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PEOPLE, PLACE, AND TIME:
HOW STRUCTURAL FIELDWORK HELPS WORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Some of the most insightful work in the political economy of the world-system area has been produced by researchers whose extensive fieldwork offers them deep familiarity with people and locales. Few other methods are as useful to understand the impacts of structural change on daily life and the ways agents resist, alter, and shape emerging structures. Yet such structural fieldwork is marginalized by the over-reliance of pedagogical materials on social constructionist, social psychological, or interactionist perspectives and also in world-systems research and writing by the privileging of long durée historical or quantitative cross-national methods. This paper introduces the concept of structural fieldwork to describe a qualitative field methodology in which the researcher is self-consciously guided by considerations emerging out of macro-sociological theories. We identify four advantages of structural fieldwork: the illumination of power's multiple dimensions; examination of agency and its boundaries or limitations within broad political and economic structures; attention to nuances of change and durability, spatial and temporal specificities, and processes of change and durability; and challenging and extending social theory. These advantages are illustrated in select examples from existing literature and by discussion of the two author's fieldwork-based research. The paper concludes that explicit attention to fieldwork may strengthen political economy and world-systems research and also de-marginalize political economy informed by structural fieldwork.

INTRODUCTION

Some of the most insightful work in the political economy of the world-system area has been produced by fieldworkers displaying deep and often enduring familiarity with people and locales. Few other methods are as useful to understand the impacts of structural inequality on daily life

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and the ways agents resist, alter, and shape structures. Structural fieldwork, we suggest, is a qualitative field methodology in which the researcher is self-consciously guided by considerations emerging out of macro-sociological theories. Such research is especially attuned to attempts to understand the formation and exercise of, or resistance and accommodation to, systemic applications of political and economic power. The intent of structural fieldwork is to explain power among people in specific places and times in order to help us modify and elaborate general theoretical understandings of the social world.

Yet, such structural fieldwork is subject to two challenges, one pedagogical and one epistemological. First, the overwhelming majority of instructional materials on sociological field methods is based on work that is social constructionist, social psychological, or interactionist. Second, world-systems and other structural scholarship is dominated by large-scale cross-national quantitative studies and longue durée historical studies that undervalue or ignore the contributions of fieldwork. The implicit lesson for scholars is that fieldwork merely adds particularistic 'color commentary' onto broader theoretical claims. The result of both challenges is a marginalization of what we call structural fieldwork that is exacerbated by researchers themselves not demonstrating the value of their fieldwork as effectively as they might.

The pedagogy of fieldwork methods focuses almost exclusively on the micro-level as both locus of research and object of inquiry. Social constructionist and interactionist perspectives are relied on for exemplars and discussions of problems. It is most often the micro-level meanings that are emphasized as the province of this method, rather than the wider political economic questions that are equally often spurs to engage in fieldwork. As a result, field methods are largely taught as ways to study the sociological 'micro'.[1]

Despite this pedagogical focus, field methods are, in fact, used across the social sciences to answer questions that are macro and middle-range. Yet macro-questions are in effect ignored and delegitimized by those who teach budding field researchers. Or, more generously, the linkages between fieldwork and macro-level inquiry are left to the individual researchers to forge.

World-systems research often privileges methods that emphasize long-standing historical dynamics and comparative processes, normally revealed through quantitative cross-national studies. The themes of world-systems study are by definition big picture issues. In many ways, the world-systems attitude toward 'small n research' is exemplified by Georgi Derlugian's anecdote about his graduate education, during which his professor, Immanuel Wallerstein, "jokingly insisted that 'we do not believe in small things'" (2005:7). Those small things, it appears, range from social interactions to sociological methods that somehow fail to shed light on the world-system study of historical change and geography.

Despite the antipathy shown by micro- and macro- sociologists alike, many field researchers pursue their work with clear affinity to world-systems analysis, and use other structural perspectives. Yet in the search for cross-national similarities or dynamics that help explain differential societal and especially global or world-systemic power, the finely textured knowledge that field research brings to the table is often ignored. It is ignored because it is

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[1] Part of the micro bias we identify may be due to instructors' reasoned advice to students that they should 'start where they are' (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2006). This advice is entirely reasonable given the constraints of facilitating the creation of a fieldwork experience for graduate students in a short period of time. But for many of us, where we are is not necessarily the best place to study the structures of our interest.

considered too small and specific to be of use or even interest to social scientists pursuing causal analysis. In this way, field research driven by theories of political economy is disadvantaged.

This paper explores both of these limitations and highlights four key advantages of structural fieldwork. The first and most important advantage is that structural fieldwork illuminates power in the dimensions identified by Lukes (2005). Second, and related to power, is that structural fieldwork examines agency and its boundaries or limitations within broad political and economic structures (Sewell 1992). Third, fieldwork provides nuances in a variety of ways. There is attention to process, change and durability, and there is also focus on context such as the spatial and temporal specificities of trends, processes and structures. In other words, through its attention to people, place and time, fieldwork enables one to consider how, why and when structures are solidified or challenged. Fourth, all of these nuances are important not in order to ideographic frills around a structural fabric. Rather they aim to challenge and extend social theory to provide clarity about the importance of complexity in social processes, including path dependencies and unintended effects.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. First, we briefly review the dominant story of fieldwork as illuminating meanings at the micro-level. Second, we examine structural fieldwork's relative marginalization within the existing range of work in the political economy of the world-system, despite some recent interventions that should support it. Third, we discuss how a number of exemplars of fieldwork display the key advantages of structural fieldwork and thereby contribute to debates and understandings of larger structural processes. Our discussion is necessarily limited, but further exemplars are myriad, despite the lack of attention by method instruction and much world-systems research. Fourth, we demonstrate what structural fieldwork looks like as we discuss not only how we conducted our own research, but the contributions it makes to macro sociology. In short, we argue that field research examining political economy is crucial to understand how people experience inequalities and resist unjust power, as well as how they achieve positions of power and create structures. Moreover, such fieldwork is attentive to the spatial and temporal specificities of structurally shaped processes.

