

## INTRODUCTION

### Ethnography and Activism within Networked Spaces of Transnational Encounter

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#### A MOMENT

From December 30, 2006, to January 2, 2007, nearly two thousand activists from around the world, including large contingents from Spain, Italy, the United States, and Mexico, gathered in the Zapatista *caracol* (literally shell, refers to a meeting point and a regional seat of autonomous government) of Oventik for the first of a series of international gatherings between the Zapatista Pueblos and the Pueblos of the World. Unlike the Intergalactic Gathering for Humanity and against Neoliberalism in 1996, where the internationals and the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN; Zapatista National Liberation Army) leadership dominated the discussions, this time the Zapatista base communities held center stage. For four days members of the Juntas de Buen Gobierno (Good Government Councils) from the five Zapatista *caracoles* recounted their successes and challenges over the past twelve years while implementing autonomy in their communities.<sup>1</sup> The internationals and activists from other parts of Mexico listened intently, for the most part, as the Zapatistas told of their experiences in diverse areas such as autonomous government, justice, health, education, and media. Beyond the scheduled workshops, visitors mingled informally, if uneasily at times, with each

other and their indigenous hosts, sharing meals, holding impromptu discussions, planning future actions and events, and dancing late into the night. In many ways, this was a typical networked space of transnational encounter, similar to dozens of other gatherings that have taken place around the world since 1996, including many associated with global justice movements. However, there was something particularly romantic, mysterious, and radical about this one, not only the scores of masked Zapatistas seemingly appearing and disappearing in the highland Chiapas fog but also the fact that the meeting was held in autonomous territory, constantly under threat yet still beyond the full grasp of the capitalist market and the Mexican state.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the encounter was also rife with contradictions, struggles, and tensions. Some of these came to the fore on the last day of the gathering, when, after hours and hours of listening to members of the Zapatista base communities, the visitors were finally given a chance to speak in response to a call for ideas and proposals regarding when, where, and how to organize the next Intergalactic Gathering. Most of the interventions were constructive, suggesting specific dates, places, and methods, and thanking the base communities for their hospitality, initiative, and inspirational model of anticapitalist struggle and autonomous organization. However, several speakers expressed their desire for a more interactive, dynamic, and participatory format. At one point, an activist from the Spanish state stood up, put a soda can on the table, and criticized the Zapatistas for selling Coca-Cola in their communities, concluding that this was “inconsistent.” People in the crowd let out a loud gasp, as many were shocked by the boldness of the critique, while others applauded in enthusiastic approval. Indeed, the man publicly expressed what many European and North American participants had commented to each other privately.<sup>3</sup>

The Zapatistas remained silent, until the following July when Subcomandante Marcos spoke out during a presentation in San Cristóbal de las Casas prior to the second Encounter of the Zapatista Pueblos with the Pueblos of the World. After exhibiting an unmarked soda can and recounting what had taken place the previous January, Marcos, visibly upset, exclaimed, “Those who applauded didn’t ask the spontaneous judge, jury, and executioner what brand of shoes and clothes he wore, or where and how he had attained the modern and expensive vehicle in which he came to judge and condemn the Zapatista struggle.” He later clarified that the leaders’ “silence . . . was an act of courtesy; it did and does not mean

agreement with what that person said.” Calming down somewhat, Marcos went on to provide a subtle analysis of what the silence of his *compañeros* actually meant. He explained that there are different kinds of anticapitalism, each valid and consistent: a consumer-based anticapitalism favored by many of those who visit the Zapatista communities; an anticapitalism that attacks the system at the point of distribution by promoting small businesses, street vendors, and cooperatives over large multinationals; and a production-oriented anticapitalism. Regarding the latter, Marcos explained that when a Zapatista sees a can of soda, she or he asks questions such as who made the can and who owns the factory where it was produced? The Zapatista opts to join forces with the workers who produced the can against the owners of the soda factory, practicing anticapitalism by “attacking the means of production.” Marcos transformed a delicate tension into a teaching moment as a way to reflect on alternative forms of anticapitalist struggle, while highlighting the Zapatistas’ open and inclusive ethic, expressed most recently in the Sexta Declaración de la Selva Lacandona (Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle).<sup>4</sup> As he exclaimed, “All anticapitalist efforts are respectable and important. . . . So go ahead and explain, educate, and advise[,] . . . but don’t judge or condemn those who have decided to risk their lives . . . to destroy the system in which we are all enclosed, and that exploits, represses, and undervalues us.”<sup>5</sup>

We begin with this brief ethnographic vignette in order to highlight and reflect on the importance of ethnography for understanding networked spaces of transnational encounter, and the wider social movements of which they are a part. On the one hand, ethnography, understood not just as a set of research methods including qualitative interviews and participant observation but also as a mode of analysis and writing, allows us to capture the subjective mood, feeling, and tone of such events. Ethnographic descriptions provide a vivid sense of actually “being there” (Geertz 1989) during transnational social movement actions and gatherings, contributing descriptive flesh to what might otherwise read as dry, distant, and disengaged analytic accounts. In this sense, the ethnographic vignette tries to bring the reader into the flow of events, recounting some of what was actually said and conveying a sense of the prevailing atmosphere and emotional climate. In many ways, this has long been seen as the role of ethnography, widely valued even among the most positivist social movement scholars.

However, as we argue in this volume, ethnography is not restricted to thick description. Rather, ethnographic analyses and accounts, particularly when they are politically engaged and carried out from within rather than outside grassroots movements for social change, are able to uncover important empirical issues and generate critical theoretical insights that are simply not accessible through traditional objectivist methods. For example, as evident in the account above, networked spaces of transnational activist encounter are rife with political and cultural tensions, conflicts, and power imbalances. In this sense, the tension between different forms of anticapitalism (see Santos 2007) and the power-laden dynamics associated with the critique of the Zapatistas by a Northern activist, and Marcos's impassioned response, are only rendered visible through ethnographic engagement. Against overly romanticized views of transnational activism, ethnography reveals the inevitable, yet productive, "friction" (Tsing 2005) that ensues in the encounter between activists from diverse movements, political contexts, and cultural backgrounds.

For the engaged ethnographer, the goal of producing such accounts is never only to uncover internal conflicts and tensions; the ethnographer also produces critical understandings that can help activists develop strategies to overcome obstacles and barriers to effective organizing. In this case, it is Marcos who makes an elegant plea for the importance of mutual understanding and "translation" (Tsing 2005; see also Santos 2006; Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, this volume; and Juris, this volume) between different forms of struggle. As the following chapters demonstrate, activist engagements and positionalities are important for gaining access, but they also provide engaged ethnographers with critical purchase on key tensions and issues underlying processes and events and can help generate subsequent ethnographic accounts that speak to political strategy and tactics. The ethnographic vignette above thus reveals the strategic importance of activists themselves developing an ethnographic sensibility to more effectively negotiate the different understandings and visions within networked spaces of transnational encounter (see Juris 2008a).

Finally, the ethnographic *mise en scène* narrated above is networked and transnational in a particular sense, with important implications for politically engaged ethnography. On the one hand, it is a site that is linked to many other sites, both in Mexico and around the world, and thus has to be seen as a momentary concatenation of translocal processes, flows, and relations. It is a site that generates its own dynamics yet always points

elsewhere: to other meanings, events, and places. On the other hand, place remains crucial, in terms of the particular nexus of meanings and relations associated with Zapatista caracoles and with respect to the place-based visions and practices that activists bring with them from their diverse locales. Grasping such dynamics requires not so much an ethnographic strategy that is multisited (although that can be a critical component) as one that is networked: attuned to the complex place-based meanings, flows, and sensibilities that interact within momentary spaces of encounter. The political significance of such transnationally networked ethnographies lies in their capacity to generate strategic insights related to the tensions, obstacles, and opportunities that emerge within networked spaces of transnational encounter.

### **TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM, ETHNOGRAPHY, AND THE POLITICAL**

Ethnography as a methodology and epistemology has long been associated with a deep concern for the lived realities that comprise socio-cultural contexts. However, our exploration of ethnography and activism within transnational spaces of encounter aims at something more. For us, ethnography is not simply a useful approach for understanding transnational activism. As a theory and a method of research that demands an explicit awareness of our being situated in place and in relation to other acting subjects, ethnography is also a form of knowledge that fundamentally challenges, even if it does not entirely overcome the (researching) subject–(researched) object binary (Juris 2007; see also the volume’s conclusion). The role of social movements as knowledge producers (see Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008, this volume; Conway 2005a; Escobar 2008; Hess 2007a) is suggested in the efforts on the part of the Zapatista base communities to articulate and communicate their emerging model of autonomous self-management in diverse spheres of social life, as well as in Marcos’s astute analysis of alternative forms of anticapitalist practice.

