations of subordination and should therefore be challenged by a radical democratic politics" (Mouffe 1995, 262).

In place of this essentialist view of identity, Mouffe advances (non)identity, "an empty place to be filled by identifications which provisionally assert, then subvert and reconstitute previous articulations of identity" (268). (Non)identity acknowledges that each of us has multiple possible representations, determined by our various social relationships: "Identity cannot, therefore, belong to one person alone, and no one belongs to a single identity" (264). Viewed as a system

of social relationships, the economy then ceases to be determinative, for it makes no sense "to speak of the economy as if it could exist independently of the ideological or political relations that constitute it" (5). And thus the system of relationships based in class, in superior and subordinate, and heavily interpenetrated by race and gender, shall be viewed as a particular historical construction, but not "seamless, natural, and inevitable" (Natter 1995, 272).

Essentialist identities, as historical constructions, are established in a moment of founding violence that creates both an inside and an outside. As Derrida suggests, within binary opposites, a hierarchy of better/worse is created: master/slave; husband/wife; leader/follower. And, where Benjamin notes that "all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them" (Benjamin 1969, 258), Derrida warns of "the future that can always reproduce the present" (Derrida 1990, 27). That is, if the now were ahistoric, the task of reconstituting a radical pluralist democracy would be much more simple. But the task of creating agonisms among (non)identity takes place on an historical plane, which itself exerts a conserving violence, of which we ourselves are the police. The disciplining force which pervades liberal society is the notion of progress, for, just as Benjamin says of Social Democracy, the promises of the future "made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than that of liberated grandchildren" (Benjamin 1969, 262). It is this promise of individual achievement that stands in the way of collective, agonistic struggle.

This historic force creates in its police the need to enforce the categories of identity, in order to preserve a political hierarchy of power that counts the nodes of uneven development as steps towards the achievement of a progressive telos. It is the need to maintain this hierarchy that exerts a conserving violence on this system of social categorization. Benjamin's solution to conservative violence is divine violence, that which "is exercised on all life but … in favor of the living" (Derrida 1990, 52). For Benjamin, a non-violent means addressing power differentials through dialogue could be considered analogous to pure violence:

> Benjamin intends to prove that a non-violent elimination of conflicts is possible in the private world when it is ruled by the culture of the heart, cordial courtesy, sympathy, love of peace, trust. Dialogue (Unterredung, "conference"), as technique of civil agreement, would be the most profound example (Derrida 1990, 49).

However, we should not fall into the trap of suggesting that divine violence is executed in the interests of establishing a new order; it rather creates the aporia in which lies the possibility of justice.

Mechanisms of Radical Pluralism

Conventional mechanisms for free speech are grounded in the liberal state. Participation in public forums, testifying in public hearings, contributing to public comment periods, all carry with them the tare of conservative violence. They are both part of, and productive of law. They are situated in relationships of power in which certain viewpoints will ultimately succeed, and be determinative of new law. Thus, the question of representation in such official forums of the state, even

if it could be equitably accomplished, only addresses part of the problem. State decision-making is ultimately determinative of resolution based upon certain viewpoints and not others, or of compromise. Benjamin states: "The parliaments live in forgetfulness of the violence from which they are born … (I)nstead of coming to decisions commensurable or proportional to (pure) violence and worthy (wurdig) of it, they practice the hypocritical politics of compromise" (Derrida 1990, 47).

By contrast, in the "Critique of Violence" Benjamin implicates the role of dialogue in creating grounds for a different view of justice, by operating independently of law (droit) and suspending the creation of a new law. It is this same suspension that Mouffe points to when she contests the Habermasian view: "the question … is not how to arrive at a rational consensus reached without exclusion, or in other words how to establish an 'us' which would not have a corresponding 'them'" (Mouffe 1995, 263). It is this same notion of rational consensus with which Lyotard takes issue in *The Postmodern Condition*:

> This way of inquiring into sociopolitical legitimacy combines with the new scientific attitude: the name of the hero is the people, the sign of legitimacy is the people's consensus, and their mode of creation is deliberation. The notion of progress is a necessary outgrowth of this (Lyotard 1979/1984, 30).

The challenge for dialogic possibility is to resist the lawmaking potential of consensus based processes, to resist the formation of an "us" through consensus, and to create possibility for forums that explore the possibility of justice.