THE DOMINANT STORY: FIELD RESEARCH TELLS US HOW PEOPLE PERCEIVE THEIR SOCIAL WORLDS

There are many field research texts. Despite the (often anthropological) exhortation that one can only learn fieldwork by being in the field, many authors have tried, if not to standardize the process, to offer pragmatic suggestions on how to address many of the recurring dilemmas of fieldwork. These dilemmas are common to most fieldwork, and include gaining entry and access (Smith and Kornblum 1996; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995); interviewing (Holstein and Gubrium 1995; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995); researcher's roles (Smith and Kornblum 1996; Hammersley and Atkinson 1995; Schatzman and Strauss 1973), and ethics and politics in the field (Tedlock 1998; Fine 1993; Shefner and Gay 2002). All of these dilemmas emerge during fieldwork, and resolving them is important for successful research. They are dilemmas that emerge regardless of whether the foci of research are micro or macro questions (or both).[2]

[2] Of course, many texts attempt to cover many of this topics. See, for example, Agar 1996; Atkinson, Coffey, Delamont, Lofland, and Lofland 2001; Atkinson, Delamont and Housely 2008;

Yet most of the work that addresses these dilemmas is couched in discussions which privilege the contributions of field research to understanding how people make meaning of their lives, how they perceive social unities and divisions, and how they construct selves in response to these perceptions.[3] As Burawoy writes, "it is more usual for ethnographic studies to confine themselves to claims with the dimensions of the everyday worlds they examine" (Burawoy 1998:5). In short, the methodological discussion focuses on micro examinations of social life.[4]

By contrast, we are concerned with what we term "structural fieldwork." By structural fieldwork, we mean, first, fieldwork that begins with theoretical conceptions and then returns to those theoretical concepts and theories over and over during the research process. Structural fieldwork is thus 'theory-driven' (Lichterman 2002:122).[5] Second, the sort of theories that guide structural fieldwork are structural or macro-sociological theories (in this case, world-systems based theories). The logic of locale(s) of the structural fieldwork is not assumed to be isolated or autonomous, as, for example in the early functionalist anthropological work on isolated or 'closed' communities (Nash 2008). Nor is it concerned just with what is happening in particular locations in a globalizing world. Rather, structural fieldwork is concerned with the "basic nature of social realities" (Friedman 2000:640). Such realities may be found in structures that are not visible nor inter-personal and behavioral but "posited by the researcher" (Friedman 2000:639). Third, the research aims to contribute to the illumination, elaboration and building of further theoretical generalization and insight. Finally, structural fieldwork privileges the study of domination of, and resistance to, large structures of politics, economics, and other forms of hierarchy embedded in social systems. Structural fieldwork is most interested in understanding structures of power that provide much of the logic by which political and economic life is organized.

Our understanding of power is founded on Lukes (2005), who views power as a relationship in which control is exercised over a party overtly, covertly, or even unconsciously; through both activity and inactivity; in ways that are contrary to that party's interests; and is carried through not just by individuals but by collectivities and institutions. Lukes insists that power is often unobservable, and that the best examination of power may be gained through the posing of counterfactuals that ask how people might act or even think differently.

We believe, however, that structural fieldwork is another way to apprehend such power, as the close observation of a locale may demonstrate how acquiescence is articulated, or how

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Bailey 1996; Clair 2003; Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland 2006; Moeran 2006; Pawluch, Shaffir, and Miall 2005; Tolich and Davidson 1999; Warren and Karner 2005; Wolcott 2008).

[3] The texts referred to, among many others, were reviewed by the second author as part of his examination and selection of materials to be used for teaching four separate graduate field research classes over the past eleven years, as well as in preparing for his forays into the field.

[4] In anthropology, the post-modern cultural critique favors self-reflexivity and hermeneutic analysis (Nash 2008; Clifford and Marcus 1986)

[5] Lichterman refers to theory-driven researchers, in contrast to "field-driven" researchers (qua participant-observers), who aim "to address a theory, rather than to elucidate a substantive topic or field site with perhaps several theories. In theory-driven participant observation, a field site or subject matter is meaningful only in the categories of a general theory, *from the very beginning*." (Lichterman 2002:122, emphasis added).

cultural, political, or economic systems provide models for behavior and thought that are uncontested. Structural fieldwork can also expose those moments when people do indeed act contrary to the limits on their interests. When power is resisted, those brief interruptions in the constancy of power may be documented by structural fieldwork, as James Scott has demonstrated (1985). Additionally, when the exercise of power is questioned, even prior to action contesting ideologies that have organized issues and interests out of political debate, structural fieldwork is effective at hearing voices and viewing actions that indicate how assumptions of power may be shaken. We agree with Lukes that the exercise of power may often be unobservable, but careful documentation of actions, thought and speech may provide the data that demonstrate how systems are organized contradicting the interests of many. Certainly the questioning of power through thought and deed is a more open process, one that may be observed through structural fieldwork.

MAINSTREAM WORLD-SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF FIELDWORK

There is a wide and growing range of contributions that fall within the purview of world-systems research (see Hall 2000).[6] Structural fieldwork as conceptualized here, however, is not currently a prominent part of what one might consider the mainstream in world-systems research. On one end of the spectrum of world-systems research are works that attempt to build world-systems into a *theory*, beginning with Chase-Dunn's (1989) foundational work. At this end we would include most cross-national quantitative research and perhaps counterintuitively, much historical world-systems research as well. On the other end, one might place Wallerstein who has continued to insist that world-systems analysis "is not a theory" but a clearing away of the paradigmatic underbrush of *a priori* assumptions about the social world, including the tired debate between ideographic and nomothetic knowledge (Wallerstein 1991:239). Yet, Wallerstein, too, has contributed to the undervaluation of fieldwork. We agree with his discounting of fieldwork that purports to begin and end with local and/or cultural constructions without taking the broader context into account. What is more problematic is the under-recognition of fieldwork's role in the broader project of understanding the structure and change within what Wallerstein (1999:124) dubs the "appropriate units of analysis for social reality" – historical social sytems.

The predominance of quantitative and historical approaches to world-systems research is not difficult to discern. For example, in the last five years, only three articles out of 56 in the *Journal of World-Systems Research* were based on fieldwork.[7] The remainder were either cross-national quantitative contributions or theoretical contributions, usually focused on system-wide characteristics. We do not mean to deny the value of either mode of inquiry for providing insights into the structure and operation of the world-system. Our concern, here, is *not* the kind of research that scholars choose to engage in but the particular kinds of knowledge that are included and excluded from consideration. In other words, the emphasis on cross-national and world-systemic structures is clearly building a body of knowledge about the structure of the world-

[6] Although here we refer to world-systems research proper, we intend the phrase world-systems research to be taken as short-hand and to include other structurally oriented research.

[7] Based on a tally of volumes 10 to 14 by one of the authors. The three articles using fieldwork are Derickson and Ross (2008); Sener (2008) and Baiocchi (2004).

system, but it seems to preclude the kinds of insights that field-based research provide. Of most concern is the possibility that the regularization of world-systems research as (Kuhnian) scientifically normal research renders it less open to further conceptual and theoretical insights.