Conventional social movement theory has analyzed the broad contours of contemporary activism with respect to dimensions such as resources, issue framing, and political opportunities (see, e.g., McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996; Snow et al. 1986; Tarrow 1998). Such scholarship maps social movements onto a political landscape marked by modern institutions (the state, political parties, and electoral democracy) and

power relations (citizenship, political influence, discourses of democracy, human rights, and sovereignty), thereby reducing these phenomena to existing political, epistemological, and ontological frameworks. When the terrain is expanded to the transnational level, dominant political and economic institutions and processes again serve as focal points for analysis (see Tarrow 2005). This approach reflects an underlying acceptance of capitalist modernity, liberal democracy, and individualism, values challenged by more radical movements, including many of those addressed in this volume. Of course such movements have promises and limitations, which we further address in the conclusion. Nonetheless, the way in which we view the causes, forms, and consequences of social movements has significant implications for how we understand their potential, the stakes involved, and the meaning of the political itself.

In this sense, social logics born out of a particular system of social, economic, and political power may come to arbitrate and evaluate the significance of struggles that seek to explicitly contest, subvert, and replace that system. While these predispositions can produce excellent scholarship about conventional movements that seek to wield influence and power within the nexus of dominant sociopolitical orders, such biases often obscure movements that aim to radically unsettle existing power structures while bringing new sociopolitical relationships, subjectivities, and imaginations into being. Even in cases where theorists have addressed the symbolic challenge posed by the so-called new social movements with respect to prevailing orders and underlying social logics (see Melucci 1996), these analyses tend to overstate the significance of symbolic and cultural transformation at the expense of the material realities of struggle and the complexities of lived experience (Fox and Starn 1997).

Ethnography's attention to everyday practices, cultural imaginaries, and emerging subjectivities allows us to grasp the complexity, contingency, and transformational potential of contemporary transnational movements. In this sense, the Zapatista model of autonomy has been particularly inspirational, resonating widely within transnational activist networks (Khasnabish 2008).<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, when confronted with contradictions, ideal models often generate harsh critiques, as evidenced by the charge of inconsistency leveled against the Zapatistas. Ethnography can also help shed light on the importance of space and place within transnational movements (Conway 2004b; Escobar 2001, 2008; Routledge 2003a). The Zapatistas thus engage in a place-based struggle to maintain auto-

mous control of their territories as they reach out to other Mexican and international activists, creating novel spaces of transnational encounter.

The cycle of transnational activism sparked by the Zapatista uprising in 1994, which is often subsumed under the banner of *global justice movement*, is more ephemeral, rhizomatic, and dynamic than most conventional social movement analyses allow (Khasnabish 2007, 2008). The wave of Occupy movements that spread around the globe in 2011–12 displays many similar, yet also some distinct, characteristics (see Juris 2012, and the volume’s conclusion). This book ventures into this shifting and uneven, yet vibrant, terrain of transnational action in order to highlight the contribution of ethnography to our understanding of transnational social movements. Previous volumes on transnational activism have included ethnographic chapters (see, e.g., Bandy and Smith 2005; Guidry, Kennedy, and Zald 2000), but none have had as their main focus the methods, perspectives, and theoretical insights generated by ethnography. Given the publication of several ethnographic studies in the late 2000s dealing with transnational social movements and activist networking, particularly in the context of the global justice movements (see Escobar 2008; Juris 2008a; Khasnabish 2008), it is a propitious moment to bring together, in a single volume, the work of both younger and more-established scholars engaged in the ethnographic study of what we call networked spaces of transnational encounter. Our goal is to convene a similarly transnationally networked group of scholar-activists to explore the intersections of the transnational, the sociopolitical practice of activists, and the academic labor of ethnographers.<sup>7</sup>

Before moving on to more deeply engage the issues, themes, and perspectives addressed in the chapters that follow, it is important to say a few words about the title of this book. This is, of course, a collection of contributions about encounters—between anthropology and struggles for social change, between scholarly and political commitments, between ethnographers and social movement actors, and between academics and activists—but what makes these encounters *insurgent*? Although we realize the language of insurgency is freighted with masculinist and militaristic overtones, we deploy it here because it suggests the clearing of a path for new forms of sociopolitical imagination and construction. An insurgency is always a provocation, a forceful intervention that aims not to constitute a singular new order from whole cloth but to radically destabilize authorized forms of power, knowledge, and organization and, in so doing, to create the space necessary for new acts of constitution (see Ne-

gri 1999). In this sense, the chapters seek to destabilize dominant understandings of social transformation, political possibility, knowledge production, and the relationship between immaterial intellectual labor and sociopolitical activism. But we also employ the language and imaginary of insurgency because we believe the engaged ethnographies collected here represent a form of critical social research that can contribute in multiple ways to social change as opposed to simply archiving, commenting on, or dissecting the efforts of grassroots social movements. This is not to suggest that such a contribution should be privileged or valorized over others, that our goals are always achieved, or that we have all the answers. Indeed, the significance of the insurgent encounters explored here lies in their capacity to elicit a critical exploration of the possibilities that emerge through the intersection of a politically committed, engaged ethnography and ongoing struggles for radical social change.

We employ the term *transnational* to refer to a scale that transcends, yet also incorporates, other levels of analysis, including the local, regional, and national. Transnational thus reflects the multiscalar nature of much contemporary activism. The transnational is lived and imagined; it is a social space made and remade through the activity and conjuring of institutions, collectivities, and individuals beyond the territorial, juridical, economic, political, and sociocultural limits of a single nation-state (Conway 2008a). In this sense, an ontological space is constituted and reconstituted at the intersection of the activities and subjectivities of disparate actors. The transnational is also a space of action and imagination, a new political horizon on which projects for social transformation are arrayed. As a scale that derives meaning, presence, and force from lived processes of articulation, the transnational—and the possibilities it offers for radical social change—has to be understood as an outcome of lived relationships. Ethnography, and its attention to everyday realities, is thus an indispensable tool for exploring transnational activism as well as the more general search for and articulation of new practices of knowledge production capable of generating democratic, liberatory, and just social futures.

With respect to activism, here we refer to an object of analysis and a mode of research. On the one hand, this volume is centrally concerned with exploring new forms of activism that are emerging in an increasingly globalized, digitally connected world. In this sense, the book presents numerous ethnographies of transnational activism. On the other hand, our concern with activism represents a commitment to a politically engaged

form of ethnographic research, which not only generates knowledge that we hope can be useful for those with whom we study but also potentially constitutes a form of activism itself. In this sense, the volume showcases diverse modes of activist ethnography that vary according to disciplinary convention and political proclivity.

By ethnography, as mentioned above, we mean more than a set of research methods. Participant observation, open-ended interviews, and related qualitative techniques are necessary, but not sufficient, *sine qua non*s of ethnographic praxis. We also conceive of ethnography as an attitude, a perspective, and, above all, a specific mode of “epistemological encounter” (Kelty 2008, 18; see also M. Fischer 2003; Marcus 1998), involving an ethic of openness and flexibility and a willingness to allow oneself to become personally transformed through the research process. This approach to transnational social movements does not search for universal laws or test already formulated theories. Rather it generates new concepts and analyses in the process of ethnographic engagement.<sup>8</sup> We also refer to ethnography as a form of writing characterized by descriptive thickness and close attention to detail, context, and tone. At the same time, the chapters also reflect diverse disciplinary norms and practices: some employ a more humanistic mode of ethnographic writing characteristic of fields such as cultural anthropology or critical geography, while others approach ethnography less as a textual product than as a means for gathering observations and generating analysis, which tends to be the norm in qualitative sociology or political science (see Hess’s chapter). Nonetheless, what all of the chapters share is a commitment to using ethnography as a tool for generating insights and understandings that are obscured by more objectivist approaches.

Our inclusion of “the political” in the book’s subtitle points to the various ways the chapters interrogate, reformulate, and broaden the meaning of the political to encompass diverse strategies, discourses, and practices that not only challenge the distribution of power and resources within hegemonic political orders but also create new meanings, subjectivities, and alternative modes of socioeconomic, cultural, and political organization. Politics thus moves out from purely institutional domains to also inhabit the autonomous realms of social movement networks, grassroots communities, and the intimate spheres of everyday social life. A concluding conceptual note: although many of the contributions explore the dynamics of transnational activist networks, we offer the broader term *net-*

*worked spaces of transnational encounter* to make room for a wider array of phenomena, events, and processes than suggested by the network concept alone.<sup>9</sup> This notion of encounter dovetails with the logic of contemporary networked movements themselves, which involves the forging of horizontal connections across diversity and difference (Juris 2008a).