Other theorists have suggested forms that might evade such stabilization. Arjun Appadurai has recognized the importance of "emergent social forms - part movements, part networks, part organizations—(which) are the crucibles and institutional instruments of most serious efforts to globalize from below" (Appadurai 2000, 15). Examples of such emergent forms abound. From an economistic viewpoint, Ostrom (1990) has advanced common property resource management (CPR):

> Common property resource management complements the emphasis on private property, eases analysis and understanding of the interaction of different resource management systems on various levels, allows a more culturally sensitive approach to project preparation and implementation, and contributes to increasing environmental and social sustainability (World Bank, 1997).

Others, such as Chambers (1997) and Korten (1980), have advanced participatory processes that engage local knowledge towards addressing environmental, social, and cultural issues. These approaches are being increasingly recognized by institutions and governments as a sympathetic and effective means of placing local knowledge on an equal footing with scientific and political knowledge.

But we should be cautious of such unproblematic representations of participation. Economic rationalism is distributive, and has created classes of people for whom equal representation in the present must contend with the unequal representation of the past. The assumption that all (non)identities participate on an equal footing elides conditions of power based in political and

historic structures. Cleaver (2001) emphasizes that "participatory approaches stress solidarity within communities; processes of conflict, and negotiation, inclusion and exclusion are occasionally acknowledged but little investigated" (Cleaver 2001, 44). As these processes are directed towards “resolution,” there is an attendant incentive to focus in developing consensus among diverse groups:

> “’Planning knowledge’ … is conditioned by perceptions of project deliverables and the desire for concrete benefits in the short term; it is consensual and obscures diverging interests both within villages and between the village and project (simplifying and rationalizing local livelihood needs to ensure consistency with project-defined models) (Chambers 1997, 23).

In focusing attention on the role of such processes in a policymaking context, advocates “[give] the impression that policy is the result of discrete, voluntaristic acts, not the process of coming to terms with conflicting interests in the process of which choices are made and exclusions effected” (Escobar 1995, 122). Thus, the challenge is not only creating forums in which diverse interests can engage with difficult issues; but also to examine critically the processes and intentions under which such fora are convened, and the question of who represents.

***Homo Sacer* and Subalternity**

Within this challenge lies the difficulty in representing the unrepresentable – that is – those groups which, through the process of economic marginalization and political oppression, can be best described as other. Axel Honneth emphasizes a “capitalist recognition order” which creates a “perceptual filter

[ensuring] that only those problems that have already attained the organizational level of a political movement are taken seriously in moral terms" (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 119). Several authors have addressed the specific exclusion and marginalization of such sub-liminal groups. Giorgio Agamben has written of *homo sacer*, bare life, while Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (and others) have written of the difficulty of representing the subaltern. These two positions serve to destabilize the traditional basis of dialogic possibility, challenging our assumptions about processes and participants in dialogic forums, such that new possibilities can be explored.

Agamben derives *homo sacer*, "bare life" from Roman law, describing a person who is banned. For him, the modern *homo sacer* is present in refugee camps, in prisons such as Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib, and in the concentration camps of Nazi Germany. The specific condition of *homo sacer* representation. Hannah Arendt observes,

> "The concept of the Rights of man, based on the supposed existence of a human being as such, collapsed in ruins as soon as those who professed it found themselves for the first time before men who had truly lost every other specific quality and connection except for the mere fact of being humans" (Arendt, cited in Agamben, 1994).

The *homo sacer* exists outside the protections of law and the mechanisms of state – s/he is idiotes, specifically outside the traditional/historic systems of representation. The inclusion of *homo sacer* into the realm of dialogic possibility requires suspension of our traditional notions of democracy, suggesting that representation not be based solely on the construction of citizens through the

state.

The subaltern is another version of this figure of bare life. Gayatri Spivak, following Gramsci, advances the figure of the subaltern as a means of challenging the idea of the sovereign subject. Spivak, following Derrida, recognizes the subaltern as the "unnamed subject as the Other of Europe" (Spivak 1988, 280). To suggest, unproblematically, that the subaltern can speak — can engage in agonistic dialogue, is to fail to acknowledge that:

> (the) subtext of the palimpsestic narrative of imperialism be recognized as "subjugated knowledge," "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" (Spivak, citing Foucault, 1988, 281).

The subaltern is a challenge, not only to the system which creates subalternity as its other, but to traditional intellectuals who fail to acknowledge that they are produced within the same imperialistic narrative, and thus subvert their own project.