Hall (2000:6) observes that world-systems analysis has a "dual research agenda" of addressing how the system affects the internal dynamics and social structures of its components and how the components affect the system. There are several weaknesses in this agenda that continue to be identified, such as determinism, reification, and homogenization (Boles 2002; Feldman 2001; McMichael 1990; O'Hearn 2001; Paige 1999; Tomich 1997), which simultaneously work against recognition of fieldwork's value. Importantly, much cross-national world-systemic research accepts the dominant story about fieldwork and thereby relegates it to a supplementary task of interpreting the construction of meaning in various locations within the system.[8]

Quantitative cross-national world-systems research, from Bornschier, Chase-Dunn, and Rubinson's (1978) analysis of foreign investment and Arrighi and Drangel's (1986) study of the semi-periphery through more recent studies of world-systems and environmental degradation (Jorgenson 2007; Jorgenson and Burns 2007; Shandra et al. 2008) are vulnerable to reification of world-systemic location. In part this is due to their reliance on available data sets at the national level. The categorization of core, semi-peripheral and peripheral locations in the world-system mirrors mainstream (World Bank) analyses of global income stratification.[9] Such categories and the effects of independent variables such as growth, investment and the like are measured with increasing sophistication on the nations of the various categories in the world-system. The risk of reification is rarely addressed, although recent works have noted that 'decomposition' of the nation-states, such as into their urban and rural components might add further precision to the analyses.[10] Historical world-systems research, too, has suffered from a tendency to validate the causal importance of the system as a whole, while underplaying the role of parts in constituting the whole. Even those historical sociologists interested in resistance highlight the continuities – rather than the nuanced differences – across hundreds of years and multiple struggles of resistance (Hall and Fenelon 2004). Even some geographers who we might expect to be attuned to the contributions of structural fieldwork accept the equating of place-based research with "contribut[ing] to world-systems analysis by calling attention to the unique qualities of localities" (Shelley and Flint 2000:80).

It is useful to revisit an old debate between Latin American historian Steve Stern and Immanuel Wallerstein (Stern 1988a, 1988b; Wallerstein 1988) because such debates are repeated and amplify the disrespect for fieldwork. Their debate concerned the importance of the sixteenth century Latin American periphery to the world-systemic structure and the question of whether

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[8] Bergesen and Lizardo assert that world-systems (and also world polity) research assumes the proposition of the existence of a global level of causal dynamics and processes that is purely autonomous from lower levels entities such as individuals and nation-states (see Bergesen and Lizardo 2008).

[9] Alam (2006), for example, relies on World Bank data while attempting to make a regional argument.

[10] The mainstream or modernization school language of 'levels of development' – as opposed to world-systemic relations of production, for example – slips into the language of such research (e.g. Shandra et al. 2008:11).

and when it became capitalist. In response to Stern's attempt to argue for the agency of local actors in Potosi, Wallerstein argued, "Every detail provided by Stern is precisely what one might have *deduced* from a world-systems perspective, and most of them are indeed presented in my work" (Wallerstein 1988:874, emphasis in original). This statement implies a sort of totalizing history in which particular details make little contribution to our understanding of the world-system. Indeed, for Wallerstein, generalization is the more difficult task and the task to which social science is called:

> We can always pinpoint differences. It is the easiest of scholarly tasks since everything is always different in some ways from everything else across time and space. What is harder and takes priority is to discern similarities. (Wallerstein 1988:881)

Generalizing from this critique would then suggest that fieldwork would only be valuable if it presented empirical facts not deducible from a world-systems perspective and if it assists in the generalization implied by the theoretical framework.

Wallerstein further notes that resistance by indigenous people to exploitation for mining and agriculture is natural, obvious, and also deducible from the world-systems perspective because labor is positioned within global structures of exploitation. "There was nothing special in the fact that Indians in Peru resisted." What matters to a world-systems scholar like Wallerstein is "why, and to what degree, their resistance succeeded in ameliorating their situation." (Wallerstein 1988: 875). Here we might agree – and in a contemporary situation, research into such resistance addressing degrees of and explanations for successful resistance would be welcome. Unfortunately, however, Wallerstein closes the debate because, as Stern acknowledges, the resistance was not in fact very successful at all in the face of a brutal intensification of exploitation.

Some recent contributions to historical and world-systemic sociology, however, offer powerful suggestions and exemplars that may be useful to a fuller understanding of structural fieldwork. The sorts of theoretical insights that this work may open up are analyzed, for example, in Swyngedouw's (2004) idea of "glocalization" as a simultaneously global and local process and – more challenging yet – in Sassen's (2008) notion of "third spaces" that are neither global nor local. In fact, Wallerstein is not so determinist. He himself argues that the local is important – it's just not *local* (in the way that most scholars take it to be).[11] As the passage above continues, after analyzing similarities we can turn to differences, but "One wants to be sure that a difference matters, that it truly suggests transformation" (Wallerstein 1988:881). Yet, O'Hearn (2001:2) explains, "local forces resist and *collaborate*," and the relationship between "*big* external forces" and "*small* local forces" haunts our studies of economic change. Structural fieldwork is at least one important way to examine how "remarkable people in remarkable institutions" may transcend the determinism of history – or may fail – but always are part of the exercise of power (O'Hearn 2001:2).

Debates in comparative and historical sociology have led to a considerable amount of more nuanced understandings of the relationship between specificity and theorizing (Abbott 1992; McMichael 1990; O'Hearn 2001; Paige 1999). Two contributions stand out for their

[11] On this point see also Swyngedouw (2004), McMichael (1996), Paige (1999).

relevance to this paper. There is recognition of the importance, first, of finding analytical space between nomothetic and ideographic extremes and second, of illuminating the mutual constitution of the global and the local. As in structural fieldwork, specificity is encountered through the lenses of theory, and conversely, theory is produced through encounters with (field) data.

Regarding the first contribution, Jeffrey Paige proposes that we aspire to 'historically conditional theory', which he defines as "theories that explicitly specify the range of historical conditions under which the theory is thought to apply" (Paige 1999:785). Although much world-systems theory "shares with statistical analysis this concern with universal social process and neglect of anomalies" (Paige 1999:797), historical conditional theorizing avoids an ambition toward abstract, universal or trans-historical theory. At the same time, it aims for much more than case-specific conjunctural explanation. Seidman's work is highlighted by Paige, too, for its comparison of militance in South Africa and Brazil that does not fall prey to the weaknesses of Skocpol's (1979) Millean comparison and her search for universal laws of revolution. Instead, Seidman starts from anomalies based in theory: failure of revolution among industrial proletariat and failure of modernization to incorporate workers. As a result, Seidman's comparison produces new theoretical insights into the potential for social movement unionism in rapidly industrializing semiperipheral societies (see Paige 1999:792-3).

Second, regarding the global and the local specifically in the context of Wallerstein and world-system theory,[12] historically conditional theory provides a refreshing analytical departure from the Wallerstein-Stern debate. In this regard, Paige highlights Gocek's (1996) work on the Ottoman empire because it makes what is unproblematic in "the Wallersteinian orrery" into an anomaly worthy of study. That is, the very peripherality of the Ottoman society is explained not by the world-system's (core) need for a periphery but by the historical emergence of a 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie' split from the marginalized, ethnic minority commercial segments. In O'Hearn's analysis of the Atlantic economy he produces an "incorporated local history" that demonstrates how Ireland's history was "subordinate *and* critical, peripheral *and* substantial (O'Hearn 2001:1). To take an example that brings us back to structural fieldwork, Bunker and Ciccantell's (2005) study of the role of raw materials and transport in hegemonic rises emanates from their intimate knowledge of resource peripheries. Building on this knowledge, they construct a broader analysis that demonstrates "how local materio-spatial relations and processes in the Amazon intersect with, and partially constitute, the world-system as it transforms and is transformed by systemic changes in cycles of accumulation" (Bunker and Ciccantell 2005:73). This is an example of structural fieldwork since the case(s) are not just illustrative of 'universal' processes (Walton 1992). The goal of structural fieldwork, as Paige (1999:797) concludes for comparative historical analysis, is to discover causal principles through attention to anomalies.

