

## Chapter 1

# Introduction: The Ethnography of Democracy and Difference

*Carol J. Greenhouse and Davydd J. Greenwood*

To the extent that liberal democracy suffers from tensions between principles of the free market and interventionist social justice, it suffers fundamentally from the flaws in its concept of difference which make diversity and equality antithetical. That contradiction compromises liberal states' efforts to acknowledge and accommodate cultural diversity as a dimension of citizenship. This book is about liberal democracies' involvements in the cultural identification of citizens and the management of difference—that is, the bases of people's identifications with and by others in the public sphere. At the heart of the matter is the fact that official constructions of identity rest uneasily on a basic ambiguity, treating race, culture, ethnicity, sexuality, and other associations as both *natural characteristics of individuals* and *the collective basis of interest groups*. Public debate often breaks down over the definition of terms.

At such moments, it is important to remember that official categories do not monopolize the available terms of understanding—or mobilization—however deeply they may be inscribed in the institutions and preconceptions of modern life. This recognition—which implies a place for an ethnographic project at the heart of democratic change—is this book's starting point. To say that modern liberalism is heir to a concept of diversity that founders on old essentialisms is to refer to a specific history of ideas and administrative improvisations in particular contexts. This collection develops two case studies in tandem, the United States and Spain (the reasons for this choice are

explained below). In these countries, official constructions of identity and diversity are the result of both political struggle and partnerships among activists, academic disciplines, politicians, and state administrators.

Modern democratization movements around the world challenge national institutions—and social science—to move past old categories, but those categories remain embedded within institutional organizations, practices, and “common sense”—sometimes to the point where alternatives might seem unthinkable. In this regard, these ethnographic essays show again and again the availability of alternatives within bureaucratic practices themselves, not to speak of the richly varied and flexible imagination for collective life among ordinary people in the society at large. Indeed, our focus on official constructions of identity is only one aspect of the broader question of how people identify with others—though a crucial and largely neglected aspect.

Even before the new social movements and democracies since the late 1970s, some analysts had announced the onset of a critical—even terminal—period in the history of liberalism. In the United States, such assessments (then and now) refer to a social and political fabric strained by the competing pressures for *laissez-faire* capitalism and welfare state interventions (Lowi, 1979). These exigencies have intensified with the globalization of capital, and other countries, too, grapple with globalization and its local social consequences (Wallerstein, 1995). The relationship between democracy and difference is very much at the core of such confrontations, which extend well beyond economic and political spheres; *multiculturalism* is their key term.<sup>1</sup>

Not coincidentally, the social sciences implicated in the making of the old categories—especially anthropology—are now self-critical in terms similar to the critique of liberalism itself, notably (but not limited to) the “crisis of representation” elaborated by Marcus and Fischer more than a decade ago (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 7ff). The central thesis of this volume is that liberal democracy and ethnography are related cultural practices, and that an examination of that relationship leads directly to the very heart of the conceptual tensions in the contemporary confrontation of liberalism and multiculturalism—and, one hopes, to an enriched dialogue toward alternative futures. The book defends difference as central to democratic life.

Democracy and ethnography are linked most fundamentally and concretely by the significance of difference in the public sphere. The essays in this collection examine the ways contemporary democratic states make cultural identity into official business, and the consequences and implications for ethnographic practice. The overarching theme is the way national institutions of liberal democracy establish and maintain a problematic conceptual distinction between diversity and inequality, by treating culture and class as largely separate spheres of association. The “classic anthropological model” (to

borrow Comelles's phrase, this volume) does the same, taking cultural diversity as its special province.

That distinction is part of a conceptual architecture that rests—today, very uneasily—on an ancient foundational fusion of elements construed as forming natural and social worlds. In that edifice of Western thought, cultural difference is imagined as physical difference, a broad naturalization of difference that subsumes (or potentially subsumes) a range of conceptual categories, such as race, gender, sexuality, and others. These categories and their conceptual arrangements are urgently contested, and even readers who are new to the academic debates will undoubtedly have been exposed to the public controversies. To focus on race for purposes of illustration: many Americans hear “multicultural” as “interracial,” missing multiculturalism's critique of the very concept of race. Modern ethnography, too, insists on “race” as a cultural construction, having turned from the biological ground of “phenotypical differences” to the social ground where differences are drawn, defined, and made to matter.

More broadly—and more controversially—the cultural milieu of liberalism's history in the West means that to talk about culture is always already to talk about a history of inequality. This specific a priori is highly problematic, in that official discourses deem otherwise. The cultural history of the liberal state cast its guarantees of equality in terms that presupposed the natural basis of difference, with the result that culture- and class-based demands for equality now compete against each other, and bring into odd proximity some liberal critics of the concept of race and conservative critics of race-based civil rights protections. These are among the tensions that this book addresses, and that account for its focus on the terms of democratic institutions' implication in people's self-identity, and ethnography's involvements in that process—in the hope of opening new lines of discussion.

Some of the essays specifically address questions of ethnographic responsibility in contexts of political struggle; all of them envision ethnography as an active form of democratic participation. The volume opens with an examination of liberalism's tensions and paradoxes with respect to culture and inequality. As already noted, these tensions are the context for each of the chapters and authors' individual reflections on the prospect of using ethnographic knowledge to inform alternative, or fuller, forms of democratic pluralism (see Schön, 1983). While the essays involve different foci and points of view in this regard, their continuity is in their consideration of democracy and ethnography as corollary forms of social knowledge and political agency.