### TOWARD THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVISM

The earliest approaches to the study of transnational activism understood the emergence of cross-border political actors, including transnational social movements and advocacy networks, as a response to the rise of a global civil society (see Wapner 1996). These novel forms of political engagement were alternatively viewed through the prism of traditional social movement theory (Jackie Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997) or a combination of international relations and network perspectives (Keck and Sikkink 1998). In their pathbreaking study, Jackie Smith and her colleagues employed the resource mobilization framework to characterize transnational social movements as distinguished “by the actors and resources they mobilize and in the extent to which they communicate, consult, coordinate, and cooperate in the international arena” (Jackie Smith, Chatfield, and Pagnucco 1997, 60). For their part, Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink emphasized the novel role of *information politics* through which NGOs in fields such as human rights, environmentalism, and women’s rights disseminate messages and apply pressure on foreign governments by circulating information within transnational advocacy networks (TANS) (1998). Subsequent volumes developed these themes further, bringing to bear additional ideas from the conceptual toolbox of social movement theory in order to analyze transnational collective action, including political opportunities, diffusion, and framing (della Porta, Kriesi, and Rucht 1999; Jackie Smith and Johnston 2002).

Although these early volumes broke important ground by highlighting the emerging transnational dimensions of collective action, they were limited in two important respects. First, they were primarily concerned with the role of formal NGOs and transnational social movement organizations (TSMOS), reflecting the influence of resource mobilization and international relations perspectives. This obscured the more diffuse formations, including informal collectives and affinity groups, that characterize contemporary transnational activism and the decentralized, dynamic, and

rhizomatic nature of transnational movement networks. At the same time, orthodox theoretical perspectives obscured many of the key problems and themes revealed by ethnographic approaches, including the importance of power, political tension, and cultural struggle within transnational movements, as well as issues related to space, place, and knowledge production.

Meanwhile, other volumes paid more attention to the role of culture and identity within transnational movements (Cohen and Rai 2000; Guidry, Kennedy, and Zald 2000), but few of the individual contributions employed ethnographic approaches. The influential collection edited by Sonia Alvarez, Evelina Dagnino, and Arturo Escobar—*Cultures of Politics, Politics of Cultures* (1998)—featured a section on transnational activism that addressed the themes of globalization, culture, digital technologies, and scale, but these chapters, although ethnographic, were not based on longer-term fieldwork.

More recently, scholars from this early wave of research on transnational activism have begun to incorporate innovative frameworks, reflecting the cross-fertilization of ideas and the unique characteristics of contemporary transnational collective action. Joe Bandy and Jackie Smith's *Coalitions across Borders* is particularly noteworthy in this respect. In the book's introduction, the editors recognize the importance of informal modes of transnational coordination, although, as they suggest, sustained modes of cross-border coordination and cooperation often require more formalized structures (2005, 4). The question remains as to whether formal structures need to resemble traditional hierarchical organizations of the past (Juris 2008a). The example of the social forums suggests that they need not (Juris 2008a; Jackie Smith et al. 2007). Just as importantly, Bandy and Smith emphasize cultural and political conflict, power imbalances, resource inequalities, and related obstacles to transnational organizing.

Meanwhile, scholars such as Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow have continued to use the dominant political process model to explain transnational activism (see Tarrow and della Porta 2005),<sup>10</sup> although they have begun to employ novel concepts and perspectives to analyze the distinctive characteristics of the global justice movements and related forms of transnational collective action. For example, della Porta (2005, 2007) has developed the idea of “tolerant” identities to understand the multiple, shifting attachments developed by global justice activists associated with

loose, decentralized organizational forms. In *Globalization from Below* della Porta and her co-editors further explore these issues in their survey-based study of Italian global justice activists, as well as other critical themes, including computer-mediated communication, the rise of a new politics, and the search for new forms of democratic practice (della Porta et al. 2006). For his part, Tarrow (2005; see also Tarrow and McAdam 2005) has usefully applied notions such as scale shift, diffusion, and the internalization and externalization of protest to explain key mechanisms associated with transnational activism. Scholars such as Thomas Olsen (2005a) and Ruth Reitan (2007) have used a variety of these conceptual tools to analyze specific networks in the context of global justice and Zapatista solidarity activism. These and related approaches have greatly enhanced our understanding of the dynamics of transnational activism, but they too often neglect issues related to power, inequality, and cultural struggle that are more clearly revealed through the ethnographic encounter (but see Reitan 2007). Tellingly, in their summary of methodological innovations used to capture the new realities of transnational contention, Tarrow and della Porta refer to the Internet, activist surveys, and comparative research designs, but nowhere do they mention ethnography (2005, 234).

Beyond traditional social movement theory, the most influential macro-level approaches to the study of transnational collective action have come from scholars interested in the relationship between communication networks, new digital technologies, and distributed networked modes of organization (Arquilla and Ronfeldt 2001; Castells 1997; Hardt and Negri 2004).<sup>11</sup> Manuel Castells paved the way by identifying a “networking, de-centered form of organization and intervention, characteristic of the new social movements, mirroring, and counteracting, the networking logic of domination in the information society” (1997, 362). Echoing Castells’s analysis, Hardt and Negri made the even bolder claim that the networking logic of Empire has given rise to a new form of networked counterpower: the multitude—“an open and expansive network in which all differences can be experienced freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common” (2004, xiii–xiv). However, it is important to remember that networks are also associated with imperial domination, repression, and informational capitalism. As Jackie Smith points out, “The opponents of the global ‘movement of movements’ . . . also share the network form” (2008, 34). Smith is

referring to networks of multilateral institutions, transnational corporations, and neoliberal governments. Yet, as Luis Fernandez argues, global police formations assume a networked form as well (2008). Macro-level approaches to transnationally networked activism have inspired ethnographic analyses that use similar perspectives and concepts in new and innovative ways. Moreover, many activists themselves, particularly within the global justice movements, have found ideas such as networks, rhizomes, Empire, and multitude useful in their own theorizing.

This brings us to the recent proliferation of ethnographic writing on transnational collective action. Hilary Cunningham's analysis of transnational activism among (post)sanctuary activists in Tucson, Arizona, represents one of the first ethnographic accounts of cross-border organizing (1999). Cunningham was particularly interested in the role of the imaginary, in her case how "the global" is constructed as an important part of political identity and practice. She conducted research during two phases: the height of the sanctuary movement in the 1980s and the postsanctuary period of solidarity activism in the mid-1990s. She found that by the latter period, postsanctuary activists had begun to incorporate many of the terms and concepts that had been developed by social scientists, including the discourse of transnational social movements and global civil society, raising an important *representational conundrum* with respect to the role of analysis when native and analytic categories coincide (1999; see also Escobar 2008; Riles 2000). Her research also uncovered trends related to transnational activism that would become increasingly apparent over the next several years, including the widespread use of the Internet, the rise of a flexible politics, and an expanded sense of global imagination and possibility.

Transnational feminist organizing has provided a key theme and a source of inspiration for much early ethnographic work on transnational activism. Sonia Alvarez's essay on transnational feminist "webs" and the tensions that arise when feminist movements "go global" was pioneering in this regard (1998). Through an analysis of parallel NGO-sponsored women's forums held in conjunction with major UN conferences, as well as the history and politics of feminism in Latin America, Alvarez explores a growing rift between what she calls the "ethical-cultural" and "structural-institutional" dimensions of second-wave feminism in the region. This focus on plural feminisms and the cultural-political struggles between them, particularly during emerging transnational spaces of encounter,

prefigures many of the themes we address here, including power imbalances and unequal access to cultural, material, and political resources.

Millie Thayer picked up on these issues in her analysis of transnational feminism in northeastern Brazil (2001, see also 2010). Against Manuel Castells's (1998) claim that certain places are becoming structurally irrelevant, Thayer argues that transnational forces are leading to new kinds of movement even in historically marginalized regions such as the Brazilian *sertão* (the semi-arid region in the northeast of Brazil). In particular, transnational feminism has articulated local, regional, and transnational women's organizing in complex, and often contradictory, ways. Thayer's fine-grained ethnographic analysis highlights the processes of contestation, negotiation, and appropriation that characterize transnational gender politics. In her ethnographic account of the strategies and practices of an autonomous women's labor collective in Nicaragua, Jennifer Bickham Méndez similarly shows how local, national, and transnational processes articulate in complex ways (2005; see also Desai 2009; Moghadam 2005, 2008).

Other influential ethnographic analyses of transnational activism include Anna Tsing's highly acclaimed account of translation, difference, and the construction of globality among transnational forest activists in Indonesia (2005), and Arjun Appadurai's study of deep democracy and horizontal, global networking among urban activists in Mumbai (2002). However, transnational Zapatismo and global justice movements (including the World Social Forum process) have provided the most fertile terrain for the ethnographic analysis of transnational social movements in recent years, including work by many authors in this volume (Caruso 2004, 2005b, 2012; Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008; Conway 2012; Escobar 2001, 2008; Graeber 2009; D. Hess 2007a, 2009; Juris 2004a, 2004b, 2005a, 2008a; Khasnabish 2007, 2008; Maeckelbergh 2009; Osterweil 2004a, 2004b; Pleyers 2008, 2011; Routledge 2008; Routledge and Cumbers 2009).