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[12] There is a tension that is worth noting between the depiction of Wallerstein's work that we offer in this paper, in accordance with a number of critics, on the one hand, and Wallerstein's own insistence that he *is* interested in variation and the merging of nomothetic and ideographic approaches into historical social science. On more than one occasion, Wallerstein has insisted that world-systems is an *approach* – not a theory – and is merely clearing the underbrush of erroneous social science assumptions inherited from the late nineteenth century (e.g. Wallerstein 1991; Tilly 1984).

VISIBILITY, OR HOW FIELDWORK CAN – AND DOES – CONTRIBUTE TO MACRO SOCIOLOGY

Like the structures they purport to study, structural fieldwork has been less visible in sociology than it might be. In fact, much less common than the dominant type of fieldwork research and pedagogy are discussions of methodology centered on understanding how people build, accommodate, respond to, resist, or overturn structures in their lives. It is not that sociologists and anthropologists conduct this finely textured work as do even the rogue political scientist and economist. On the contrary, there is a strong tradition of field research that has helped us understand how people respond to, is guided by, or overturns structures of power and inequality. In addition, more squarely in political economy of the world-system research, there are contributions that force us to re-think and even revise our theoretical assumptions about the functioning of the world-system.

Take, for example, Philippe Bourgois' (1996) masterful work on the organization of social and economic life around the crack epidemic in New York, *In Search of Respect*. Bourgois situates this study within a history of migration and deindustrialization, two structural dynamics that exerted great influence on the lives, opportunities, and choices of the New York crack dealers, consumers, and family members to whom he dedicated a four-year study. Or take an example from Cecilia Menjívar (2000), whose work *Fragmented Ties*, revealed how Salvadoran immigrants rely on networks in making the journey from their homes to San Francisco. Menjívar elegantly weaves analysis of structures of class, gender, poverty, and international inequality to demonstrate how networks both facilitate and pose obstacles for new migrants. Both of these highly regarded works begin their stories with questions from political economy, with dynamics of migration, occupational shifts, and poverty driven by globalization. Both authors address the importance of locale and how it relates to power, and both have spent extensive time in the field on these studies, important to document change. Although both Bourgois and Menjívar address the perceptions of workers and family members, their intent is not to address structures of meaning, but to lay bare a stratification system that has disadvantaged them because of structural changes and structured inequality. Both authors examine the effect of markets, states, race, and class systems on their informants. In short, they are revealing the effects of political economy.[13]

These books are exemplars for their finely-textured research and analysis; they are only a small sample of a multitude of books and articles that take structural issues as the starting points for ethnographic and field research. Indeed, much of the work on resistance to globalization relies on some kind of field research. Certainly this is the case in many studies of social movements confronting systemic-driven hardships. In a fascinating example, Jaffee's (2007) *Brewing Justice* compares the experiences of Mexican coffee farmers with fair trade and free trade coffee. He thereby illustrates the limits to and precarious character of resistance to the market system via (alternative) market mechanisms. The costs and benefits are chosen and experienced by farmers and traders embedded in commodity chains.

How do these exemplars of structural fieldwork contribute to the theoretical assumptions of world-systems theory? First, both Menjivar and Bourgois demonstrate that the experiences of

[13] There are dozens of further examples that pose structural questions and answer them with fieldwork. See, for example, Bickham-Mendez 2005; Gay 1994; Haber 2006: Goldman 2005; Li 2007; Paige 1997; Peluso 1992; Salamon 2003; Ulysse 2007).

core and periphery are not always so separate. Both works offer ways to rethink how the intersections of inequalities are experienced. The economic shifts in the United States and their differential impacts on agents in different class positions intersect with inequalities of race and gender. Second, these works show the importance of the national even within the core of the world-system. For Menjivar, it is economic power that brings migrants to the US. For Bourgois, neoliberalism in the US has exacted a differential cost from an increasingly vulnerable population as the national occupational structure shifts. Third, both provide us with examples of a de-totalizing of history in their examination of agents in contexts defined by both world-systemic structures of inequality and those based in local economics, politics, and culture. Finally, these works coincide in challenging the Wallersteinian position that we need to examine long sweeps of history to find transformational change. Unless we prioritize only historical methodologies, how do we know if we are living in such a time without doing work that painstakingly observes the process of change? In those moments where we find that such change is not occurring, it is important to document and understand how change is prevented.

Despite the great number of studies in political economy based in fieldwork, few have tried to unpack how political economy-informed field research differs from research that takes a constructionist or interactionist approach. We believe this methodological lacuna helps us understand why such work is not sufficiently regarded among many who pursue world-systems analysis. In short, readers of research based in structural fieldwork may have to dig deep to discover the fieldwork underlying the writing.

When the macro-ethnographic strategies of structural fieldwork are articulated at all, they are too often buried or hidden in published works. As Schrank (2006) notes, the best places to look for inklings of the role of fieldwork in providing the depth of knowledge that political economy and world-systems fieldworkers possess are books' acknowledgments, prefaces and introductions. Even here, structural fieldwork discussion is not given its due. Derlugian (2005) directly observes that his first chapter's description of Chechnya is the sort of depiction that good, sensitive investigative journalists might produce – a kind of unfortunate self-derogation of fieldwork, although that is not our point here. Perhaps because of the world-system bias against fieldwork, Derlugian gives us little discussion of how he conducted the research. Not only does the absence of this discussion fail to reveal the exercise of the method, it raises (in the minds of those critical of fieldwork) questions about the *plausibility* of his insights.

To take another example, in Gay Seidman's (1994) *Manufacturing Militance*, we are provided with a two-page section at the end of the Introduction on Sources. On the one hand, she assures us that her study of the unexpectedly militant social movement unions relies on "both secondary and primary sources in all the chapters." (Seidman 1994: 13). On the other hand, she explains her reluctance to rely fully on the field data because of fieldwork's unreliability and by the authoritarian circumstances of her fieldwork. Arguing that memories can be deceptive, she relies on their written records, or 'grey records' [This is not Seidman's term but ours. Could be single quotation marks or none.] such as minutes of meetings and discussion papers, as well as public records such as interviews of activists, and articles in the press. A further problem presented itself in differential access to information due to different levels of safety available to her informants. While Brazil had recently transitioned to a civilian government, and activists began to produce their own histories, South Africa had not yet done so, and self-censorship was a problem. Seidman therefore opted for confidential interviews whose anonymity she preserved. Indeed, we could find only four or five footnotes to her interviews in the hundreds of footnotes.