Overall, the book explores that rarely examined terrain between inclusion and exclusion, both within and between democracies. Inclusion and exclusion are never settled questions, anyway, but always only hypotheses

continually under experimentation and experiential review. Accordingly, the essays' starting points and the nature of their explorations are shaped by the cultural histories of the democracies in question, including their histories of contest. For this reason, some of the volume's key terms—*democracy*, *ethnography*, *culture*, and *difference*—cannot be defined in advance, since our common concern is with how their meanings emerge from specific situations, and might continue to do so in the future.

The essays show that official discourses of difference do not define a fixed architecture of inclusion and exclusion so much as they imply codes for routines and possibilities for political improvisation. In referring to "discourses of difference," we mean the ways self-identity and identification with and by others is inextricably tied to politics. Our use of the word "discourse" for such convergences of terminology, practice, and stakes is influenced by Foucault (1975: xvi–xix). In linking culture to politics, though, we are not suggesting that cultural categories always or only emerge as symbols of opposition.<sup>2</sup> When opposition takes the form of cultural difference, the social processes that produce and maintain that association concretely over time constitute a field of inquiry that is simultaneously political and ethnographic.

In other words, the terms *identity*, *difference*, and *culture* are always heavily charged with histories of asymmetrical power relations, aspirations, and vulnerabilities. Liberal democracies' commitments to individual liberty and the equality of citizens cannot cancel these histories and encodings; however, it can make them difficult to hear. In this volume, discourses of difference constitute the primary connection we explore between democracy and ethnography, as discourses of difference constitute pluralism and its varied forms. As Chantal Mouffe (1993: 149) has written in this regard, pluralism "cannot be envisaged only in terms of already existing subjects and restricted to their conceptions of the good. What must be addressed is the very process of constitution of the subjects of pluralism." Our attention to the constitution of subjects emphasizes the discursive tensions between race, culture, and class; all of the essays address these tensions directly.

The second connection between democracy and ethnography in these essays is pluralism, as already suggested above. As several essays show vividly (especially those by Sarat and Berkowitz and Comelles), the modern liberal concept of the nation-state maps a place for cultural diversity, but in ways that contain questions of diversity within the state's existing legal and political forms, as if difference is a matter for reconciliation or, even more problematically, for cure. When difference cannot be resolved by law in these ways, it is either relegated to the realm of consumer choice (as in Urciuoli's account in this volume), treated as "unruly" (to borrow Sarat and Berkowitz's term), marginalized as polluting (Chock), or silenced altogether (Fernández

de Rota, Yanow). Moreover, they challenge the liberal assumption that culture first and foremost poses problems of organization for society and the state, and they pursue a range of critical directions in relation to this familiar axiom of public debate.

The essays focus on the domains where liberal topographies are made—for example, pedagogy (Mertz), the media (Urciuoli), public administration (Segal and Yanow), law (Prieto de Pedro, Sarat and Berkowitz, and Chock), medicine (Comelles), and the social organization of academic practice (Varenne and Velasco). Some of the essays also examine pressing challenges to liberalism from within the political sphere or at its fringes, for example, by ethnonationalist polemics (Fernández de Rota and Azcona), progressive and revolutionary movements (Comelles), and ultraconservatives (Chock).

The third connection between liberal democracy and ethnography we explore involves exchanges of social knowledge. The contributors to this book have bent their highly varied efforts toward a reflexive ethnographic exploration of the social production of identity at democratic sites: bureaucratic structures and procedures, constitutional texts, academic practices, the media, regulatory regimes and rhetorics, and ethnography itself. They also consider the means, media, and agents of democratic and ethnographic practices in specific situations.

All of the essays examine the ways liberal democratic institutions—notably academia, partisan politics, and federal bureaucracies—nurture and/or curtail social transformation, in the highly selective opportunities they afford for self-identification in the course of their involvements in the production of knowledge about citizens' lives. The contributors are critical of the highly essentialized terms that tend to comprise official discourses of identity, and especially of the specific mythicizations of history, race, and ethnicity that these entail. In pointing out the ways categories are made, the contributors also specify ways they might be remade. In several essays, academic disciplines or professional discourses are explicitly and doubly subject and mode of analysis (Varenne, Segal, Mertz, Velasco, and Comelles). Overall, we hope that the book's reflexive dimension will be read as confirming the relevance of ethnography as a means of identifying spaces for dialogue and innovation where the public scripts for daily life, even within academia, might otherwise tend to foreclose them.

The essays are markedly different in focus, focal length, and overall approach. Our purpose in presenting so self-evidently varied a collection is to emphasize the richness of their common ethnographic ground. Each essay focuses on a different aspect of the terrain where discourses of difference, the public management of inequality, and the allocation of national resources are mutually implicated. As noted above, the book's emphasis is on the sites

(offices, classrooms, forms, legislative chambers, etc.) where these discursive and pragmatic arrangements take shape—always provisionally and always among alternatives. Readers should not expect a survey of world democracies or of institutions within any single state. In taking this approach, we hope that the volume will be useful to others who are interested in expanding the mutual relevance of social policy and ethnography. In addition, we hope the volume will encourage and facilitate comparative discussion and research.