For example, Jeffrey Juris's ethnography of the global justice movements is, in part, a response to the macro-level theories of distributed network structure and technology within contemporary movements (2008a). Carving out a practice-based approach to networks, Juris argues that global justice movements involve an increasing confluence among network technologies, network-based organizational forms, and network-based political norms, mediated by activist practice. In this sense, the network, beyond technology and organizational infrastructure, has also become a widespread cultural ideal, a model of and for emerging forms

of radical, directly democratic practice. The complex, dynamic relationship between imagination and political practice is also the principal focus of Alex Khasnabish's ethnographic study of the often unexpected, unpredictable consequences of the resonance of Zapatismo among diverse communities of activists in Canada and the United States (2008). Khasnabish's analysis explores the forms and consequences of Zapatismo's resonance for North American activists who, rather than simply "importing" Zapatismo, have encountered it through politico-cultural and technological processes of transmission and translation. And, having found their political imaginations radicalized, activists sought to ground this resonance in their own living fabric of struggle. At the same time, global justice networks are marked by tensions, power imbalances, and cultural struggles, particularly given the diversity of activists' cultural and political backgrounds and the existence of competing organizational logics, giving rise to what Juris calls the "cultural politics of networking" (2008a).

Actor-network theory (ANT) and complexity theory have also inspired recent ethnographic work on the global justice movements. Complexity theory, which emphasizes the recursive self-generation of complex, adaptive systems through myriad micro-level interactions, has become increasingly influential among activists and social theorists (see Chesters and Welsh 2006; Escobar 2001, 2008; Maeckelbergh 2009; Sterpka, this volume). In his recent ethnography of the *Proceso de Comunidades Negras* (Process of Black Communities) on Colombia's Pacific coast, including the group's participation in transnational global justice networks such as Peoples' Global Action, Arturo Escobar suggests that social movements possess complex, adaptive features (2008). Although the networks he studies are hybrid formations, involving aspects of hierarchy and more diffuse, horizontal "meshworks,"<sup>12</sup> they exhibit many features associated with the latter, as they are "based on decentralized decision making, self-organization, and heterogeneity and diversity," and develop "through their encounter with their environments, although conserving their basic organization, as in the case of autopoietic entities" (274). In other chapters, Escobar explores the role of place, culture, and power in the context of transnational organizing, and the critical role of social movements as producers of insurgent knowledges.

For his part, Paul Routledge has drawn on ANT to develop an analysis of the shifting patterns of connection, association, and translation within the Peoples' Global Action network based on ethnographic fieldwork in

Bangladesh (2008; see also Routledge and Cumbers 2009). Whereas ANT has been silent on issues of power and human agency, particularly given its view of reality as an effect of sociotechnical networks composed of heterogeneous chains of human and nonhuman elements (Callon 1991; Latour 1993; see also Escobar 2000; Juris 2004a), Routledge argues that power differentials and intentionality are central to shaping the contours of network association. In arguing for a corrective to ANT, this analysis resonates with many of the ethnographic themes we have highlighted, including the critical role of practice, culture, and power within networked spaces of transnational encounter. At the same time, as discussed below, such insights largely flow from a critically engaged position within the networks being examined.

Before moving on, it is important to specify two kinds of activism that fall outside of this volume's bounds. First, there has been a growing ethnographic literature on NGOs in anthropology and related fields, much of it concerned with issues related to globalization, development, and transnational civil society (see Bornstein 2003; Fisher 1997; Hemment 2007; Markowitz 2001; Riles 2000). NGO-based activism is an important dimension of contemporary politics, but its relation to neoliberalism has been hotly debated, with some scholars and activist groups even suggesting that NGOs are complicit with neoliberal rule (Hardt and Negri 2000; INCITE! 2007; Postero 2006; Speed 2007). Although some progressive NGOs participate in wider social movements, their position is frequently marked by their implication within and reliance on dominant architectures of power and funding. None of this is to say that NGOs cannot be significant vehicles for social change, only that there is an important distinction to be made between formal organizations and more noninstitutional, grassroots, and confrontational forms of mobilization.

Second, exciting research on the frontier of anthropology and science and technology studies (STS) has also addressed various types of activism in a global context. Whereas David Hess (2007a, 2009, this volume) has examined the more or less organized activity of localist movements in response to corporate globalization, other scholars, such as Kim Fortun (2001) and Christopher Kelty (2008), have explored more diffuse kinds of global activism not directly associated with collective political actors: the former concerned with environmental advocacy following the Bhopal disaster, and the latter revolving around a loose network of free software writers and activists. Fortun's experimental, self-reflexive ethnography of

transnational advocacy is more focused on formal NGOs than grassroots movements, while Kelty's emphasis is less related to activism and social movements than to a set of discourses and practices surrounding free software as a recursive public. In contrast, this volume is concerned with expressly organized, oppositional, and grassroots activism that belongs more properly to the field of social movements.

## **NETWORKED SPACES OF TRANSNATIONAL ACTIVIST ENCOUNTER**

Covering an admittedly partial terrain of transnational activism, this volume takes up diverse analytic challenges guided by four key themes: emerging subjectivities; discrepant paradigms; transformational knowledges; and subversive technologies. Using each of these themes as a lens, the chapters render diverse dimensions of transnational activism and the knowledge work of ethnography in relation to such activism visible in provocative and illuminating ways.

### **Emerging Subjectivities**

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000, 2004) have posited that through the global, neoliberal, and biopolitical order of Empire, a new revolutionary subjectivity is emerging: the multitude. Rather than a homogeneous, singular historical subject, the multitude is unified by a collective no (to global neoliberal capitalism and liberal democracy) and is marked by many yeses (to diverse alternatives to dominant political, economic, and social processes). Although the notions of multitude and Empire have generated considerable debate (see Brennan 2006; Bull 2005), we invoke these terms as a way of broaching the theme of subjectivity. As a space of encounter, action, and imagination, the transnational is also a space of subjectification.

The notion of the rhizome is another useful guidepost in our analysis of power and subjectivity. For Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1987), the rhizome requires us to do away with fixed lines and linearity. As a bulb or tuber possessing both shoots and roots, the rhizome's shape is unpredictable and capable of growth across multiple dimensions. The rhizome's process of becoming is influenced by its nonuniform capacity for growth and its engagement with its surroundings. In much the same way, transnational networks and movements are unpredictable, multiscalar,

and multidimensional, as well as acephalous, segmented, and reticulate (Gerlach and Hine 1970), constituted by ongoing processes of becoming. Indeed, it is only in attending to the connections that comprise them and the nonisomorphic shapes they take that we can begin to understand their power and capacity to forge new subjectivities.

We also refer to subjectivities in the more concrete sense of diverse political identities based on gender, race, ethnicity, indigeneity, and other social categories. Contemporary social movements involve a multiplicity of subjects such as women, youth, indigenous people, gays and lesbians, students, the unemployed, squatters, landless workers, and so on. These subjectivities comprise what Raul Zibechi refers to in his writings on Latin America as new social movements “from below” (2010). Unlike traditional labor and socialist movements, these new political actors do not merely counteract dominant global networks; they are building a new politics of autonomy and self-management rooted in local territories and identities while also reaching out horizontally across diversity, difference, and geographic space to develop new forms of regional and transnational coordination.

The contributors to this volume explore emerging subjectivities as sites of liberation and foci of tension and conflict. How, asks Juris, does the creation of an intentional space at the U.S. Social Forum (USSF) enhance the visibility and inclusion of some subjects while deemphasizing others, and what is the political significance of this dynamic? Manisha Desai grapples with subjectivity as a scholar-activist critically reflecting on her positionality and on larger debates about scholar-activists and activist-scholars within a feminist space at the WSF. Tracing cross-border political subjectivities, Khasnabish explores the intersection of imagination and politics in a transnational encounter between Northern radicals and the discourse of Zapatismo: can such encounters and their resonances, asks Khasnabish, generate new political possibilities? Finally, Geoffrey Pleyers troubles conventional narratives that delimit the “success” of social struggles in narrowly institutional terms and instead illuminates forms of resistance to corporate globalization that focus on subjectivity, lived experience, and the articulation of alternative ways of being and doing.