There is no doubt, however, that her study is squarely situated within an understanding of Brazil and South Africa's location within global structures, both spatially and temporally. Her puzzle is why militant, rather than docile, unions formed in two "newly industrializing societies." She builds consciously on Burawoy's deep ethnography of manufactured consent in advanced capitalist countries like the US and comes to the conclusion that it is precisely the sorts of competitive pressures that exist in the periphery that may "inadvertently manufacture new sources of militance" (Seidman 1994:12). Seidman's book gives us important detail on union activity, and clear macro-sociological analysis.[14] But we are not provided with much guidance on how exactly to proceed with structural fieldwork.

Some of the few works that try to address what a globally informed field analysis looks like, and has to contribute to structurally-oriented social science, have been created by Michael Burawoy (and colleagues) in his two edited volumes derived from his ethnography classes, and in his work discussing the extended case study method. It is the uniqueness of these works that demonstrates the cliché that the exception proves the rule.

Burawoy et al. (2000) provide us with a series of essays on globally grounded field research. Whether it is an advantaged set of migrants from Kerala, India, whose successful migration from the periphery has everything to do with changing occupational requisites in the core (George 2000), to the devastating impacts of globalization on shipyard workers (Blum 2000), to new careers and opportunities created by the newly privileged place of information technology on the occupational structure in the US and Ireland (Ó Riain 2000), Burawoy and his students grapple with methodological difficulties emerging from field research on the impacts of political economic change and world-systemic dynamics on workers and families.

How can ethnography contribute to an understanding of globalization, given the methodological limitations of understanding so many far-flung dynamics driven by structural change? Burawoy answers that our work must be 'embedded in 'time-space rhythms' which define everyday life both local and global. More precisely, understanding global connections may require studies in multiple field sites as a way to understand the reality of global processes. Multiple siting makes comparisons across cases possible, allowing us to make wider claims than we might otherwise. With this data, we may then "assemble a picture of the whole by recognizing diverse perspectives from the parts, from singular but connected sites" (Burawoy et al. 2000:5).[15]

Field research driven by structural theories must unite what may seem like an uneasy alliance between diverging analytical strands: on one hand, researchers must pay careful attention to local histories and dynamics to truly understand the particularities of their 'case'.[16] On the

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[14] Seidman also shows us that the constancy of power, suggested by examining long sweeps of history and the slow movements among nations across core, semi-periphery, and periphery, is in fact not so constant, and that hierarchies are instead disrupted through the activities of organized groups regardless of the world-systemic moment.

[15] Marcus (1986, 1995) has generated considerable interest for his development of the multi-sited ethnography; Nash (2008) notes that Hewitt de Alcantara (1984) and Kuper (1983) preceded Clifford and Marcus's collection by several years.

[16] Case studies pose their own set of methodological questions, from what a study is indeed a case of and how it contributes to theory (Ragin and Becker 1992) to how cases genuinely expand and challenge our theoretical understandings (Walton 1992; Schrank 2006). We recognize that many

other hand, careful understanding of the particular must be joined to an analysis focused on seeing wider links – discourses, events, etc. that embody global roots. Case-specific experiences of globalization, whether it is resistance, accommodation, facilitation, or some other, according to Burawoy, helps us trace global forces on local lives and choices.

The 'extended case study method' provides a model for structural fieldworkers as we are urged to extend our observations over time and space, while our theoretical analysis extends "out from micro process to macro forces" to help us understand "where the part is shaped by the whole, the whole being represented by 'external forces'" (Burawoy et al. 2000:27). In our search to locate and understand the reciprocity of global and local, Burawoy warns us against objectification, "constituting the extralocal as forces gives them a false sense of durability." (Burawoy et al. 2000: 27). This caution should especially resound with world-system researchers, as the historical sweep of much of our analysis predisposes us often to look for persistence rather than change. We suggest that field research offers the world-system perspective exactly the opposite: in the work we are highlighting, authors instead show how structure is located in people's lives, and often how people struggle to make change.

Gille and Ó'Riain (2002), following Burawoy, suggest that one of the questions that globalization poses for ethnographic study is 'where is the there of our interests?' Locale is an important question, to be sure, but structural fieldwork looks also at new and different systems and spatial arrangements, while focusing largely on power relationships. Place continues to be central. Yet, place is not understood just as examining locales of political contestation. Instead, in structural fieldwork, places are where systems themselves are produced, re-produced, and contested.

The issue of place also brings up new trends of multi-sited global ethnographic work. In our view, counter to current trends, structural fieldwork need not be multi-sited so long as it takes into account the *impacts* of different *sites*; that is, how geographies of power create disadvantage and advantage in the locales studied. As structural fieldworkers, we are less concerned about locations of flows or networks, but of the influence of structures upon our locations of study. Here our position is similar to Gille and Ó'Riain's warning that those who focus on flows or networks miss local and place-based manifestations of globalization. Structural fieldwork examines places of globalization, and how lives have been globalized, rather than finding places in flows or networks, or in cross-border relations.

Our view of revisits and Burawoy's differ in some ways, but he captures our position when he writes:

> Instead of inferring generality directly from data, we can move from one generality to another, to more inclusive generality. We begin with our favorite theory but seek not confirmations but refutations that inspire us to deepen that theory. Instead of discovering grounded theory we elaborate existing theory. (Burawoy 1998:16)

Yet where Burawoy suggests that our unique cases help us deepen that 'favorite' theory, we suggest it is the revisiting process and the comparison to other like cases that help us

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case studies rely on field research. We hope to expand our discussion at a later date, but here we refer only to the contributions of field research.

understand what are generalizable cases, and what are more unique. This is not to reject the contributions of those cases that are truly unique, but instead to suggest that it is one of the contributions of world-systems that drive us to look for more common dynamics and processes, and how that process further refines theory.

We also applaud global ethnographers' focus on agency, which too many structural analyses miss, regardless of the methodology used. But agency must always be understood within and as it relates to structure (Sewell 1992). Otherwise, we risk a return to the structural-functionalism of prior modernization theory-inspired fieldwork (Friedman 2000). We believe structural fieldwork is most able to examine agency through responses to structures of economies, politics, and cultures, and the intersections of these structures.

Schrank (2006) also helps us understand how case studies, often based in field research, provide the nuances often missed or misread by the 'large-N' research that often characterizes world-system study. For Schrank, case studies provide the conceptual clarity that we believe may be missed by overly devoted adherence to a pre-established theoretical model. This is not to say that Schrank advocates some kind of naïve relationship to the field, in which the researcher enters with no presuppositions, indeed, almost without any prior knowledge. This position, which dates from interactionist and social psychological based studies in sociology's past (e.g. Whyte 1981), is no longer tenable. No serious field researcher enters into a site without deep previous study at this point. That deep engagement may well be based in studies that rely on broad explanations such as the world-systems perspective. Like Burawoy, Schrank tells us that the dynamics of inequality and power are better understood through engagement in case studies. In turn, these often rely on the ethnographic work that we believe is too often ignored by world-systems practitioners.

It is the extension of theory to which world-system or global ethnographers can most contribute. When we see differences from our theoretical expectations, or indeed find something new, we can contribute to the nuances of a macro theory that, in its pursuit of sweeping explanations, may have missed an issue of importance – or gotten it wrong (Burawoy 1998). Indeed, it is the theory building and even testing that is so crucial to the progress of social research where ethnographic methods contribute the most.