Homo sacer and the subaltern pose a critical challenge for a reconstituted, radical pluralist, democratic project. These figures signal that achieving a field of radical pluralism goes beyond the granting of self-representation to traditionally marginalized groups. Radical pluralism involves grappling with the idea of (non)identity, not merely that "'the existence of the other becomes a condition of the possibility of my identity since, without the other, I could not have an identity'" (Mouffe 1995, 264), but also that the identities of self and other have been produced, historically and socially, on an uneven plane. Thus, the project of

radical pluralism depends not only on a reflection of the existence of the subaltern as other, but also a reflection upon the grounds that constitute self. For the grounds upon which traditionally represented individuals speak is rarely interrogated; it is viewed as a natural, unproblematic condition of democracy. The existence of *homo sacer* and the subaltern should, at a minimum, cause us to reflect upon the question of representation delinked from identity and other. Thus the charge for radical pluralism is to imagine a field upon which the subaltern can be liberated from its otherness through an ahistoric narrative that resists rewriting other through the paths of western imperialist identity. The conceit in this statement is palpable. But the project of reconstituting a field of equitable agonistic participation must embody the difficulty in "(recognizing) how certain differences are constructed as relations of subordination and should therefore be challenged by a radical democratic politics" (Mouffe 1995, 262). For such a project involves reconstituting the field of politics more equitably, and thus redistributing relations of power which are presently unequal.

The Role of the Intellectual?

As key producers of narratives, traditional intellectuals (academic researchers) have been said to play a key role here (Mills 1959/2000; Dryzek 1990). Gramsci (2000) suggests that traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals must work jointly in challenging hegemonic blocs while realizing their production within a particular hegemonic bloc. Spivak notes that this poses

particular challenges for traditional intellectuals who tend to fall back on an essentialist agenda: “their text articulates the difficult task of rewriting its own conditions of impossibility as the conditions of its possibility” (Spivak 1988, 285). Traditional intellectuals, in creating text, also perform the act of representation. Here, Spivak elaborates on the difficulty of representing the subaltern:

> The sender-“the peasanty”-is marked only as a pointer to an irretrievable consciousness. As for the receiver, we must ask who is "the real receiver" of an "insurgency?" The historian, transforming "insurgency" into "text for knowledge," is only one "receiver" of any collectively intended social act. With no possibility of nostalgia for that lost origin, the historian must suspend (as far as possible) the clamor of his or her own consciousness (or consciousness-effect, as operated by disciplinary training), so that the elaboration of the insurgency, packaged with an insurgent-consciousness, does not freeze into an "object of investigation," or, worse yet, a model for imitation. "The subject" implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counterpossibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups. The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss (Spivak 1988, 287).

This constitutes an entirely different role for the traditional intellectual, not as unproblematic purveyor of essentialized knowledge, but as individuals with identities that must be both acknowledged and suspended in the act of representation.

It also has implications for methodology. The traditional intellectual operates through the production of signifiers and categories, which are themselves not given but produced within an historical context. The traditional intellectual must thus question what s/he has come to regard as “received knowledge,” for this knowledge has also been produced within historically determined conditions, and through relationships of power. Research subjects also take on new roles and

relationships. The academic project is deeply implicated in the production of power relationships through the construction of categories which also create a constitutive other. In this regard, it is arguable that academics have created whole collectivities of people who are defined more by what they are not. So defined, these groups may be dismissed as not constituting proper research subjects. As Spivak states, traditional intellectuals must resist their essentialist tendencies. But they must also learn how to speak to, rather than speak for, research subjects. This involves a process in which traditional intellectual and organic intellectual are not merely juxtapositioned as "source and sink" of knowledge; rather a novel process of research in which traditional intellectuals learn from and with organic intellectuals, and this new relationship creates the grounds for revolutionary change: "In seeking to learn to speak to [rather than listen to or speak for] the historically muted subject of the subaltern woman, the postcolonial intellectual systematically 'unlearns' female privilege" (Spivak 1988, 295).