## DEMOCRACY AND DIFFERENCE AS COMPARATIVE ISSUES

In this book, the democracies and academic disciplines in question are those of the United States and Spain. Our project developed out of a dialogue among scholars working in Spain and the United States (the origins of the project are discussed in a subsequent section). The decision to focus on these two countries was based on a comparison of their particular political and ethnographic experiments with multicultural liberal democracy. It seemed to us that they were, in some ways, already in dialogue, in that each country construed the tensions elaborated in the previous section in similar terms, but then chose different routes. Thus, as we explain briefly here and more fully in a later section, a comparison of Spain and the United States makes an ideal canvas for appreciating the tensions of contemporary liberalism confronted with the multiculturalism of its citizens, as well as a starting point for broader ethnographic and comparative discussion, given the transnational sources and consequences of those tensions.

The constitutional traditions of Spain and the United States guarantee cultural diversity, but they do so in inverse terms, from the vantage point of how they design legal spaces for cultural difference. In the United States, it is individual citizenship that provides the template for equality; the cultural rights of groups are highly problematic, as several of the U.S. chapters stress. In Spain, cultural diversity is guaranteed in the idiom of groups' rights, putting the state squarely in the middle of contests over regional nationalisms and ethnicities. Several of the chapters on Spain explore the process of "making" ethnicities in the political sphere, and in some cases their private remaking.

The relationship between ethnography and democracy in the two countries is inevitably political, as anthropologists and other cultural analysts cannot escape taking a position for or against the official paradigms of difference, and in response to their respective national versions of liberal-communitarian debate. In either context, specializing in culture means taking a position on basic issues under current, heated debate. The essays on Spain describe this

engagement with particular force, but it is also clear in the substance and tone of the U.S. essays.

A comparative ethnography of the mutual engagements of democracy and ethnography in these two countries has potentially broad relevance, given the new democracies in Europe and elsewhere. As democracies, Spain and the United States have distinctive histories, pluralist logics, and traditions and countertraditions that make them particularly attractive for ethnographic exploration. Moreover, both the United States and Spanish democracies have considerable potential for export, as Habermas and Michnik (Krzeminski, 1994) have noted. They advocate Spain's democracy as a model for Eastern Europe, for its distinctive balancing of community autonomy regionalized within a state structure. U.S. democracy has had a career abroad, too, but in paradigmatically different terms. Where Spanish democracy makes geographic regions the central focus of pluralism, the United States focuses on citizenship and individuals' civil rights, especially in response to demands for equality by groups who are defined (by themselves or others) in terms of race, ethnicity, and/or gender.

The book's attention to ethnography is not limited to anthropology, but several of the essays are about the anthropological profession (Varenne, Segal, Fernández de Rota, Azcona, Velasco, and Comelles). Just as national democracies differ, so do anthropologies. "Anthropology" itself does not constitute a unified field, at home or abroad (wherever these may be). The different anthropologies implicit in Spanish and U.S. democratic experience and explicit in the two countries' academic professions are part of this book's subject; the book is also intended to exemplify the richness of their variety and the vitality of the dialogue across that variety.

In each national context, authors focus on the parallels and tensions between anthropological and public officialized discourses as contexts of social action and theorizing. The essays unfold around three main comparative themes, already elaborated above: first, the influence of state institutions over public discourses of diversity; second, the exchanges between constitutional discourses of diversity and anthropological discourses of difference; and third, the transformation of these structures and exchanges into modes of knowledge, reproduced in academic disciplines and in the professions associated with state practice, especially the legal profession. In all but one essay, authors write about either Spain *or* the United States from the vantage point of one or more of these comparative questions; Comelles's essay, which doubles as the volume's conclusion, is alone in being explicitly comparative, bringing the reader full circle. In the rest of this section, we discuss some of the broader comparative issues that formed the book, and return later to the more specific discussion of the United States and Spain.



The book's comparative themes connect our project to rich veins of recent scholarship within and beyond anthropology. This has been a decade of exciting discovery and debate in legal and political anthropology, gender studies, and cultural studies, as well as new research in the fields of international relations and sociolegal studies. Contemporary debates over essentialism among feminist theorists have provided important terms and issues that now bridge these disciplines (see especially Butler and Scott, 1992 and Schor and Weed, 1994), particularly with respect to the nature of identity of difference. Postcolonial studies have also forged new interdisciplinary dialogues around questions of state power, cultural domination, resistance, and hybridity (see especially Bhabha, 1994 and Chatterjee, 1993). These new trends in scholarship stand in a variety of reflexive and critical positions vis-à-vis rights discourses, positions whose tonalities (e.g., irony) and agendas (e.g., redistributive social and political reform) are perhaps the hallmarks of academic exchange and debate in the 1990s. The contributors to this volume have taken these theorizings, moods, and agendas seriously as warrants for ethnographic research by examining directly how democracy and difference are related in practice.

That the recognition of difference should be so deeply interwoven with regime structures and dynamics suggests both a need and a means for rethinking anthropology's convention of keeping the large-scale social arenas, so active in the constitution of difference, out of sight. European and American anthropology's traditional resistance to studying "at home" remains a lingering example of a classical tradition that placed the state—indeed, any translocal field—outside the ethnographic frame. "Home" is where the classic social science view of the state as merely the distant, neutral containing walls for society and culture is most vividly contradicted by people's everyday encounters with its agencies and its relevance in the organization of experience.