### **Discrepant Paradigms**

What comes of our attempts to critically and analytically engage movements for social change is contingent not only on the categories we adopt

and our own familiarity with such movements but also on our ethical commitments, cultural backgrounds, and epistemological frameworks. In other words, the political and intellectual “paradigms” (Kuhn 1970) we bring to bear matter, not only analytically but also with regard to political effects. Following Sylvia Escárcega’s contribution to this volume, we define a paradigm as the “set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that pertains to a specific yet nonbounded worldview of an imagined community of actors.” Given that any paradigm imposes a sense of order or meaning, this definition allows us to see that a paradigm is capable of obscuring as much as it reveals. For instance, dominant social movement studies paradigms often narrowly define what counts as movement success by focusing on the impact of movements in the formal spheres of governance and policy (see Amenta and Caren 2004; Giugni, McAdam, and Tilly 1999).<sup>13</sup> In such a light, most movements follow a standard tragic narrative arc of emergence, contestation, and demobilization (see Tarrow 1998) that casts struggles for social transformation as plagued by socio-political entropy, always failing against the inevitability of their decline.

What would happen if we reject these paradigmatic assumptions and pursue alternative paradigms that unsettle hegemonic forms of politics and knowledge production? Operating from distinct ontological and epistemological premises, such paradigms could be described as discrepant for at least two reasons. First, they contest the authority of explanatory accounts that reduce radical challenges to dominant orders by narrating such challenges within the parameters of established frameworks. Second, rather than foreclosing horizons of possibility, these paradigms suggest the potential for alternative orders that are radically different. What if, asks Escárcega, instead of turning to well-worn techno-scientific models born of European modernity to address the global eco-social crisis, we attune ourselves to the alternative paradigms offered by indigenous peoples for living, working, and relating to Mother Earth? What if instead of paying attention to what is most visible, we attend to, as Vinci Daro exhorts, the encounters and possibilities that occur at the margins of political protest? What if, as Hess suggests, we take seriously the epistemological and ethico-political possibilities and challenges of engaging each other across disciplinary paradigms? Or, as Hess advises, what if we break out of the rigid dichotomy between local and global analytic frames? Such discrepant paradigms destabilize authorized frameworks, paving the way for the envisioning and articulation of new possibilities.

### **Transformational Knowledges**

The knowledge categories we deploy affect how we understand social action. Indeed, our epistemological and ontological grounding has profound consequences for the way we represent the lives of others. Academic disciplines are by no means absolved of responsibility for the effects of their knowledge production (Lal 2002). Our volume specifically attempts to understand the work of subjects deeply invested in reimagining and reconstructing their worlds as they resist the violence of the neo-liberal order.

This relates to the vital, yet often overlooked work of social movements that Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison refer to as “cognitive practice” (1991). In this sense, as Maribel Casas-Cortés, Michal Osterweil, and Dana Powell suggest in their chapter, social movements should be viewed as knowledge producers (see also Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008; Conway 2005a; Escobar 2008; D. Hess 2007a; Santos 2008), which is one of the premises of the Social Movements Working Group (SMWG), founded in 2003 at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Contributors in this section critically assess various kinds of academic and movement knowledge and explore ways of knowing otherwise among engaged researchers participating in projects of social transformation. Giuseppe Caruso invites us to consider the contours of transformative ethnography, which aims to cultivate the conditions necessary for transformative action. In a similar vein, Paul Routledge considers the obligations and responsibilities of activist ethnographers, and in the process compels us to examine what it might mean for ethnographers to live up to commitments of solidarity with respect to urgent social justice struggles. Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell ask us to reflect on the methodological, epistemological, and political implications of their premise that movements are knowledge producers and that ethnographers are but one actor in a crowded field of knowledge production. Janet Conway similarly interrogates the potential contributions of ethnography to our understanding of transnational political dynamics, such as the social forum process: What can ethnography achieve within transnationally networked political spaces? What are its limitations?

### **Subversive Technologies**

The networked spaces of transnational encounter we explore in this volume are thoroughly intertwined with new digital technologies. The Inter-

net provides a key technological tool for the spaces, networks, and movements we consider; it also shapes their emerging visions, practices, and identities. With respect to the global justice movements, Juris has identified a powerful “cultural logic of networking,” a set of “broad guiding principles, shaped by the logic of informational capitalism, which are internalized by activists and generate concrete networking practices” (2008a, 11). Although always uneven and contested, this logic emerges as global justice activists interact with new digital technologies in everyday social contexts. Although some scholars refer to wider social technologies in a Foucauldian sense (see Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, this volume), the contributions in this section specifically address computer-related technologies. Even in this more restricted sense, technology is infused with questions of epistemology, power, and subjectivity. For example, activists use the Internet to communicate and coordinate with one another across vast distances, but they also employ digital technologies to experiment with innovative forms of collaborative practice within virtual and physical spaces. Online tools, such as movement-related forums, blogs, wikis, and emerging forms of social networking represent new modes of collectively producing and distributing knowledge in ways that reflect activists’ emerging utopian subjectivities and ideals with respect to directly democratic practice, horizontal coordination, and the free and open flow of information (Juris 2005a, 2008a, 2012). Although new digital technologies may enhance the relative power of grassroots movements vis-à-vis the state, they also constitute sites for the expression of internal tensions and power struggles.<sup>14</sup>

Contributors to this section examine diverse technologies that operate across multiple scales and spaces. Jeffrey Juris, Giuseppe Caruso, Stéphane Couture, and Lorenzo Mosca ask what kinds of politics and exclusions are enacted in the use of free/libre and open-source software (FLOSS) within transnationally networked spaces, such as the social forums. M. K. Sterpka asks how we might better understand the aspirations and contributions of struggles for information freedom by critically examining pre-Internet civil society networks in historical and ethnographic contexts. Explicitly positioning herself in the midst of a transnationally networked, Internet-based social change project—Indymedia—Tish Stringer probes the possibilities for change when scholars work within the academy through their activism while also supporting social movements as academics.

## ETHNOGRAPHY, SHIFTING FIELDS, AND POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

This volume is situated within the post-1980s critique of ethnography and the reconfiguration of ethnographic fieldwork in two fundamental ways. First, it contributes to the recent expansion of scale and complexity in the construction of the “field.” The critique of a single, bounded location for fieldwork cut off from wider processes and political economic trends was clearly articulated by George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer in their influential book *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986). Their idea of a *multilocal* ethnography foreshadowed the recent emergence of multisitedness as a strategy for depicting a complex world characterized by increasing connectedness and translocal flows (Candea 2009). This expanding scale of fieldwork has given rise to a radical questioning of the idea of the “field” itself. The Malinowskian ideal of the ethnographic field site as a village coterminous with a discrete, bounded people and culture no longer holds water (if it ever did) in a world of complex transnational flows (Gupta and Ferguson 1997a). The difference between home and field is thus rendered blurry, requiring us to reconstruct the field anew (Amit 2000).

One strategy for reconstructing the field has been to demarcate a series of multiple sites that are connected by translocal flows of people, ideas, things, and conflicts (Marcus 1995). Such multisited strategies have been influential over the last decade and a half, yet they have also been criticized for their lack of “depth” (Falzon 2009), and their perhaps paradoxical tendency toward holism (Candea 2009). Given our focus on networked spaces of transnational encounter, the chapters in this volume all speak to issues of space, place, and scale—either directly or implicitly. However, the authors pursue a range of ethnographic strategies for doing so, involving varying degrees of emplacement and mobility. Some emphasize local places and how they interact with translocal forces, flows, and connections, constituting examples of what Michael Burawoy refers to as “global ethnographies.” Others pursue multisited strategies (Marcus 1995), traveling within and through various networked spaces. However, most of the chapters feature a combination of ethnographic strategies, involving aspects of each of these ideal types. In this sense, studying networks that are locally situated yet globally connected calls for novel modes of networked ethnography (see Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, and Sterpka, both in this volume). As Arturo Escobar puts it, this would “relate place-based, yet transnationalized, struggles to transnational networks,” and “investi-

gate the ways in which . . . actors relate to both places and spaces as they ‘travel’ back and forth” (2001, 163).

This volume should also be seen as a response to the crisis of ethnography in the wake of the Writing Culture critique of the 1980s, particularly the links between ethnography, colonialism, and power (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Any project with such a strong emphasis on ethnography has to confront inevitable questions regarding the power relations embedded in the ethnographic process. This is even more the case when engaging social movements that explicitly challenge unequal power relations in the context of broad-based struggles for social justice.