Visions of a Reconstituted Democracy

What might a project of radical pluralism, of reconstituted (non)identity look like? We have seen that, as per Mouffe, that such a project involves

> resisting the ever-present temptation to construct identity in terms of exclusion, and by recognizing that identities comprise a multiplicity of elements, and that they are dependent and interdependent, a democratic politics informed by an anti-essentialist approach can defuse the potential for violence that exists in every construction of collective identities and

create the conditions for a truly 'agonistic' pluralism (Mouffe 1995, 265). However, the reconstitution of new fields of engagement must also incorporate an element of learning and unlearning, as Spivak indicates. This indicates a field in which relationships are central, trust can be generated, and a certain degree of intimacy is produced over the course of time. The distances created through categorization must be closed, and the conflict inherent in radical pluralism must not be allowed to become conventional, or comfortable. A critical research project involves identifying and investigating examples that provide a seedbed of radical pluralism. It may further involve action research, which specifically engages the researcher in the reflexive praxis of radical pluralism. These issues are difficult, for the traditional university education does not prepare one for this sort of engagement. The second part of this paper will explore examples from the environmental justice movement in which radical pluralism could be said to occur, and specifically, how these examples engage with the figure of the other, such that a project of learning and unlearning can take place.

Environmental Justice Movements

The discussion of the US environmental justice movement in the context of subalternity and bare life may appear uneasy. However, the association rests on the type of economic rationality that allows public decision-makers to place disproportionate environmental risk on traditionally powerless communities. In the course of the distribution of environmental risk, these groups are allowed no

voice, and the value of their health and livelihoods is (implicitly or explicitly) regarded as less than that of middle income and wealthy families of the dominant race. An example of this devaluation was graphically documented in the infamous "World Bank memo," in which Lawrence Summers, then chief economist for the bank, measured the costs of pollution according to the average wage and infant mortality rate in a given country. This type of calculus inevitably places a higher value on the health and well-being of dominant, western cultures.

Such a calculus is also at work in the siting of toxic waste facilities in the United States. Sociologist Robert Bullard explains: "Chronic unemployment, poverty, and the lack of a sound economic infrastructure all place communities of color at risk from polluting industries which exploit this economic vulnerability" (Bullard 1993, 12), a system which he describes as "petrochemical colonialism." The siting of such facilities results from a community's relative ability to represent itself; on calculations by polluting corporations that lower-income communities will have less choice in the matter of jobs vs. the environment; and on the level of inattention that dominant communities will give to the needs and interests of communities of race and class.

Two cases from the environmental justice movement serve to illustrate this point. The first comes from Colorado's San Luis Valley, a predominantly Chicano community resisting the claiming of water rights by a gold mining company. The second is an in- depth case study of the internal dynamics of the Southern African American Network for Environmental Justice (AANEJ), a multi-state

network of citizens developing strategies to confront toxic facilities in their communities. These cases serve to illustrate aspects of radical pluralism, the tension between identity and (non)identity, and possibilities of justice. They also illustrate relationships between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals such that learning and unlearning may occur.

Nature and Chicanos in Southern Colorado

Peña and Gallegos (1993) describe the case of rural opposition to the siting of a strip mining operation within the San Luis Valley watershed. The rural residents of the valley are descendants of homesteaders, and constitute an agricultural community dependent upon a gravity irrigation system, the acequia madre. While significant out- migration has occurred, families maintain ties with their home communities, thereby creating a "'"regional community'' that unites families scattered among diverse rural and urban settings" (Peña, et al 1993, 145). These communities constitute, in a way, a diasporic community, or, as Appadurai might suggest, a version of locality which is "primarily relational and contextual, rather than scalar or spatial" (Appadurai 2003, 178). Residents desire to maintain their agricultural lifestyle against the incursions of mining corporations, in this case, Battle Mining Gold corporation. The corporation extracts gold via a cyanide-leaching process that poses significant risks for the Rito Seco watershed. Those organized against BMG are the County Committee for Environmental Soundness (CES), comprised of "local formers, ranchers,

members of the clergy, educators, business people, and community planners" (Peña et al 1993, 149) as well as five irrigation ditch associations consisting of historic residents of the valley who depend upon the watershed for farming.

