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• The Production of Locality

This chapter addresses related questions that have arisen in an ongoing series of writings about global cultural flows. I begin with three such questions. What is the place of locality in schemes about global cultural flow? Does anthropology retain any special rhetorical privilege in a world where locality seems to have lost its ontological moorings? Can the mutually constitutive relationship between anthropology and locality survive in a dramatically delocalized world? My argument does not stem directly from concern with either the production of space (Lefebvre 1991) or the disciplinary anxieties of anthropology as such, although they broadly inform my response to these questions. Rather, it engages a continuing debate about the future of the nation-state (chap. 8). My concern is with what locality might mean in a situation where the nation-state faces particular sorts of transnational destabilization.

I view locality as primarily relational and contextual rather than as scalar or spatial. I see it as a complex phenomenological quality, constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts. This phenomenological quality, which expresses itself in certain kinds of agency, sociality, and reproducibility, is the main predicate of locality as a category (or subject) that I seek to explore. In contrast, I use the term *neighborhood* to refer

to the actually existing social forms in which locality, as a dimension or value, is variably realized. Neighborhoods, in this usage, are situated communities characterized by their actuality, whether spatial or virtual, and their potential for social reproduction.¹

As part of this exploration, I address two further questions. How does locality, as an aspect of social life, relate to *neighborhoods* as substantive social forms? Is the relationship of locality to neighborhoods substantially altered by recent history, especially by the global crisis of the nation-state? A simpler way to characterize these multiple goals is through this question: What can locality mean in a world where spatial localization, quotidian interaction, and social scale are not always isomorphic?

Locating the Subject

It is one of the grand clichés of social theory (going back to Toennies, Weber, and Durkheim) that locality as a property or diacritic of social life comes under siege in modern societies. But locality is an inherently fragile social achievement. Even in the most intimate, spatially confined, geographically isolated situations, locality must be maintained carefully against various kinds of odds. These odds have at various times and places been conceptualized differently. In many societies, boundaries are zones of danger requiring special ritual maintenance; in other sorts of societies, social relations are inherently fissive, creating a persistent tendency for some neighborhoods to dissolve. In yet other situations, ecology and technology dictate that houses and inhabited spaces are forever shifting, thus contributing an endemic sense of anxiety and instability to social life.

Much of what we call the ethnographic record can be rewritten and reread from this point of view. In the first instance, a great deal of what have been termed *rites of passage* is concerned with the production of what we might call *local subjects*, actors who properly belong to a situated community of kin, neighbors, friends, and enemies. Ceremonies of naming and tonsure, scarification and segregation, circumcision and deprivation are complex social techniques for the inscription of locality onto bodies. Looked at slightly differently, they are ways to embody locality as well as to locate bodies in socially and spatially defined communities. The spatial symbolism of rites of passage has probably been paid less attention than its bodily and social symbolism. Such rites are not simply mechanical techniques for social aggregation but social techniques for the production of "natives," a category I have discussed elsewhere (Appadurai 1988).

What is true of the production of local subjects in the ethnographic

record is as true of the processes by which locality is materially produced. The building of houses, the organization of paths and passages, the making and remaking of fields and gardens, the mapping and negotiation of transhuman spaces and hunter-gatherer terrains is the incessant, often humdrum preoccupation of many small communities studied by anthropologists. These techniques for the *spatial* production of locality have been copiously documented. But they have not usually been viewed as instances of the production of locality, both as a general property of social life and as a particular valuation of that property. Broken down descriptively into technologies for house building, garden cultivation, and the like, these material outcomes have been taken as ends in themselves rather than as moments in a general technology (and teleology) of localization.

The production of locality in the societies historically studied by anthropologists (on islands and in forests, agricultural villages and hunting camps) is not simply a matter of producing local subjects as well as the very neighborhoods that contextualize these subjectivities. As some of the best work in the social logic of ritual in the past few decades so amply shows (Lewis 1986; Munn 1986; Schieffelin 1985), space and time are themselves socialized and localized through complex and deliberate practices of performance, representation, and action. We have tended to call these practices *cosmological* or *ritual*—terms that by distracting us from their active, intentional, and productive character create the dubious impression of mechanical reproduction.

One of the most remarkable general features of the ritual process is its highly specific way of localizing duration and extension, of giving these categories names and properties, values and meanings, symptoms and legibility. A vast amount of what we know of ritual in small-scale societies can be revisited from this point of view. The large body of literature on techniques for naming places, for protecting fields, animals, and other reproductive spaces and resources, for marking seasonal change and agricultural rhythms, for properly situating new houses and wells, for appropriately demarcating boundaries (both domestic and communal) is substantially literature documenting the socialization of space and time. More precisely, it is a record of the spatiotemporal production of locality. Looked at this way, Arnold van Gennep's extraordinary and vital study of rites of passage (1965), much of James G. Frazer's bizarre encyclopedia (1900), and Bronislaw Malinowski's monumental study of Trobriand garden magic (1961) are substantially records of the myriad ways in which small-scale societies do not and cannot take locality as a given. Rather, they seem to assume that locality is ephemeral unless hard and regular work is undertaken to

produce and maintain its materiality. Yet this very materiality is ~~sometimes~~ mistaken for the terminus of such work, thus obscuring the more ~~abstract~~ effects of this work on the production of locality as a structure of ~~feeling~~.