As Shannon Speed (2006, 2008) maintains, the recognition since the 1970s and 1980s of anthropology’s history of colonial entanglement, together with the recognition of our situatedness as ethnographers and the potentially negative, if unintended, consequences of our ethnographic depictions of others (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986), has given rise to two reactions. Some anthropologists have responded to the crisis of representation via theoretical and textual experimentation, primarily engaging in self-reflexive cultural critique. Others have forged more collaborative, activist approaches involving a commitment to the human rights and political struggles of our interlocutors as well as an attempt to create more equitable relations of research. This second current has led to a proliferation of politically committed strategies: action research, engaged research, advocacy research, participatory action research, collaborative ethnography, and militant anthropology (Hale 2008; see also Burdick 1995; Lamphere 2004; Lassiter 2005; Low and Merry 2010; Mullins 2011; Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006; Schepers-Hughes 1995). Marcus (2009) himself has noted a significant rise in the numbers of graduate students coming to anthropology to work on activist-oriented projects. Although the literature on engaged, activist modes of research has not always addressed similar debates among feminist scholars (Méndez 2008; see also Maguire 1996), this trend builds on decades of politically committed feminist research situated within and/or drawing inspiration from diverse feminist movements inside and outside of the academy (see Cancian 1992; Harding 2005; Mohanty 2003; Naples 2003). The trend is also related to recent efforts to challenge the continuing hegemony of universalist objectivism within a still largely white, Eurocentric university context (see Costa Vargas 2006; Wallerstein et al. 1996; Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva 2008).

The chapters in this volume are clearly linked to this second tradition. However, recent accounts have exaggerated the contrast between *activist research* and *cultural critique* (see, e.g., Hale 2006, 2008; Speed 2006, 2008). According to Charles Hale, *activist research* refers to a collaborative method involving explicit alignment with a group in struggle. While practitioners of *cultural critique* express political alignment through the content of the knowledge produced (and, we would add, the style of theory and writing), activist researchers enact their political engagements by establishing relationships with a politically organized movement or group (2006).<sup>15</sup> This distinction has two consequences. First, activist researchers have dual loyalties—one to the academy and another to a broader social struggle—while proponents of cultural critique “collapse these dual loyalties into one” (100). Second, the latter are often particularly concerned with generating theoretical and analytic complexity and sophistication, and thus tend to be averse to “the politically induced analytic closure that activist research often requires” (101). Even positivist methods reviled by postmodernists and politically engaged scholars may be precisely the kind of research that our allies request.<sup>16</sup> The contributors to this book share this schizophrenic yet productive sense of divided loyalties, but not necessarily the thrust toward theoretical and analytic closure, which may proscribe other modes of activist research (see also Osterweil 2008, and Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell, this volume).

When we situate ourselves within a particular network or struggle, and are thus a constitutive part of rather than an outside supporter of that struggle, our contributions as researchers become potentially less instrumental and more strategic (see Méndez 2008). Given that strategizing is inherently open-ended and exploratory, and often involves the kind of search for new analytic categories and theoretical approaches that Hale associates with cultural critique, a strict divide between activist research and cultural critique is not necessarily warranted. At the same time, in common with the tradition of cultural critique, the chapters that follow also share a commitment to self-reflexivity. Interestingly, the social movement networks considered here are by nature self-reflexive, engaged in the collaborative production and circulation of knowledge by and for the networks themselves (Juris 2008a). In this sense, activist research might also be seen as a creative process of collective theorization and knowledge production carried out from inside social movements. Stephen Shukaitis and David Graeber capture this collaborative, exploratory spirit when

they describe “a process of collective wondering and wandering that is not afraid to admit that the question of how to move forward is always uncertain, difficult, and never resolved in easy answers that are eternally correct” (2007, 11). Here *activist research* refuses analytic closure.

This is not to suggest that Hale’s view of activist research is wrong, but rather that it points to one among many kinds of activist research. Grass-roots communities are often in desperate need of strategically placed allies with access to cultural and material skills, tools, and resources. This kind of traditional solidarity should not be underestimated and is often a matter of life and death (see Sanford and Angel-Ajani 2006). In this volume, however, we stake out a different form of solidarity, one that is reciprocal rather than one way (Waterman 1998). In this sense, each of us is engaged in our own struggles and we each write from an embedded, if at times contradictory, position. Even when we stand in support of other groups, we do so as part of much wider networked spaces of encounter. We are interested in precisely the uneven, power-laden interactions and encounters between groups within these spaces (see Chesters and Welsh 2006). In this sense, studying the cultural logics and practices associated with a particular network requires acting within the network (Juris 2008a; Routledge 2008). Of course, there is a critical class- and power-related dimension to consider: acting and researching from within a network is often facilitated by our collaboration with middle-class actors with whom we are more likely to share a critical, intellectually oriented habitus.<sup>17</sup> The kind of activist research outlined by Hale is perhaps more appropriate to situations where we are working across class and power divides.

Andrew Mathers and Mario Novelli have noted a more general “process of re-engagement among academics” (2007, 230), which can be seen, in part, as a response to the rising poverty, inequality, and social suffering caused by neoliberal globalization (see Bourgois 2006). Calls for a public anthropology and sociology (Burawoy 2005; Lamphere 2004) attest to a growing desire among scholars for their research to be relevant. However, politically engaged research is not just about reaching a wider audience; it is also about how we conduct our research (Calhoun 2008; see also Hale 2008). On the one hand, political engagement means explicitly taking sides, recognizing that even the most seemingly objective accounts have an implicit politics. As Victoria Sanford argues, “activist scholarship reminds us that all research is inherently political—even, and perhaps especially, that scholarship presented under the guise of ‘objectivity,’ which is

really no more than a veiled defense of the status quo” (2006, 14). On the other hand, political engagement also means working together with the subjects of our research. Hale puts it this way, “activist scholars work in dialogue, collaboration, [and] alliance with people who are struggling to better their lives” (2008, 5). Participatory action research (PAR), which involves the collective design and implementation of research between a researcher and an organization or community of stakeholders, represents a particularly radical example of this collaborative ethic (Greenwood 2008; see also Reitan 2007).

At the same time, even PAR is rooted in an a priori separation between research subject and object, regardless of how democratic the relationship between the two might be. This makes good sense for projects where there is a clear divide between the researcher and the group he or she is working with, but it is less appropriate when researchers are trying to understand a network, group, or struggle of which they are a part. In this case, a mode of situated, self-reflexive research is called for that seeks to overcome the divide between subject and object. As feminist scholars have long insisted (see Haraway 1988; Harding 2005; Sprague and Zimmerman 1993), this is not just a question of political utility but is also a matter of generating more adequate knowledge.

With regard to the operation of transnational social movements, for example, Juris (2007, 2008a) has argued that the only way to truly grasp the concrete logic of activist networking is to become an active practitioner. This kind of *militant ethnography* requires becoming directly involved in a particular struggle through activities such as organizing actions and events, facilitating meetings, staking out and supporting positions during discussions and debates, and risking one’s body during mass actions. This leads to deeper cognitive understanding and also provides a sense of the embodied emotions generated by activist practice. If it is to be taken seriously, activist-oriented research of any kind has to justify itself in terms of the standards and criteria of the academy (Hale 2008), while simultaneously generating analytic and theoretical insights—regarding movement practices, cultures, and forms; internal relations of power and inequality; organizing strategies and tactics; and the nature of wider social, cultural, political, and economic contexts—that are useful to activists.

The relationship between knowledge production, the intellectual, and social change has long been a site of contestation. Ethnographers have been compelled to address the politics of knowledge precisely be-

cause our work is grounded in the lived realities of others. While questions about the ethnographic production of knowledge and related issues of representation surfaced in anthropological circles in the 1980s, critiques of ethnographic knowledge had been raised previously by feminists, indigenous peoples, and anticolonial struggles (L. Smith 1999). At the same time, many anthropologists have worked in a dedicated fashion with research participants and partners to bring tangible benefits to communities (Bourgois 2001; Burdick 1995, 1998; Farmer 2004; Scheper-Hughes 1995). In the past decade, discussion turned toward the subject of activism and the academy and the possibilities and challenges therein (see Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell 2008; Coté, Day, and de Peuter 2007; Graeber 2004; Hale 2008; Juris 2007, 2008a; Shukaitis and Graeber 2007). In this spirit, this volume seeks to explore the possibilities for elite provinces of knowledge production and dissemination to become sites of liberatory collaboration. What might a radically collaborative ethnography look like?<sup>18</sup> What does it promise and what are the obstacles and challenges to its realization?

Nonetheless, engaged, activist approaches to ethnography are not without their own challenges. These are of at least three varieties: tensions and obstacles in the field, contradictions between academic and activist spaces, and the difficulty of bridging academic and movement audiences. First, despite our best intentions, activist researchers and militant ethnographers often find themselves embroiled in complex arguments and power struggles. It is one thing to declare ourselves in support of a certain movement or group, but what if we disagree with a particular goal or course of action? As active participants it would seem that we should clearly stake out a particular position, but what happens if this undermines our role in the group? Just as difficult are situations where we find ourselves caught negotiating between competing factions (see Speed 2008). Neutrality might seem a desired course, but this is not always an option. In this sense, our goals and responsibilities as researchers and activists do not necessarily coincide.