The call for reconsidering the cultural role of large-scale political structures has come primarily from anthropologists and other scholars in cultural studies whose attention has been engaged by the colonial, postcolonial, and subaltern. Their reassessments of the cultural dynamics of colonialism and its historical sequels offer compelling interpretive and comparative issues for our purposes (e.g., Bhabha, 1994; Chatterjee, 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; Cooper and Stoler, 1989; Fabian, 1986; Gordon, 1992; and Warren, 1993). Importantly, as these works make clear, British and other colonizing projects overseas also involved rehearsals and constituencies in democracies at home (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: ch. 10).

The paradox of there being parallels between colonial domination and democratic processes offers broad scope for comparative research. As the essays indicate in different ways, pursuing this comparative question means more than simply widening ethnography's canvas; it also means finding new



ethnographic problems and intellectual frameworks. Some of these call into question mythologies of identity and the nation-state that are deeply embedded in modern democratic practices (on such mythologies and their consequences, see Ferguson, 1994; Herzfeld, 1987; Malkki, 1995; and Wilmsen and McAllister, 1996). Others call into question conventional attributions of agency in large-scale processes of change, conventions charged with racial, class and gendered meaning (see Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991; and Williams, 1996). As these and other works—including the essays here—imply, anthropology is always and inevitably in a highly vulnerable and politicized position vis-à-vis the relationship between cultural difference and those conditions of existence determined by the state.

The history of anthropology in the United States includes many chapters of direct involvement with state administration in colonial and other contexts, for example, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the immigration quota system, and civil rights and human rights movements. Specifically in reference to the United States and Spain, anthropology's central concern with difference and identity places it at the very point where the affirmative and discriminatory possibilities of the very concept of "culture" meet. As these tectonic forces have moved with the modern retrenchments of the welfare state, anthropology's positions and knowledge are more than ever outside the arena of public discussion and debate in both countries. Similarly, the recursive effects of state practices on self- and collective identities also tends to be rendered invisible, as if these were natural differences (but see Urciuoli, 1996).

The contests between the affirmative and pejorative meanings of diversity in official and other public discourses can be difficult to map, since the opponents sometimes use the same language (e.g., rights, equality, citizenship)—indeed, in some cases, the very language whose ideological and moral mortgagings petitioners resist (in general, see Lazarus-Black and Hirsch, 1994). The claims and contests over democracy's capacity to transform diversity into unity make up the ethnographic terrain on which our contributors have positioned their projects. Exploring such relationships—"the externality at the heart of internality" (Bourdieu, 1990a: 21)—is the traditional province of anthropology (see Latour, 1993: esp. 100–106), a province that now also draws other disciplines into a changing dialogue.<sup>3</sup> This volume's authors come from the fields of anthropology, folklore, law, political science, and public administration in the United States and Spain.<sup>4</sup>

## ETHNOGRAPHY: "THE POLITICAL" AND "SOCIETY"

Especially for readers who think of ethnography as limited to village life (or, even *moreso*, village life far from their own neighborhoods), or of

states as working their effects at some remove from something called "social life," the nature of these essays' treatments of large-scale state institutions may be surprising; we offer some words of clarification here.<sup>5</sup>

Some of the essays explore face-to-face interactions, but more of them examine how people model others' reality from the raw material of their own hypotheses about the identities, organization, and the historical processes that (again, in theory) comprise "the nation." Such modelings—evident, for example, in rhetoric, stereotypes, formal categories, and myths—have the power to transform the scale of social relationships, even when they are face-to-face. Face-to-face relationships between bureaucrats and constituents can be rendered "distant" by a variety of rhetorical, gestural, and substantive means.<sup>6</sup> As Comelles emphasizes in his contribution to the volume, the distance between ethnographer and subject is also manipulable, and the history of ethnographic distance intersects with that of the liberal state.

Inserting distance into face-to-face interaction involves registers and rituals with which readers may already be familiar—for example, "official" demands for proofs of identity and status through birth certificates, driver's licenses, and other documents (little rebirths, as it were) or formalities of less tangible kinds—whose cumulative enactments and effects are part of what social scientists mean when they refer to "social structure." These encounters and their effects should not be taken for granted, since they involve reworkings of personal presence that are central to the ways in which bureaucracies lend themselves to the transformation of personal identities and collective purposes (cf. Herzfeld, 1992). And they should not be taken lightly, since such relationships involve potentially high stakes, individually and collectively.

Accordingly, in the essays that follow, "the political" is not some "space," "level," "structure," or "public square" (to borrow current metaphors) that stands outside or above the realms where individuals consider their options and act. Rather, the power of political institutions must be understood as a component of people's agency. Moreover, the essays are not limited to situations in which people are in direct dialogue with state agents; they also illustrate ways in which democratic discourses are implicated in the ways people address each other outside state offices. Indeed, such dynamics make ethnographic study and cultural analysis of political forms and processes relevant and possible. Nation-states cannot be understood as entities apart from, or somehow containing, an internal cultural diversity.<sup>7</sup> State nationalism is inevitably—among other things—a theory linking cultural diversity to the legitimacy of the state itself (cf. Anderson, 1991).

Ethnography dwells on the particulars of human life—the "where" and "how" of eras, trends, and tensions coming to the ground. Given the nature of culture as a discourse of difference, ethnography is also intrinsically com-

parative (Boon, 1982), and so lends itself to discussions of alternatives not readily apparent from the vantage point of the givens of everyday life. While anthropology is often said (often by anthropologists themselves) to involve the study of "the Other," it is more accurately understood as the study of the "otherwise"—the relationship between the "possible" and the "actual" (to borrow a phrase from François Jacob [Jacob, 1982])—and no less so at home than abroad.