Peña and Gallegos relate the ongoing, multi-front struggles of the Chicanos against the BMG. In a court case against BMG, the voices of residents were severely limited by the judge, who "made it clear that the opponents were not to ''get emotional,'' or raise what he characterized as ''fuzzy environmental issues.'' Water law, he declared, was a ''strictly scientific and legal matter'' (1993, 151). Unsuccessful in this instance, community members sought and received some concessions from the company. Corporate attempts to paint the community resistance as monolithic, "'anti-mining'" were effectively countered due to the building of networks with educators, the news media, politicians, and other community groups. They were also successful due to their relationships and familial ties with mine workers, who attempted to unionize and served as inside informants regarding mining hazards. They also recruited local business people whom the mining company had alienated. The emphasis on relationships and networks as productive of alternative economic possibility resembles Appadurai's "process geographies."

Last, the Southern Colorado case also represents a particular type of relationship between traditional intellectuals and organic intellectuals. The lead author (Peña) was invited in by the Committee for Environmental Soundness (CES) to conduct a survey of community attitudes. CES then arranged for the

researcher to report on the issue for the local newspaper, and this was instrumental in countering BMG's media efforts. Thus, community members played a strong role in shaping Peña's research, and the author's efforts have yielded tangible benefits for the community. Peña's relationship with the community has been ongoing, reciprocal, and productive of a number of research projects.

African American Network for Environmental Justice

This particular case offers an inside view of an environmental justice movement, reflecting the plurality, but also the conflict extant in this particular network. The network covers constituents in eleven southern states, all linked by exposure to toxics. Author Melissa Checker emphasizes the "multiple, divergent ideas about contemporary African American identity" (2004, 172) that are negotiated within the network. As an anthropologist, she argues that "race, gender, and class identities are in a continual process of negotiation and cannot be essentialized … Current ethnographic work has also demonstrated how such identities are intricately bound up with one another — so much so that they "'are not analytically separable'" (173). Among the identities at play are "African-ness," southern Black and Christian identity, status based in class and education, the question of separatism, as well as the nature of the grassroots. Throughout, Checker does not emphasize resolution, but instead the creative tension which animates the work of the network.

Checker cites the specific role of identity within the network, which makes it particularly contestable. Certain members advanced identity in African heritage, for "it symbolizes a specific history in the United States and a rationale for organizing separates, while also symbolizing a way to redress that history by fitting African Americans into a powerful ethnicity paradigm" (178). Identity, in this case, serves the important role of creating a foundation for countering the majority dominant culture.

By contrast, some members advanced a more "American" identity: "Black Americans ought to take pride in the fact that they have enough culture on their own without having to look to Africa to acquire some more" (179). This tension is not resolved in the course of the authors' interactions; both conceptions of identity continue to coexist over time. Tensions also arise over educational status within the group, somewhat along the lines of African / American identity. Afro-centrist members were perceived as having a higher level of education; whereas traditional members perceived themselves as less educated, and therefore closer to the "grassroots." However, this identity was shifting and contextual; certain members had become educated and had moved from of their home communities, but were still perceived as being "grassroots" due to familial connections.

Another area of contention that Checker highlights is that of separatism, the discussion within the network of whether it should be limited to African Americans only. The author notes that she was absent during this discussion, at the request

of some of the members. Many of the members felt that separatism was a necessary stage towards resistance, one that they could not achieve in the presence of whites: “Other activists agreed that organizing separately from whites would enable African Americans to establish a stronger voice and identity. A strong and empowered identity was also a means toward a larger and more significant end — a more inclusive, more democratic America” (184). This statement reflects a temporal movement, implied in Mouffe, that identity begins “as a lack, an empty place to be filled by identifications which provisionally assert, then subvert and reconstitute previous articulations of identity” (Natter 1995, 268). The members of the network were attempting to establish their own identity and discourse in the absence of the dominant white discourse, in the anticipation that they will prepare themselves to emerge within a more robust democratic system. Interestingly, others advocated for the presence of whites, but specifically as a means towards that end. Associations with whites brought funding and resources: “power was a practical matter and cross-racial partnerships added important power dimensions to African American struggles” (Checker 2004, 184). While the separatist views prevailed, other views remained, and the question of separatism became an ongoing dialogue. At the same time, the network evolved partnerships with Latino and Native American networks, as well as with predominantly black organizations with white members and representatives.