Second, it is also often difficult to move back and forth between academic and activist spaces. Even when we are able to convince our activist collaborators of our political commitments, finding the time and energy to maintain our activist pursuits beyond the moment of field research, given the enormous pressures to teach and publish in the neoliberal university, is a major challenge. As Routledge (1996a) has pointed out, there

is a significant gap between the moment of research, when we are active collaborators with our research hosts, and the moment of writing and publishing, when we are faced with vastly different incentives and institutional rewards (Juris 2008a). One way to negotiate this tension is to transform teaching and publishing into political acts. However, it is important to remember that there are multiple positionalities, multiple strategies for engaging movements, and multiple ways of negotiating the gulf between activist and academic spaces.

This suggests a final tension related to activist ethnography: the divide between academic and movement audiences. Tenure requires that we publish articles in peer-reviewed journals and books with university presses, yet these are often far removed from activist-oriented outlets and circuits of distribution. These distinct modes of knowledge production may lead to very different forms of knowledge. Furthermore, some activists, particularly those who are influenced by the free software movement (see Juris, Caruso, Couture, and Mosca, this volume), are opposed to any form of publication based on intellectual copyright. Of course many of us write for both academic and activist outlets, yet the hope remains that a book such as this can partially transcend the divide between activism and the academy. Whether or not this occurs depends on complex factors such as price, marketing strategy, and the possibility of more open distribution.

### THE VOLUME AHEAD

We have tried to maintain a balance between up-and-coming and more-established scholars in this book. There is a fairly even distribution of men and women, but with the exception of two authors from the global South (Desai and Escárcega), the rest of the contributors are from Europe, Canada, or the United States. In terms of discipline, most are anthropologists by training, but there are also sociologists, geographers, and political scientists. This anthropological thrust is reflected in the more interpretivist ethnographic tradition expressed in this introduction. However, several authors employ a more social scientific approach and are more comfortable generalizing from particular ethnographic cases (e.g., Hess, this volume). Nonetheless, we share a commitment to working across disciplinary and epistemological boundaries. Moreover, although most of us are situated in the academy, we are all dedicated to bridging the gap be-

tween academic and activist work, while some of us are primarily engaged in independent research and activism.

Following this introduction is a section on emerging subjectivities. In his contribution, Juris explores the dynamics of race, class, and political subjectivity at the USSF. Through an ethnographic account of the 2007 USSF in Atlanta, Juris examines one high-profile attempt to confront the tension between directly democratic organization and the goal of racial and class diversity within radical social movements by establishing an *intentional* space. He argues that USSF organizers implemented an intentional organizing strategy by focusing on and specifically recruiting grassroots base-building groups. This strategy achieved a significant degree of racial and class diversity, but it deemphasized political and ideological diversity as larger NGOs, liberals, white radicals and anarchists, organized labor, and mainstream environmentalists and feminists were largely excluded from the organizing process. At the same time, given the strong desire among participants to overcome past exclusions, the privileging of intentionality over horizontality and openness was widely viewed as legitimate, even among those excluded from the organizing process.

In chapter 2, Khasnabish examines the transnational resonance of Zapatismo among activists in Canada and the United States. Pushing beyond a politics of solidarity to consider how transnational Zapatismo has generated new political imaginations and political subjectivities, Khasnabish argues for the utility of ethnographically informed analyses of radical expressions of political possibility. Drawing on fieldwork with North American activists inspired by the Zapatista struggle, Khasnabish probes the dynamics, promises, and pitfalls of a specific manifestation of the radical imagination. Since institutional transformation is a necessary but not sufficient element of social change, attending to the subjectivities emerging from social justice struggles makes analytic sense and facilitates the exploration of social movements as generators of radical sociopolitical possibility that exceed conventional measures of political success.

Based on participant observation at the Feminist Dialogues (FD) during the WSFs in Porto Alegre, Nairobi, and Bélem, in chapter 3 Desai analyzes the shifting spatial and power relations between and within the FD and the WSF. She examines how dialogue operates as a transnational feminist practice, arguing that although the FD is imagined as a dialogic space, it has produced limited exchanges—primarily among the orga-

nizers—and as dialogue became the predominant concern of activists, its original aims of making the WSF more feminist and energizing transnational feminist organizing were undermined. She also reflects on the relationship between feminist activism and feminist writing as a way to contribute to academic and activist transnational feminist practices by showing how our concepts and research strategies can contribute, albeit in a limited way, to diverse forms of political activism. In the section's final chapter, Pleyers employs a Tourainian lens to explore the subjectivities and grammars of experience emerging among distinct yet transnationally linked movements in Mexico, Argentina, and Belgium: the Zapatistas in Chiapas, alter-activists in Mexico City, the *piqueteros* (picketers) in Buenos Aires, and a social center in Liège. Pleyers argues that an ethnographic focus can elucidate the noninstitutional dimensions of such movements, including their favoring of horizontal and participatory organization, their reinvesting of local territories with meaning, and their privileging of learning by experience through ongoing processes of experimentation.

The chapters in the next section explore the dynamics of transnational social movements from diverse analytic perspectives related to activism and ethnography, suggesting the need for a shift toward nondualistic, noninstitutional, and noncentralizing frameworks. The chapters also deal with the discrepant paradigms proposed by movements. For example, in chapter 5 Escárcega provides an ethnographic analysis of the activities of the global indigenous movement, including network building, the development of common political agendas, and the negotiation of discourses on indigeneity. Escárcega argues that while in past decades indigenous struggles aimed to establish new relations with states and societies through legal instruments, indigenous intellectuals and activists today are participating in networked spaces of transnational encounter such as the UN and the social forums to establish new political alliances, empower new movement actors (e.g., indigenous women), and propose alternative cultural paradigms that transform our received understandings of humanity, nature, and the world.

In the next chapter Hess maintains that alternative economy movements should be considered alongside protest-based movements as part of a single family of antiglobalization movements. According to Hess, community-based or localist antiglobalization movements ought to be understood as neither local nor global but rather as simultaneously place-

based and transnational. Hess then uses this discussion as a springboard for considering the larger methodological and theoretical issues addressed in this volume and in his own research, specifically the role of ethics in the ethnographic study of antiglobalization movements and the two cultures of ethnography, understood as a humanistic product and a method for social science research.

Daro then considers, in chapter 7, the dynamics of counter-summit protests against meetings of institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the most powerful industrialized capitalist countries (the G8, now the G20) as transnational spaces where activists confront and negotiate power. Daro specifically addresses the significance of the local for how global justice activist convergences are “figured” by activists and nonactivists alike. Moving away from a concern with core protest actors to consider other participants—police, bystanders, local shop owners, and government officials—Daro develops an innovative approach to the study of protest events based on what she refers to as “edge effects”: “the unpredictable, unintentional effects of interactions across social, political, and cultural boundaries, or edges, marked by different interpretive lenses and different relationships to global processes.” Daro argues that shifts in the meanings and trajectories of activists’ practices and alliances in *edge zones* during large protest actions merit ethnographic attention to reveal the complex dynamics that are often obscured by traditional approaches in the study of social movements.

The next section foregrounds the transformational knowledges arising at the intersection of contemporary social movement practice and ethnographic fieldwork. In chapter 8, Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell combine insights of experimental ethnography with a body of interdisciplinary work that conceives of social movements as knowledge producers. Based on fieldwork with Native American environmental justice movements and global justice collectives in Spain and Italy, Casas-Cortés, Osterweil, and Powell argue that the role of ethnography should be seen not in terms of explanation or representation but as translation and weaving, processes in which the ethnographer is one voice in a crowded field of knowledge producers. Ethnographic translation enables the ethnographer’s participation in the creation of new and different worlds, constituting a vital form of political intervention.

In the next chapter Caruso develops an innovative model of transformative ethnography based on his experience as a mediator and his ongoing

fieldwork with the social forum process. Transformative ethnography generates knowledge that is nonprescriptive, nondirective, and collaboratively generated as a process of recognition, adaptation, and transformation between multiple actors. Highlighting recurring patterns of concern, transformative ethnographers can contribute to processes of theory making and political deliberation toward transformative action within transnational networks. In so doing they are aware that, while patterns may emerge out of interaction, such interaction is mediated by cultural, social, and political differences and the frictions that arise from them.

In chapter 10, Routledge explores the dynamics of solidarity associated with activist ethnographies, involving an immersion in the field and in the practices being examined. This requires critical engagement with resisting others inside *embodied terrains of resistance*. Based on his years of engaged ethnographic research among transnational activists in places such as India, Bangladesh, and the United Kingdom, Routledge argues that activist ethnography is animated by a commitment to action, reflection, and empowerment — on the part of the ethnographer and of others who resist — to forge bonds of solidarity and challenge oppressive power relations.