While each of the contributors examines some aspect of the way difference encodes discrimination (on the one hand) and social action (on the other), this does not imply that the authors share a single position on the complex question of whether equality is the means or ends of democracy. The contributors examine equality, inequality, and rights as practices, pursuing somewhat different itineraries as they do so. They also have somewhat different starting points with respect to identity and difference, varying in their attachment (or lack of it) to the idea of an encompassing self-identity as a rubric of solidarity and social action, or as a field for study.

Such debates underscore the tensions between multiculturalism conceived in terms of "identities" (social types) and "difference" (self-identification). Both terms operate in the essays, depending on the ethnographic context, but they imply somewhat different histories, contexts and aspirations. "Identities" feature in the essays on official discourses of diversity (e.g., the census form); authors generally refer to "difference" when they are concerned with the ways people identify themselves in some contingent relationship with others. Collective identities conceived in terms of similarity and solidarity are oppositional both as criteria of naming ("us" versus "not us") and as sociological rubrics of competition (see Wagner, 1975 and Dumont, 1977). "Difference," however, is not intrinsically oppositional but insistently plural; "difference" affirms a contingent relationship rather than a bounded set of characteristics. The availability of both terms as alternative social visions has broad implications for a cultural analysis of liberal democracy—as most of the essays show directly.

Let us turn now to the more reflexive dimensions of the volume bearing more directly on anthropological practice in the United States and Spain. As discursive practices, democracy and democratic administration are partially inscribed in the propositional canons of classic social science methodologies. Among the premises that democracy and social science share, for example, are central propositions about individuals as members of communities, communities as elements of social wholes, the role of norms as determinants of social action, collective action as structured and structuring, and equally problematic, the ambiguity between "the norm" (in a purely statistical sense) and "the normal" (in a socially acceptable sense). One way of summarizing the

significance of this shared lexicon would be to say that “community,” “nation,” “law,” “society,” “power,” and “justice” have overlapping meanings in both democratic rhetoric *and* classic social theory.

At the same time, given that politics and social science are mutually implicated at the levels of practice and justifying rationales, one implication of this volume must be to call into question “society,” too, as an analytically neutral rubric for ethnography. Several of the essays give particular attention to the construction of “society” as a particular arrangement of organizations, channels of communication, and associations both literal and figurative (Varenne, Segal, Yanow, Fernández de Rota, Chock, and Comelles). Indeed, all contemporary regimes include bureaucratic managers for whom “efficiency” means reductionist, quantitative, scientific measures of costs and benefits, success, or productivity—technologies borrowed from social science. To an important degree, there has also been a reverse traffic, from bureaucracies to the social sciences, as the desire for relevance quietly commits social scientists to others’ ideologies and lexicons of bureaucratic management. Several of the essays (Azcona, Fernández de Rota, Urciuoli, Yanow, Velasco, and Comelles) explore this exchange of concepts and agendas directly, as well as their implications for the so-called communities who are supposed to be their beneficiaries. As already noted, the volume also explores the contexts where these arrangements are reproduced, wittingly and unwittingly, as matters for the judiciary, legislatures, and universities (Chock, Mertz, Velasco, Prieto de Pedro, Sarat and Berkowitz, and Comelles).

In offering these reflections, we join the increasing trend in anthropology and sociolegal studies that questions a concept of society as a “whole” reducible to its “parts” (for anthropological interventions, see contributions to Kuper, 1992, especially Strathern, 1992a and Strathern, 1995). Such challenges are significant beyond the academic debates they occasion in anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, and sociology—at least, they ought to be. They are, as implied above, a significant counterdiscourse to a fundamental tenet of bureaucratic-administrative rationality that deems otherwise, and which accounts in part for the persistence of the pragmatic tensions arising from the simultaneous value of diversity and equality—constructed, as they are in contemporary official discourse—as potentially antithetical values.

## IDENTITY, DEMOCRACY, AND THE SUBALTERN

Anthropologists are by no means new to the study of law and politics (for a comprehensive historical review, see Vincent, 1990). Conversely, political scientists—to whose province the study of democracy might seem

more natural—are no strangers to the idea of culture. Still, sociocultural anthropology was a very late arrival to the full-fledged study of global politics and modern state-level institutions (Vincent puts the date at 1974 [1990: 388 ff.]) And for their part, political scientists have tended to relegate “culture” to some residual category of explanation “a variable, which, if necessary can be controlled for . . . or treated as a form of universal psychology” (Warren, 1993: 10).<sup>8</sup>

The essays imply that in addition to whatever democracy offers as forums for the expression of *interests*, contemporary democratic representation in both the United States and Spain is also predicated on the notion of multiple collective *identities* that must be reconciled to the national society. In Spain, the terms of this accommodation are geographic, in that culture is associated with regional communities. In the United States, the terms of accommodation are (to borrow from Yanow’s chapter in this volume) “racethnic.” In different ways, all of the articles examine the cultural, political, and legal work entailed in maintaining these associations as features of state legality. Crucially, this means examining the legitimacy of official discourses of identity and difference both as social processes and against fields of alternatives, as these emerge ethnographically.