HOW IS IT DONE? (HOW HAVE WE DONE IT)

How have fieldworkers contributed to world-systems analysis, or to other ways of studying political economy? Derlugian (2005) provides one example as he defies the critique of 'small things' in his biography of an activist by situating the investigation of one life within the wide flows of history, and demonstrates how those interactions contribute to social theory. In his words,

> Close empirical analysis of (such) micro-processes can help us to cut the building blocks useful for constructing explanations on a larger scale. To put it another way: a comprehensive interpretation of specific micro-interactions necessarily requires articulating their relational position with macro-contexts; but by the same token, an account of global trends will have no force or substance unless its observations and analyses are rooted in empirical situations. (Derlugian 2005:10)

We agree with Derlugian's strategy, as it contributes to the ability

> …to grasp the complex and dynamic interplay between the movement of historical structures and the actions of a particular man as he struggles to stay on course in relation to shifting political opportunities and constraints . . . (and) allows us to reexamine some common assumptions regarding different structural forces that might otherwise remain hidden under over-familiar labels. (Derlugian 2005:11)

In the sections that follow, we offer brief summaries of our research based in structural fieldwork, and how we believe it has contributed to wider theory.

Neoliberal Democratization and the Illusion of Civil Society[17]

Shefner's work in Guadalajara, Mexico, began in 1991, and continued through 2006. Initially that work focused on social movements and their challenge to the neoliberal policies imposed by a succession of PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) governments. By 1994, he had begun studying how a community organization was able to take advantage of some of the unintended political consequences of neoliberalism. Neoliberal policies, as is widely known, try to shrink the welfare state, as well as limiting other state efforts at pro-labor and pro-poor economic regulation. The tradition of PRI patronage delivered to neighborhood organizations had long been a strategy to maintain the party's peculiar blend of clientelist and corporatist dominance. Neoliberal policies damaged the viability of that form of state control by shrinking some of the resources that the state party relied upon to elicit loyalty. The shrinking of patronage resources in urban Mexico eroded the logic of clientelism. Why be a client, after all, if the patron was not forthcoming with resources? In this way, the global neoliberal shift ironically created political opportunities for alternative organizing not just at the wider social movement level, but also at the level of community organizations that had provided a bulwark for national political domination.

Shefner began his structural fieldwork during a year long ethnographic study in 1994. During that period, a great amount of time was spent interviewing members and leaders of the community organization, the UCI (Union de Colonos Independientes, or the Union of Independent Settlers), their supporters in nongovernmental organizations, their supporters in the neighborhood, and their enemies from PRI affiliated organizations. Additionally, he was able to speak to a number of government officials with whom the UCI had consistent contact in their struggles for urban social services such as potable water, sewers, and electricity that had been promised them during the 20-year life of their neighborhood. The UCI was also an important member of a variety of coalitions, and was funded by a political group affiliated to the Mexican Jesuit order, and Shefner gained access to those organizations as well. In addition to observing the neighborhood and interviewing principal actors, he spent time observing events as diverse as organizational and coalition meetings, demonstrations and government building takeovers, parties, rallies, and the entirety of group organizational life. Over the year, he came to know

[17] This section is based on Shefner 1999, 2000, 2001, 2007, and 2008.

people, issues, and the area well, and became deeply impressed by the addition of democratization to the more traditional community agenda of urban services.

Shefner continued to work in Guadalajara studying the UCI and its activity for the next 12 years, making subsequent fruitful, if shorter, trips in 1997, 1998, 2001, 2003, and 2006.[18] Returning in this way allowed him not only to continue to study the UCI within the theoretical contexts of neoliberal economic policy and clientelist community organizing, but to gauge local outcomes of the formal democratization of Mexico's political system. By 1995, opposition parties from the right and left had made important gains in local, state, and federal office; in 2000, the PRI finally lost the presidency after decades of control. Following this empirical case allowed not only continued examination of the ongoing implications of neoliberal economic policy on political change at the community level, but also the opportunity to see how formal democratization changed the political process and material life of the urban poor in Mexico. The results of the latter process were grim – materially, minimal gains have been made by the UCI and its constituents.

At the level of political process and outcome, Shefner was able to look at what the story of the UCI contributed to the ubiquitous analysis of civil society. In Guadalajara, the activity of a coalition self-identified as civil society actors brought together nongovernmental organizations of diverse mandates with organizations of the urban poor like the UCI. This coalition had important success as the local arm of the democratization movement. Twelve years of fieldwork allowed Shefner to look beyond the early success, however, and recognize the coalition failed to deliver its post-democratization promises. Fieldwork revealed fractures among the organizational collaboration from the very beginning and demonstrated how they led to the UCI's demise.

Fieldwork provided many things that help us understand how fieldwork contributes to structural analysis. Shefner was able to revisit his study in the way Burawoy advocates, not just returning to a site over time, but genuinely investigating it with different lenses that allowed the reanalysis both of previous work and current action. All of his work was conducted in ways that demonstrate the contributions of structural fieldwork. First, deep and wide knowledge of Mexican community politics and how organizations of differential resources and status work with others lays bare both systems of domination and efforts to overturn them. That is, this work helps us understand both the exercise of and challenges to power. Second, fieldwork allowed the researcher to document the exertion of agency within structure. The shrinking of the state patronage pool, driven by neoliberal policies, provided opportunities for new kinds of political action across Mexico, from the urban poor who previously relied on clientelist politics, to the newly disenfranchised middle class, to democratization activists. Third, extended structural fieldwork provided the ability to search for and emphasize the nuanced meaning of new political activity. Shefner was able to look beyond the traditional focus on neighborhoods to coalition work, to ask supporters and opponents of the new political activity when, how, and why the PRI lost support, and what material and ideological changes provided the opening for alternative organizing. Fieldwork revealed not only state strategies by which the PRI clung to power, and the

[18] One of the difficulties of field based research is the time required in the field. Although secondary data and newspapers are useful and listserves and email communication have made 'keeping up' with the field easier, there is no substitute for 'being there' (Geertz 1989). If there were, fieldwork would be unnecessary.

activity of coalesced dissidents, but also the dangers posed when social movements pursue electoral strategies.

Such in depth examination allowed more critical engagement with theories of clientelism, with the relationship of neoliberalism to democratization, and to theories of civil society. Theories of clientelism have failed to examine what happens when the material basis of the exchange relationship are disrupted; this study was able to understand the emergence of new political alternatives given this foundational shift. Additionally, clientelism has been seen by advocates of democratization as the vestiges of a pre-participatory politics; but this study has re-examined clientelism as a form of problem-solving for the poor, and indeed has argued for re-thinking the intentions of politics.

The fieldwork was also able to shed light on the relationship between neoliberal economics and democratization. Indeed, there is a relationship, but it is the opposite of that which many have suggested. For many conservative and liberal social scientists, the unchaining of market forces leads to greater democracy. Instead, neoliberalism only created greater economic exclusion, to which opposition groups responded by demanding alternative – democratic – political processes.