In chapter 11, Conway considers the new forms of ethnographic knowledge that can be produced about the WSF as a transnational, movement-based, multisited process. Through an ethnographic analysis of the participation of indigenous movements in the WSF she makes five related arguments: (1) ethnographic approaches are able to ground the production of particular transnationalisms in concrete practices and places; (2) the ethnographic focus on locating and contextualizing practices and discourses within their own lifeworlds and in their own terms rightly considers the agents of these practices and discourses as subjects rather than objects and as producers of the transnational and of transnational social movements; (3) the production of knowledge about others has been problematized and politicized as a result of the epistemological and ethical debates about the practice of ethnography that have intensified over the last decade; (4) ethnographic sensitivity to lived realities allows social diversity to come more fully into view, troubling monolithic constructions and perceptions of homogeneity while helping to counter Eurocentrism and positivism; and (5) ethnography in and of itself is not analytically self-sufficient.

The final section explores the links between new, potentially subversive technologies, ethnography, and activism within networked spaces of

transnational encounter. In her chapter, Sterpka examines a lesser-known history of transnational civil society computer organizing that began in the 1970s and laid the groundwork for contemporary struggles by establishing early on the role of networks, user protocols, and methods of engagement for online mobilization. Using historical and ethnographic analysis, Sterpka highlights the labor of a small group of transnational activists in the early days of computer-mediated communication as well as the formative phase of deep democratic politics that arose from a post-colonial critique of the global economy. Sterpka introduces the term *social emergence* to highlight continuities between activist practices and social studies of complexity, which are well suited to analyzing the communicative interactions of activists articulated through social networking and information systems, reinforcing an overall reticulate structure.

Moving to the contemporary period, in chapter 13, Stringer examines the rise of new modes of collaborative production inside the transnational Indymedia network, and addresses three related tensions associated with the use of technologies and the open, collaborative ethic of the Indymedia network. First she explores how Indymedia activists use “masks” as a response to surveillance and, paradoxically, as a way to maintain openness and visibility. She then considers the tensions associated with her relationship to the Indymedia network, which revolves around two competing poles: activism—being inside a movement—and the academy. In an attempt to bridge this dichotomy, Stringer constructs a hybrid position, which, like the mask, allows her to inhabit and speak to multiple communities. But this alternative position is also haunted by the figure of the snitch, one that is deeply problematic for academics circulating among and writing about political activists.

In chapter 14, Juris, Caruso, Couture, and Mosca conduct a collaborative transnational ethnographic exploration of the *cultural politics of technology* within the social forums by analyzing the political goals and struggles over FLOSS and wider technological infrastructures within the social forum process. The authors contend that conflicts over specific uses and configurations of computers, software, and technologies are cultural, reflecting distinct visions and understandings of what software and technology mean. In this sense, the authors argue that decisions about technological infrastructure are not primarily technical but rather political. While free software, in particular, can be seen as reflecting the open, collaborative, and nonproprietary nature of the forum, the authors also

suggest that, similarly, struggles surrounding software and technology reflect conflicts over the nature of the forum itself. The conclusion then ties together the volume's principal themes while further exploring some of the political possibilities, limitations, and tensions of activist ethnography and the kinds of networked movements and spaces of encounter explored in the preceding chapters.

## NOTES

- 1 The caracoles, regional seats of the new autonomous Zapatista governing councils called the Juntas de Buen Gobierno, were created in 2003 to replace the former *aguascalientes*, which were regional places of encounter for Zapatista communities and civil society. For more on the development and implementation of autonomy in the Zapatista communities, see Barmeyer 2009; Earle and Simonelli 2005; and Speed 2007. For a more general analysis of the Zapatista vision of indigenous autonomy, see Nash 2001.
- 2 This opening vignette is based on fieldwork carried out by Jeffrey S. Juris during the first two Gatherings of the Zapatista Pueblos with the Pueblos of the World, the first of which took place in Chiapas in the caracol of Oventik (December 30, 2006 to January 2, 2007), and the second in the caracoles of Oventik, Morelia, and La Realidad (July 20 to 29, 2007). Juris translated the quotes into English.
- 3 The critique of Zapatista communities for selling Coca-Cola is a common one among Northern activists, but it is generally not expressed in public forums. This issue has also stirred significant debate, as many in the solidarity community defend the Zapatistas, arguing that Coca-Cola is a sensible alternative given the shortage of potable water, and that the communities are governed democratically, so if members want to drink Coca-Cola, they have every right to do so.
- 4 The Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle is the most recent in a series of communiqués issued by the EZLN since the uprising began in 1994. The Sexta, as it is widely known in Spanish, was released in June 2005 after a long period of silence, and provided an analysis of the situation in Chiapas, Mexico, and the world followed by an explanation of the Zapatistas' anti-capitalist vision, the rise of the caracoles and Juntas de Buen Gobierno, and the EZLN's plan for building alliances with other anticapitalist struggles in Mexico and internationally.
- 5 Within this quote, Marcos actually used the Spanish verb *enlatado*, which is translated as "enclosed" but literally means "canned" or "tinned," making a poetic play on the Spanish word for can, *lata*.

- 6 By also focusing on the movements, networks, and activist communities in the global North that have been influenced by Zapatista discourse and practice, Khasnabish (2008) provides an important corrective to previous approaches to transnational Zapatismo that have exclusively emphasized the strategic framing (Olesen 2005a) or marketing (Bob 2005) of the Zapatista rebellion from the perspective of the Zapatistas.
- 7 In invoking the transnational we are aware of the considerable scholarship and debate this phenomenon has generated at least since the mid-1990s (see, e.g., Schiller and Fouron 2001; Kearney 1995; Olesen 2005b; M. Smith and Guarnizo 1998).
- 8 Our approach to theory is similar to, but somewhat less universalizing than, Michael Burawoy's approach in his extended case method (1998). Whereas Burawoy employs particular case studies to test, reject, and/or extend existing theories, our goal is less to build a theoretical corpus than to develop new and/or adapt existing theoretical concepts in ways that help us to understand particular movements and that are also potentially useful to movements.
- 9 See J. Fox 2002 for a discussion of alternative forms of transnational political organization, including networks, coalitions, and movements, from the lowest to highest levels of integration (see Bandy and Smith 2005). Our notion of "networked space of transnational encounter" is even broader, making room for periodic or even momentary gatherings, actions, and events.
- 10 Political process theory holds that social movements emerge as a result of expanding political opportunities (institutional access, elite alignments, existence or lack of repression, etc.), which are seized upon by collective actors and sustained through mobilization structures (organizations, networks, channels of recruitment, etc.) and resonant cultural frames (McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996).
- 11 The argument here is not that distributed network forms are entirely new in the context of grassroots social movements—Gerlach and Hine (1970) wrote many years ago about the networked structure of the Black Power movement as acephalous, segmentary, and reticulate (see Kim 2000)—but rather that new digital technologies significantly reinforce such networked structures, allowing them to operate at a greater distance and on a larger scale (Juris 2008a).
- 12 Juris (2004b, 2008a) has identified a similar tension between "horizontal networking" and "vertical command" logics.
- 13 Some of this literature also examines the cultural and biological consequences of social movements (see, e.g., Earl 2004; Guigni 2004, 2008), but the vast majority of work in this area focuses on policy-related outcomes.
- 14 The chapters assembled in this section take us from the "pre-history" of

social movement organizing on the web through the years just before the Arab uprisings and Occupy movements, which, making innovative use of new social media such as Twitter and Facebook (see, e.g., Allagui and Kuebler 2011; Castells 2012; Juris 2012), appeared in 2011 as this volume was nearing completion and going to press.

- 15 For example, in her study of transnational activism among Indonesian forest activists, Anna Tsing (2005) employs a particular mode of storytelling and ethnographic writing as a form of resistance in itself. She explains, “I have used ethnographic fragments to interrupt stories of a unified and successful regime of global self-management” (271). Practitioners of various forms of activist research, including the authors in this volume, would question whether this is enough.
- 16 For example, Hale (2006) provides an account of his experience giving expert testimony in support of communal land claims by a Costa Rican indigenous group, the Awas Tingni. As he explains, “Community members asked us to make forceful and authoritative claims to the state and other powerful actors and to put social science to the service of their struggles” (113). Shannon Speed (2006, 2008) writes of similar experiences where she was called upon by a community in Chiapas to provide research to support its claims to indigenous identity. In the process, she had to confront a tension between the community’s understanding of identity as fixed and continuous with the past and her anthropological approach to identity as socially constructed, unstable, and changing.
- 17 For some of us the decision to study with collaborators that have similar class backgrounds and levels of social privilege reflects a political decision to study horizontally in ways that avoid the complex power differentials and exploitative tendencies that often characterize traditional ethnographic research projects with marginalized groups (see Juris 2008a).
- 18 For a few preliminary examples, see Kelty 2009; Matsutake Worlds Research Group 2009; and Jackie Smith, Juris, and the Social Forum Research Collective 2008.