Another key issue of contestation was the nature of the grassroots. As

Checker notes, "'grassroots'' is a category that is too often assumed (by academics and activists alike) to be transparent and not in need of further investigation or problematizing" (176). However she observes that while the membership defined "grassroots" as against "academic" or "middle class," in further conversations the concept has a shifting, contextual meaning:

> "grassroots was a complex and value-laden category that had more to do with a person's behavior and accountability than with their education or income" (180).
>
> "we (saw) grassroots defined as activists who live in toxic areas and who are ''on the front lines'' of fights against toxic pollution" (186).
>
> "grassrootsness was a flexible category and (one) that a leader''s constituents were constantly measuring and sizing up their actions. Just as categories of activism could shift according to context, the ideologies that seemed to divide activists could also be reframed" (187).

The fluidity of the category suggests that its meaning is unstable, and constantly being negotiated between the membership. This suggests that it is a dynamic, important concept within the network, the fixing of which would be viewed by many as an act of violence.

What is ultimately fascinating in this particular network is that contestation is viewed as natural and critical to the movement. This reveals a particular tension between conflict and solidarity — members recognized that differences were significant, but that they should not fall prey to a "divide and conquer" mentality. In response, they constructed a *commons* in which identity was critical, but always contested: "in order to overcome intra-movement friction, activists took a larger view of class differences, seeing them as the result of systemic injustice

that created uneven class mobility" (188). Importantly, members adopted a particular attitude towards conflict:

> "The fact that we took so much time for dissenters is about as democratic as you can get" (188).
>
> "We argue loudly and it might seem like things get pretty ugly sometimes but that's just the way we are … That's what democracy is all about" (189).

As in the prior case, the role of the researcher is also critical. The observance of these meetings was part of a larger participatory action research project that formed the author's dissertation. She is present in her research, but presents the viewpoints of the research subjects as their own. Hers is a process of listening to and developing relationships with members, but she continually resists an essentialist perspective, and lets the subjects represent themselves. Rather than producing "expert knowledge," the research is produced with subjects who, despite their varying positions, are all treated as experts.

Conclusions

The above cases provide a view into what might constitute seedbeds of radical pluralism. As such, they are not models or perfect examples. However, they reflect many markers of what might constitute a radical pluralist project. First, in there is an emphasis on plurality, both in terms of differences among group members, as well as multiple identities represented by individual members (African American, Afro-centric, educator, activist, community member). Second, there is a sense of temporality, of shifting, constantly negotiated positions and

identities. The emphasis in both cases is on the shifting and construction, as opposed to reaching a particular outcome or end. To the extent that an end is articulated, it is *more freedom*, or *democracy*.

The role of identity is important, in terms of animating the participants' struggles as people whose social position (or lack thereof) is implicitly or explicitly targeted for the depositing of toxic wastes. It is also suggestive of participants claiming control of their identity production, through retaining and reproducing an identity that is in sync with a particularly geographic location and means of production (farming). This is not to say that such an identity is easily categorized or static, but rather generous, evolving, and expansive. Thus, as Natter states, "radical and plural democracy recommends a politics which builds upon these while working to extend to ever more dimensions of social relations the principles of 'free and equal' such that they might be articulated by and for ever more settings" (Natter 1995, 269). As such, the members of the AANEJ have chosen to delimit their membership, at least for the moment, but within this grouping maintain space for conflict and agonism.

A final reflection concerns the conditions of possibility being developed by each group. Gibson-Graham states: "A local ethic proffers respect, not just for difference and autonomy but for self understood as capability" (Gibson-Graham 2003, 50). I note that in both cases, the community, conceived pluralistically, is in control and setting the agenda. Thus, community members of varying perspectives are represented in terms of their capabilities, as opposed to a

"deficit-model" often used to depict marginalized communities. The AANEJ is similarly concerned with supporting capacity in more localized communities. To what ends are these groups directing their capacities? In the case of the Southern Colorado Chicanos, they are fighting for a sustainable future in which livelihoods based in agricultural production will be available to their children. And although miners are dependent upon the mining company, they nevertheless retain their loyalties to the local community. In AANEJ, the organization is adopting principles based in capacity, which recognize alternative economies, considering "specific strategic courses of action such as resisting capitalism and white hegemony through economic independence" (Checker 2004, 177).

All of this has implications for the role of the researcher. Following an essentialist agenda elides the plurality of perspectives and conceals agonism and conflict. Respecting and revealing difference, capacity and self-determination takes time, and relationship development. While every act of research "represents," the position of the researcher involves "learning and unlearning" her perspective, and remaining conscious of choices made in the act of representation. It further suggests that the act of research, rather than being reproductive of historic categories of subjugation, could, carefully considered, be productive of new possibilities.

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