Given the centrality of communitarianism to official discourses of culture in both the United States and Spain, the tensions surrounding the question of whether and how difference should be understood in communal terms provide a major theme linking the essays on Spain and the United States. In the United States, official discourses of identity emerge from between the competing frameworks of liberalism and communitarianism (these paradigms are examined in detail by Sarat and Berkowitz, this volume). In Spain, official discourses of cultural pluralism entail constitutional guarantees of linguistic pluralism (see especially Prieto de Pedro). In different ways, both systems officialize difference as a matter of individuals’ a priori membership in collective groups; Varenne, Segal, Urciuoli, and Mertz (in the U.S.) and Azcona, Comelles and Fernández de Rota (in Spain) are most explicit in confirming the inadequacies of such automatic, a priori ethnicizings of difference. All of the essays address the question of whether official discourses leave scope for self-identification in other terms; all of them find that scope too limited, and all are uneasy with the contemporary appropriations of “culture” by the legal/political sphere. At the same time, they do not define the problems the same way, and they do not share just one vision for remedying them.

In this regard, all of the essays offer studies of various official communitarianisms as viewed from a variety of critical perspectives. In different ways, each of them asks a double question: What is the official discourse about? What does it silence? The recurring refrain across the essays

is that official discourses of difference singularize difference (elucidating different “kinds” of difference). In the United States, the official “menu” more readily allows selections of race and ethnicity than it does class (Varenne, Segal, Sarat and Berkowitz, Yanow, and Urciuoli) or gender (Chock and Mertz). In Spain, the official discourses more readily permit selection of singular cultural identities than they do the multiplicity of affiliations and social bonds that people articulate in their own voices—as each of the essays on Spain shows in different ways.

Myths of the nation (e.g., the American melting pot, or regional primordialisms in Spain) valorize particular practices of identification in highly concrete ways (compare Varenne, Chock, and Prieto de Pedro). Such myths—taken up as political charters and academic canons—also preclude public discourses more sensitive to the multiplicity and flexibility of people’s everyday associations and self-identifications (see Fernández de Rota, Azcona, Urciuoli, and Yanow). Similarly, academic canons of knowledge share essential features with the language of law and constitutionality, as Comelles, Velasco, Mertz, and Sarat and Berkowitz show most vividly.

However, excavating discourses and silences does not in itself expand democracy’s scope. As all of the essays also show, inclusion involves more than adding to the arithmetic of voices. The essays approach the issue of silence as a complex question of recognition and address. One characteristic of those complexities (as the essays also show) is the *dynamic incompleteness* of the connections between everyday forms of association and experience and civil society (i.e., the social extensions of the state’s modes of cultural recognition). Gramsci (1971: 52ff.) offers the term “subaltern” for such lapses, together with their context and significance:

The historical unity of the ruling classes is realized in the State . . . But it would be wrong to think that this unity is simply juridical and political . . . ; the fundamental historical unity, concretely, results from the organic relations between State or political society and “civil society.”

The subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a “State”: their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States. . . (Gramsci, 1971: 52; notes omitted)

While acknowledging that such “intertwinings” involve issues of consciousness and affective ties, the contributors concentrate more on the question of the rhetorical and discursive locations of such gains and losses within formal processes. These locations turn out to be highly precarious, and—for better or worse—the meanings of identity are never clear in theory or prac-



tice. Any discourse of difference is always highly ambivalent, though it does not always make its ambivalences explicit. In the situations explored in this book, official discourses of difference are competitive, given their implied access to entitlements and resources, and ambivalence is potentially costly. It is that zero-sum (i.e., the pressure to choose *an* identity prefigured in official discourse) that constitutes the hegemonic aspect of liberalism of greatest concern to most of the contributors. As already noted, this aspect of the hegemonic order is sustained in part by liberalism itself, given the historical association of diversity with inequality inscribed in contemporary rights debates.

In this context of instability and incompleteness, sustained in part by that hegemonic zero-sum, “subaltern” names what is most relevant about the subject of difference for the transformation of politics. A reference to a group as “subaltern” underscores the comparative and contingent aspects of people’s collective status in relation to the workings of politics, markets, civil society and the state—and implies that an examination of these contingencies might bear fruit as an alternative history (Said, 1988: x). The mutual contingencies implicit in “the subaltern” cannot be overstressed, since it is such contingencies—locally acknowledged, unacknowledged, or something in between (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991: 29–30)—that remind us that anthropologists and other social scientists do not occupy their fields of practice alone. They are practicing in the middle of the field of contemporary politics. In the contexts these essays explore, pretending otherwise can only lead one to the so-called pure categories of ethnonationalist extremism or (as Comelles reminds us) lifeless numbers, or indifference.

## IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE, AND RIGHTS

This volume differs from others in the ethnography of law and politics perhaps most vividly in treating “the state” and other institutions not as issues of organization and scale, but as configurations of agents, routines, and improvisational possibilities. We have already suggested some of the ways in which bureaucratic practice can play havoc with the assumed geometries of social distance. In these essays, the relationship between individuals, communities, nations, and cultures is not presented as nested levels of scale or generalizability, but different (and closely related) practices of recognition involving different terms, stakes, and vulnerabilities.

In different ways, the essays explore directly what is ordinarily left to the concealed interstices of political ethnography, that is, the conceptual space “between” political “structures” and the “political imagination,” or between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of collective political experience

(Eley, 1994; Moore, 1994: 5–6). In this volume, we take political structures as cultural ideas and approaches that coalesce—chimerically and provisionally, perhaps, but also with great consequence—around particular preoccupations with human differences. Again, as we have already explained, there is no space “between” structure and agency, but only the predictable and unpredictable opportunities and risks individuals face in their efforts to live in dignity and security. The essays focus on ways in which the state’s bureaucratic architecture in modern democracies opens, closes, invites, or compromises cultural self-definition and expression.