Finally, the fieldwork discussed in this section contributed to theories of civil society. The conceptualization of civil society has been omnipresent for twenty-five years, leading to analyses of the emergence of popular political activity that are overly romantic and under specified. Who exactly are civil society actors, and how do they work together? Because of careful fieldwork examining these questions, and the strikingly different outcomes for civil society actors over the course of Mexico's democratization, Shefner rejected the concept and argued that civil society is illusory. There is no unified group of society that opposes the state or other unjust forces; opposition groups instead match the rest of society in their stratification in power based on class, ethnicity, gender, etc. Mistaking civil society as real obscures the political, material, and ideological differences behind organizational coalitions.

Illiberal Democratization and the Illusion of Developmentalism[19]

Gellert's research in East Kalimantan and Jakarta, Indonesia, began with fieldwork in 1994-1995 and continues through to the present. This work also illustrates the four advantages of fieldwork identified in the introduction regarding power, agency, nuance and extension of theory. He entered the field focused on tracking the logic of extractive economies in the world-system, influenced by Stephen Bunker (1984; Barham et al. 1994; Bunker and Ciccantell 2005). Contrary to expectations of the dependency literature, Indonesia moved from raw log exports to downstream wood processing industries. The research examined how timber firms and an authoritarian state formed an alliance to maintain access to raw materials, control the competitiveness of the sector, and deflect local, national and international protest against the social and environmental effects of extraction. Focusing on connections to the world-economy led to investigation of the beginning end of the timber commodity chain and investigation into how it was different from other peripheries. Gellert's fieldwork eventually took him to the core to examine how access to the market was achieved, and back to Indonesia in the period after the fall of Suharto to examine the persistence of domination over the timber sector.

[19] This section is based on Gellert 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2008a, 2008b.

In the timber camps of East Kalimantan, the spatially disperse characteristic of the commodity emerged as the most salient sociological factor. It affected the power of the timber firms, their on-site managers and workers; the power of the state's forestry bureaucracy, and the lack of power of the surrounding communities. Gellert began his structural fieldwork with a combination of participant-observation and interviews in the camps and with logging managers and workers as they mapped, logged, hauled and shipped logs from the forests of Kalimantan to the mills in the provincial capital. Space affected the state's capacity to effectively monitor the practices of timber companies. The great distances, in space and time, were easy and cheap for the companies to float raw materials down river to processing mills but increasingly difficult, expensive and time-consuming for state agents to traverse to reach the locations of logging activity. Given the state's intertwined interests with capital, this distance provided a handy excuse for what were dubbed excesses by badly behaving companies.

Direct experience with the isolation, difficult topography and transport distance from urban centers in the extraction of timber, allowed him to pose more probing questions of government officials and industrial executives about the general tendencies of the industry and the difficulties in monitoring and sanctioning them. In addition, attempts to collect data at local district forestry offices were met by feigned ignorance, skepticism, and the sharing of some data that perfectly matched the rounded figures later provided in provincial and national capitals. This experience made Gellert more skeptical of aggregate data provided in a highly politicized environment. Being stonewalled by such powerful interview subjects revealed the kinds of power they wield. The ideological image of developmental success promoted by the Suharto regime in general and the timber industry in particular, with export and production data, could be demonstrated to be illusory.

During his time in the field, Gellert gained further insight into the timber company's power and ideological perspective through interviewing all levels of workers, and attending meetings they held with local community leaders. It became readily apparent that community development programs were both a sham to satisfy domestic and foreign critics of the timber industry and also that the firms did not really have expertise in community development. Community members showed public deference and self-derogation of their identity and agricultural practices while grumbling in the background in an effort to obtain roads or buildings from the firms. He triangulated this experience with interviews of non-governmental environmental activists about their resistance to the profitability and expansion of logging and wood processing. While cognizant of their efforts to challenge national elites, he found that the so-called community development programs distracted activists and university forestry students into measuring impacts, costs and benefits and the like, rather than challenging power directly.

The initial research has continued through fieldwork in the prominent timber-importing nation of Japan in 2000 and 2005 and subsequent briefer trips to Jakarta in 1999, 2000 and every year since 2004. Gellert followed the commodity outward to national and international sites of power to investigate how markets are constructed and partially controlled by interested parties. Following the commodity chain to the core market of Tokyo enhanced the picture of the creation of markets that is sometimes assumed to be automatic, even within world-systems work. A personal political-economic alliance between the Indonesian timber export association leader Bob Hasan and a smaller Japanese trading house worked to the advantage of both. As a result of this analysis, Gellert began to reject the idea that peripheral industrialization could be equated with

movement up in the global hierarchy of periphery-semiperiphery-core. Rather, it seemed that class dynamics were more important.

Re-visits have allowed Gellert to follow and analyze the watershed of the Asian crisis of 1997-1998 and the resignation of the authoritarian President Suharto in 1998. In a sense, continued attention to the field during and following the 1997-98 conjuncture provided Gellert with a natural comparison between Suharto's New Order regime and the subsequent reform period. Contrary to neo-liberal expectations, democratic and economic reform have not broken the power of the dominant politico-bureaucratic oligarchy (Robison and Hadiz 2004) in the timber sector. New laws on regional autonomy and decentralized governance led to a brief interregnum of regional allocation of timber cutting, but that was curtailed by the Ministry of Forestry. Despite high hopes for improved and more democratic governance, the industrial associations and their strong position in the Indonesian political economy have persisted, creating an illiberal form of democratization in Indonesia (Robison and Hadiz 2004). Extended structural fieldwork meant that Gellert was able to interview industrial leaders, government officials and NGOs about their responses to the changed environment while recognizing the persistence of old patterns of power, as well as the looming problems of resource depletion for resource-based exports. Paradoxically, increased integration into global markets and emphasis on transparent and open governance has not transformed the politics of oligarchy that control the timber sector. Social movements and NGOs organized around toppling Suharto quickly became disillusioned with the limited reforms of the post-Suharto era. Without a clear enemy to oppose, they have had to reconfigure their strategies and tactics in the context of formal democratization and money politics.

As these brief summaries indicate, both of our research projects are deeply informed by structural fieldwork. This methodological approach has involved multiple methods: participant and non-participant observation, interviews, as well as collection of 'grey literature' documents from governmental and non-governmental sources. It is worth noting several key similarities in our work. We entered the field with theoretically driven questions that were sometimes answered and sometimes altered during the research process. The structural fieldwork involved triangulation of sources by interviewing and otherwise obtaining data on a range of actors from the powerful to the much less powerful. We have integrated the economic and the political in our analyses of the real social processes of structural adjustment, democratization, protest, commodification, governance, and the like as they occur. In addition, we have used re-visits to gain historical perspective on the broader trajectories of change and the persistence of structures of inequality and environmental degradation.