Much that has been considered local knowledge is actually ~~knowledge~~ of how to produce and reproduce locality under conditions of anxiety and entropy, social wear and flux, ecological uncertainty and cosmic volatility, and the always present quirkiness of kinsmen, enemies, spirits, and quarks of all sorts. The locality of local knowledge is not only, or even mainly, its embeddedness in a nonnegotiable here and now or its stubborn disinterest in things at large, although these are certainly crucial properties as Clifford Geertz has reminded us in much of his work (Geertz 1975, 1983). Local knowledge is substantially about producing reliably local subjects as well as about producing reliably local neighborhoods within which such subjects can be recognized and organized. In this sense, local knowledge is what it is not principally by contrast with other knowledges—which (from some nonlocal point of view) the observer might regard as less localized—but by virtue of its local teleology and ethos. We might say, adapting Marx, that local knowledge is not only local in itself but, even more important, for itself.

Even in the smallest of societies, with the humblest of technologies and in the most desolate of ecological contexts, the relationship between the production of local subjects and the neighborhoods in which such subjects can be produced, named, and empowered to act socially is a historical and dialectical relationship. Without reliably local subjects, the construction of a local terrain of habitation, production, and moral security would have no interests attached to it. But by the same token, without such a known, named, and negotiable terrain already available, the ritual techniques for creating local subjects would be abstract, thus sterile. The long-term reproduction of a neighborhood that is simultaneously practical, valued, and taken-for-granted depends on the seamless interaction of localized spaces and times with local subjects possessed of the knowledge to reproduce locality. Problems that are properly historical arise whenever this seamlessness is threatened. Such problems do not arrive only with modernity, colonialism, or ethnography. I stress this point now because I will discuss below the special properties of the production of locality under the conditions of contemporary urban life, which involve national regimes, mass mediation, and intense and irregular commoditization.

If a large part of the ethnographic record can be reread and rewritten as a record of the multifarious modes for the production of locality, it follows that ethnography has been unwittingly complicit in this activity. This is a

point about knowledge and representation rather than about guilt or violence. The ethnographic project is in a peculiar way isomorphic with the very knowledges it seeks to discover and document, as both the ethnographic project and the social projects it seeks to describe have the production of locality as their governing telos.² The misrecognition of this fact in both projects, as involving only more humdrum and discrete actions and settings (house building, child naming, boundary rituals, greeting rituals, spatial purifications), is the constitutive misrecognition that guarantees both the special appropriateness of ethnography to certain kinds of description and its peculiar lack of reflexivity as a project of knowledge and reproduction. Drawn into the very localization they seek to document, most ethnographic descriptions have taken locality as ground not figure, recognizing neither its fragility nor its ethos as a property of social life. This produces an unproblematized collaboration with the sense of inertia on which locality, as a structure of feeling, centrally relies.

The value of reconceiving ethnography (and rereading earlier ethnography) from this perspective is threefold: (1) it shifts the history of ethnography from a history of neighborhoods to a history of the techniques for the production of locality; (2) it opens up a new way to think about the complex coproduction of indigenous categories by organic intellectuals, administrators, linguists, missionaries, and ethnologists, which undergirds large portions of the monographic history of anthropology; (3) it enables the ethnography of the modern, and of the production of locality under modern conditions, to be part of a more general contribution to the ethnographic record *tout court*. Together, these effects would help guard against the too-easy use of various oppositional tropes (then and now, before and after, small and large, bounded and unbounded, stable and fluid, hot and cold) that implicitly oppose ethnographies of and in the present to ethnographies of and in the past.

The Contexts of Locality

I have so far focused on locality as a phenomenological property of social life, a structure of feeling that is produced by particular forms of intentional activity and that yields particular sorts of material effects. Yet this dimensional aspect of locality cannot be separated from the actual settings in and through which social life is reproduced. To make the link between locality as a property of social life and neighborhoods as social forms requires a more careful exposition of the problem of context. The production of neighborhoods is always historically grounded and thus contextual. That

is, neighborhoods are inherently what they are because they are produced to something else and derive from other, already produced neighborhoods. In the practical consciousness of many human communities, this / something else is often conceptualized ecologically as forest or wasteland, ocean or desert, swamp or river. Such ecological signs often mark boundaries that simultaneously signal the beginnings of nonhuman forces and categories or recognizably human but barbarian or demonic forces. Frequently, these contexts, against which neighborhoods are produced and figured, are at once seen as ecological, social, and cosmological terrains.

It may be useful here to note that the social part of the context of neighborhoods—the fact, that is, of other neighborhoods—recalls the idea of *ethnoscape* (chap. 3), a term I used to get away from the idea that group identities necessarily imply that cultures need to be seen as spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or ethnically homogeneous forms. In this earlier usage, I implied that the idea of *ethnoscape* might be salient especially to the late twentieth century, when human motion, the volatility of images, and the conscious identity-producing activities of nation-states lend a fundamentally unstable and perspectival quality to social life.

Yet neighborhoods are always to some extent ethnoscares, insofar as they involve the ethnic projects of Others as well as consciousness of such projects. That is, particular neighborhoods sometimes recognize that their own logic is a general logic by which Others also construct recognizable, social, human, situated life-worlds. Such knowledge can be encoded in the pragmatics of rituals associated with clearing forests, making gardens, building houses, which always carry an implicit sense of the teleology of locality building. In more complex societies, typically associated with literacy, priestly classes, and macro-orders for the control and dissemination of powerful ideas, such knowledges are codified, as in the case of the rituals associated with the colonization of new villages by Brahmans in pre-colonial India.

All locality building has a moment of colonization, a moment both historical and chronotypic, when there is a formal recognition that the production of a neighborhood requires deliberate, risky, even violent action in respect to the soil, forests, animals, and other human beings. A good deal of the violence associated with foundational ritual (Bloch 1986) is a recognition of the force that is required to wrest a locality from previously uncontrolled peoples and places. Put in other terms (de Certeau 1984), the transformation of spaces into places requires a conscious moment, which may subsequently be remembered as relatively routine. The production of a neighborhood is inherently colonizing, in the sense that it in-