Particularly in the United States, perhaps, the predominance of the liberal/communitarian debate in public discussions of multiculturalism may make for some unexpected starting points in this volume. Specifically, readers who think of “community” as the natural unit of analysis for social science may find its career in this volume ambiguous and problematic. The essays suggest (some more explicitly than others) that there can be no adequate ethnography of communities until the broader institutional workings of politics beyond community have been understood ethnographically, along with the way ethnographic knowledges are themselves implicated in these institutional operations (cf. Greenhouse, Yngvesson, and Engel, 1994; Mertz, 1994; and Strathern, 1995).

The implications of this volume with respect to community place it in dialogue with classic debates between liberals and communitarians (Sarat and Berkowitz describe these positions and their partial differences). In these debates, individual rights are cast “against” community norms, as it were; however, they presuppose that individuals and communities have an existence prior to, or apart from, the state (e.g., see Sandel 1984: 7). The essays contest this presupposition in a variety of ways. The liberal-communitarian debate construes cultural identity as if it were outside of the national society (whatever that might mean), but the essays show that state institutions are implicated in the character and significance of the very “communities” they regard as if from someplace apart. As feminist theorists Frazer and Lacey (1993: 203) point out, merely affirming “rights of participation” is not sufficient as acknowledgment or inclusion, since histories of discrimination and privilege shape “access to speech and being heard.”

With respect to liberal-communitarian debates—and more fundamentally, the idea of “the universalization of liberal democracy” (Mouffe, 1993: 1)—ethnography unfreezes problems of organization to yield their fluid and complex histories, antagonisms, self-identifications, and hoped-for alternatives in practice. How do signs of difference (in the hermeneutic sense) actually circulate as “identities” and “institutions” in public life?<sup>9</sup> What—and who—opens doors or closes them? makes a difference? leaves people indifferent? When is a person an individual? When does he or she become “an

African American” or “a Hispanic” or “a Spaniard” or—for that matter, “a man” or “a woman”? Without some ethnographic and historical grounding in questions such as these, one risks confusing moral schema (behind their masks as “communities”) for political mandates, and partisan political debates over recognition for terms of self-identity and consciousness. More problematically still, one forfeits the possibility of conceiving of self-identity apart from the state, since the a priori assumption that all identities are communities makes the state’s reach theoretically infinite and all-inclusive.

Such questions underscore the fact that *pluralism*, in this volume, is no mere synonym for *variety*. The authors use the term in a variety of ways, but always as an active term for a dynamic, improvisatory, and high-stakes process by which the state’s legal/administrative discourse of difference engages in dialogue with citizens over the terms and conditions of their self-identity. Such projects of cultural management comprise the central social fact of modern states and contemporary political life (Bauman, 1991; Mouffe, 1993). The centrality of the state in structuring “diversity” (through rights, regulation, and policing, e.g.,) involves discourses and practices that are as important to the internal politics of state bureaucracies as they are to the more diffuse hegemonies of the broader society (Greenhouse, 1996: chapters 6 and 7). They unleash forces that can “create” communities or destroy them, recognize “diversity,” and limit its expression to acceptable categories. They are powerful, but not all. These are some of the junctures where these essays explore the immanence of “the political,” “the social,” and “the cultural” in the always-unfinished work of democracy and ethnography.

## THE UNITED STATES AND SPAIN

So far, this introduction has focused on the volume’s comparative and interpretive frameworks. This section is intended as a guide to help readers anticipate some of the more specific comparative issues as they read back and forth between Spain and the United States.

The key similarity between the democratic discourses of the United States and Spain is that both systems naturalize difference, as if it were beyond question or negotiation. The key difference between them is in the way they acknowledge cultural pluralism. While Americans refer to the “melting pot” and “e pluribus unum,” Spain has incorporated “autonomous communities”—conceived as regional cultural communities—into its constitutional structure. And from these discourses flow general political commitments as well as ethnographic trends.

The idea that nations are built one citizen at a time, out of some “natural” common identity, bound together by a social contract mediated through and by the state, is central to everyday and legal concepts of citizenship,

community, and civil rights in the United States (Greenhouse, Yngvesson, and Engel, 1994; Sarat and Kearns, 1993; and Yngvesson, 1993). In American ethnographic studies of the United States, anthropologists tend to use language that concedes the "natural" reality of race and gender, the hyphenated boundedness of ethnic groups, and the overall comprehensiveness of standard categories of "identity"—even while acknowledging these as social constructions. Perhaps such elisions are ones in which many Americans are fluent. Indeed, cultural literacy requires knowledge of standard euphemisms and modes of denial that cross and recross race, ethnicity, class, and gender. Such fusions (and the confusions and refusals they imply) both illustrate and compound the entanglements of power, on the one hand, and people's own claims as to who they are and want to be, on the other.

Recent scholarship from anthropology and postcolonial studies (notably Bhabha, 1994) reminds us that these are also *ethnographic* questions: whether or how an individual might be "a minority" or belong to a group (to borrow the conventional verbs and nouns), or the sense in which there *are* groups, are complex ethnographic and historical questions to which very high stakes attach. Belonging and identity are sufficient to affect life chances, attitudes, and even life-or-death choices. At the same time, "choice"—the conventional idiom of self-identification in the United States—is inadequate to the task. "Belonging" is not the same as "choosing," since people may find themselves cast as members of groups or barred from them—and seek alternative solidarities, or be barred from them, as well (cf. Grosz, 1994).