CONCLUSION: WHY FIELDWORK MATTERS

In this paper, we have sought to respond to the marginalization of ethnography, even that ironically imposed by its practitioners. Gottlieb (2006:49) writes in a vein similar to many others, that, "Qualitative methods, of which ethnography is the quintessential exemplar, seeks to explain what quantitative observations actually mean to actual individuals." Thus, even partisan advocates of field research cede the crucial territory of explanatory power to other methods. The first step towards recognition of fieldwork's contribution to macro-sociology is to establish that these methods are entirely suited to examine questions of power and privilege as they are

structured in social systems and experienced in daily life. A further step would be to advocate to instructors of field methods that they recognize the wider scope of fieldwork – including what we call structural fieldwork – and its application to problems well beyond micro experience so that they change their pedagogical foci accordingly.

We believe that ethnography can do much more than lay bare the meanings of social life to individuals. Instead, careful engagement in the field, with ongoing yet non-slavish commitment to a wider perspective, can help us understand not just meaning. We argue that fieldwork is crucial to understand real dynamics and processes of power. It is one thing to find the geographic centers of power and powerlessness. It is quite another to demonstrate how that power is exercised and resisted, accommodated or facilitated, made covert or kept hidden. As Lichterman (2002) puts it, field research allows us to see how structure happens. Or, as Tsing (2004) argues, structures do not roll down the highway or fly into the peripheries of the world-system without encountering a variety of "frictions" that sometimes shape how structure happens and other times prevent reproduction of the exact same structure. Field research is even more crucial to understand processes of change, and to decipher the distinction between formal and substantive change in power relations. Short stints in the field may only provide snapshots of human activity. But extended engagement in peripheral nations lays bare how the international economy has influenced political power over time, or how changes in natural resource policy reflect persistent power differentials over time.

This brings up issues of generalizability, one of the most common methodological critiques of ethnographic or field research. The potential for field studies to be able to produce generalizable knowledge, one might suggest, is even more crippling in a set of studies which address global commonalities of core, periphery, or semiperiphery. Our willingness to consider context in the ongoing search for generalizability may be exactly the greatest contribution of ethnography or structural fieldwork to the world-systems perspective. Once we understand commonalities of the world-system geography, how can we further understand patterns of resistance, accommodation, or facilitation, reciprocal or otherwise? We provide a preliminary answer in this paper. It is by addressing context and detail that we can answer questions such as the following: how do particular moments of the world-system affect the power of contending groups? How do particular historical contexts affect the contemporary struggle and exercise of power? It is the ethnographer, or what we have called the structural fieldworker, who supplies these answers.

And context, rather than undermining generalizability, contributes to it. How can we understand urban politics in Mexico and Argentina in the 1980s and 1990s, the efficacy of social movements in Ecuador or Indonesia in the 1990s and 2000s, or the general and specific effects of neo-liberalism in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa? Structural fieldwork can accumulate knowledge and build generalities. One way is to look at analogous settings in Brazil, Mexico, and Peru for similarities of political economy, and then examine similarities and differences in response – based in local context and history. Another is to broaden our studies comparatively within particular social formations. If we do not ultimately emerge with the laws sought by the Chicago School of urban ethnography, and in their own way by many following the world-systems perspective, we can instead understand a range of actions within structural constraints. In other words, fieldwork can contribute to comparative and generalizable sociology without giving up insights from the field.

Our intention in this paper has been to show what structural fieldwork can offer world-systems research. Structural fieldwork provides the ability to see nuance, change, and mixed displays of agency – even how people's actions can both threaten and simultaneously reinforce hegemony. Field methods provide the ability to examine power exerted by the dominated as well as that exercised by the powerful, so adding nuance to a static class analysis, or a vision of social change. In brief, such work can help answer the questions of *why* and *how* social change occurs. Following Burawoy, we believe that this method "is able to dig beneath the political binaries of colonizer and colonized, white and black, metropolis and periphery, capital and labor to discover multiple processes, interests, and identities" (Burawoy 1998:6). We add power to this list, which is perhaps the central sociological concept of all. World-systems must move beyond looking merely at the wide structuring of humans by world-system dynamics, and instead recognize that humans are "simultaneously shaped by and shaping an external field of forces" (Burawoy 1998:16).

So, what are the contributions of fieldwork to structural political economy? Fieldwork can illuminate activities that large-scale studies miss. In comparison to survey based research, for example, there may be fewer non-responses and greater possibility of interpreting such non-response.[20] Also, there may be more skepticism about the veracity of data sets produced and provided in particular nation-states.

More importantly, fieldwork is especially suited to provide clarity about the complexity of social processes. For example, world-systems scholarship relies heavily on the tripartite division of labor in the world-economy among core, peripheral and semi-peripheral locations and powers. Yet, the world is increasingly mixed and fieldwork may illuminate such admixtures in ways that do not simply re-create the existing conceptual categories nor always serve the singular function of maximizing capital accumulation on a global scale.[21] As Schrank (2006:23) puts it, theorizing such mixes can be seen as a "pre-inferential attempt to develop the conceptual underpinnings of future social scientific inquiry." The point is not to add complexity merely for complexity's sake but to take into account unintended effects (Ferguson 1994; Li 2007) or structural consequences of differentially situated actors. It is also possible, like in historical work (Mahoney 2000), to discern path dependencies in the field.

In another example, globalization may be facilitated, accommodated, or resisted by social movements. Moreover, it may be that these contradictory processes happen simultaneously. The attempts by various nongovernmental organizations in the periphery to simultaneously ameliorate and protest against the ravages of neoliberalism provide a clear and common example. Thus, measuring only the extent to which global forces are assisted or thwarted by social movements may lead us to conclude with a misplaced precision; fieldwork is likely to capture the nuances missed by other methods. Expressions of ambiguity and contradictory positions may be illuminated in relation to a global structure that is not directly observable (Friedman 2000:640).

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[20] Here one thinks of Eliasoph's (1998) analysis of political apathy in the United States.

[21] Wallerstein, by contrast, argues, "Of course each geographic region had a mixture [of labor types]. The world is extraordinarily complex…I observe three patterns in three parts of the world, none of them 'pure' to be sure but overall presenting quite different 'mixes' nonetheless. I gave them names for convenience of reference." But the patterns are not accidental in his view but "systematically correlated" with "serving" capital accumulation (Wallerstein 1988:876-7).

Finally, fieldwork is valuable due to its attention to *process* – how structures are constituted and deepened or challenged over time. As a result, fieldwork may facilitate new theory building and testing. In short, we believe that both Wallerstein's and Stern's positions are wrong. Understanding resistance, for example, entails much more than an assessment of its success or failure in overturning domination. Studying resistance tells us about the level of hardships endured by disadvantaged groups, about how they experience inequality and demonstrate solidarity, about the resources they may bring to bear in their own behalf, or how they may have to rely on others. Understanding resistance and its potential for systemic change requires attention to its process, not just the outcome. It should be especially important for those examining struggle using the world-systems perspective to understand how one moment of resistance can presage a later one with a greatly different outcome. It is these kinds of insights that structural fieldwork contributes.

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