Individuals are—as a matter of course—called on personally to assess and navigate the distance between affirmation and resistance, solidarity and refusal. For ethnographers no less so, it may not be clear how or whether to confront the ready essentialisms of contemporary identity politics without either adopting the same terms—or, alternatively, using a language so alien to the lexicons of public debate as to have no place in it (cf. Comelles, this volume). By the time it is ethnographically relevant to refer to "groups" or "communities," these issues may have been decided, at least to the extent that individual self-identity is already envisioned as collective political mobilization. For readers who are used to the ordinary public terms of "diversity," our approach may seem oddly roundabout; however, our point is that to limit the ethnography of politics to the standard terms of diversity is to make crucial aspects of the research enterprise circular.

These are not just academic questions. They are issues and tensions at the center of the contemporary debates over rights and entitlements, as the recent referenda and ongoing legislative debates over welfare, affirmative action, and immigration restriction in the United States and European countries reveal again and again. The narrowness of the terms of such controver-

sies underscores the urgency of examining and reassessing the taken-for-granted assumptions that limit individuals' social reality and legitimacy to their legal status as members of groups—and limit the salience of group identity to one at a time. Each of the contributors writing on the United States deals with this issue—that is, the agonistic aspects of social categories constructed in these terms.

In Spain and in Europe more generally, the naturalization of social categories is also central to the legitimating discourses of civic life (for analyses, see Greenwood, 1985a, 1985b, 1993; Herzfeld, 1987; Prieto de Pedro, 1992: esp. 183–192; Strathern, 1992b: esp. 128–198). In Spain, the anthropological discourse of difference apparently focuses first on geography, rather than race in the American sense of the term. The “geographized” modality of naturalized difference presupposes a “natural” reality and immutability of ethnic groups, but only insofar as they are geographically localized. The grievances of ethnic groups are addressed to the extent that they form regional geographic communities—a striking continuity with the Hapsburg legacy of regional rule in Spain. Difference and identity become epiphenomena of state forces that always lie just beyond the field of view, supposedly inaccessible to anthropological critique.

Official discourses of difference—including the language of the Spanish Constitution (cf. Prieto de Pedro, 1992)—borrow more directly from ethnographic knowledge in Spain than in the United States.<sup>10</sup> From very early in the Hapsburg system, legal representation through ethnographic portraiture justified special political treatment of regions within the Hapsburg structure. In certain respects, the emergence of the Bourbon system in Spain, through its attempts to suppress the Hapsburg system, created the environment both for liberal revolutions that sought redress of social grievance in class terms and for the maintenance of strong oppositional regional identities. This dynamic resulted in three civil wars and three republics, each trying to seek some accommodation between the idioms of human rights and regional home rule.

In certain respects, the Spanish experience demonstrates most clearly the limits of individual rights as the basis for a liberal state's agenda of delivering social justice to all. The new Spanish constitution recasts the notion of difference within a democratic state to make differences ethnic and to make ethnic differences regional. This converts the issue of difference into issues of home rule rather than into issues of general social justice. Underlying this must be the notion that home rule will result in greater freedom and greater freedom will yield greater social justice.

The resulting social and cultural dynamics are sharply different from those familiar in the United States. To have rights, one must be a member of a regional ethnic group. All regional ethnic groups are oppressed, in the sense

that the constitution must return their historical rights to them, and only thus liberating them from the past. To be mistreated as an individual is far less likely to bring redress from the state than to be mistreated as the member of a regional ethnic group. Thus, as Habermas and Michnik also note (*op. cit.*), Spain is experimenting with something new and volatile: a democratic ethnic welfare state. And while this goes forward, as Velasco, Comelles, and Azcona also emphasize, anthropologists must decide whether to serve as the chroniclers of the regional movements or confront their renderings of identity and difference, a choice having counterparts in the U.S. To step into this arena with comparative and critical perspectives invites serious, even dangerous, reprisals in some places.

## THE ESSAYS

The origins of this volume were in the classroom and around a conference table. The class, in 1990, was a summer course for fourteen high school juniors entitled "Difference and Democracy," originally conceived by Davydd Greenwood in response to an invitation from the Telluride Association Summer Program, on the campus of Cornell University. We cotaught the course, and the experience (including a year-long preparation) left us with the strong sense that a constructive sequel might be an extension of the conversation to anthropological and sociolegal colleagues whose writing had influenced our development of its comparative themes, which, like this volume, centered on Spain and the United States.

Accordingly, we continued our collaborative efforts, and co-organized a conference on "Democracy and Difference," which took place over the course of four days in April 1993, on the Bloomington campus of Indiana University. The essays in this volume originated as conference papers on that occasion, each dealing with a different aspect of the question of how democracy and ethnography might be mutually implicated in the United States and Spain.

In its overall structure, the volume relates U.S. and Spanish democratic experiments to the creation and ongoing significance of cultural diversity in both public affairs and academic social science. The essays are grouped into three sections, around three interrelated themes. Each section includes essays about both countries.

The first set emphasizes parallels between constitutional discourses and practices relating to cultural diversity, on the one hand, and anthropological discourses of difference, on the other (Varenne, Segal, Prieto de Pedro, and Sarat and Berkowitz). The second set concentrates on constitutional struc-