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MOVEMENT AGAINST DISASTER: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF POST-KATRINA VOLUNTEERISM IN THE LOWER NINTH WARD OF NEW ORLEANS LOUISIANA

by

PATRICK W. HUFF

Under the Direction of Dr. Kathryn A. Kozaitis

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the experiences and practices of disaster relief volunteers. This thesis is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted over a period of fifty-three days in the summer of 2007 at the post-hurricane Katrina Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana. Through innovative practices and a commitment to the principle of "solidarity not charity" volunteers produce not just material aid, but an ideology of social justice. This thesis is also an exercise in engaged scholarship in that the author directly participated in the disaster relief effort as a volunteer.

INDEX WORDS: Hurricane Katrina, Volunteers, Lower Ninth Ward, Ethnography, Social Justice, Solidarity, Common Ground Collective, Relief

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by

PATRICK W. HUFF

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

In the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

2007

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2008

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May 2008

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated first and foremost to the victims and survivors of hurricane Katrina, to all those who believe that a better world is possible, and those struggling to make it so. Secondly, this thesis is dedicated to my wife without whom this work would not have been possible. And finally, this thesis is dedicated to my parents: thanks for the freedom to explore.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge all the people who participated in the research for this study: my gratitude. I would also like to acknowledge all of the wonderful assistance and excellent instruction by the following professors: Kathryn A. Kozaitis, Emanuela Guano, Cassandra White, Gregory Gullette, Susan S. McCombie, Jennifer Patico, and Frank L'Engle Williams.

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INTRODUCTION

"Idlers do not make history: they suffer it!"
— Peter Kropotkin

"…The frontiers are my prison…"
— Leonard Cohen

One, of many, disturbing facets of life in New Orleans' Lower Ninth Ward is the eerie silence that one experiences late at night. If not totally quiet the area certainly lacks the contextualizing sounds of an urban environment. Gone is the collective hum of millions of electrical devices, microwave ovens, dishwashers, televisions, computers, radios, street lamps and porch lights. The car and truck engines can be heard mainly in the distance, across the canal, in the Upper Ninth Ward. Deep in the night the collective pulse of thousands of heartbeats and the rhythm of lives being lived and dreams being dreamed has mostly been replaced by the chirping of crickets, the croaking of frogs, buzzing of mosquito and the sound of wind moving through the tall grass that has sprung up in the ruins of homes and empty lots.

In the warm humid darkness of a mid-summer night amongst the wreckage of generations, even the most committed volunteer is forced to wonder, despite all the sweat and toil, if this place can be rebuilt, can it really be done? This question crossed my mind more than once during my stay in the Lower Ninth Wards and it is a question that just about every relief worker with whom I spoke contemplated at one time or another. In the aftermath of a disaster as extensive and encompassing as hurricane Katrina, almost everyone despairs. However, this work is not an account of despair, but rather this is an ethnography of hope founded on the possibilities embraced by the volunteers who came to New Orleans or rose from the wreckage to express solidarity through action with the survivors and victims of hurricane Katrina.

The disaster associated with hurricane Katrina was a complex interaction between raw nature, human negligence and historic inequity that created a needlessly tragic and deadly reckoning along the southern coastline of the United States. By now the story of hurricane Katrina is well known, at least in its broad outlines, if not its particulars. In the immediate wake of the hurricane, those outside of the disaster zone not directly affected by the disaster, peered into the unfolding horror through the window of national and global television to see images of desolation and despair almost apocalyptic in magnitude. Those stranded along the gulf coast and in New Orleans witnessed the terrors of wind and water first hand and many will carry the burden of bearing witness to such events for the rest of their lives. In the hours, days, weeks and months that followed, as the winds abated and the waters slowly dissipated, people directly affected began to organize and take action; ultimately, through intense effort and agonizing heartbreak began the work of restoration.

This research seeks to shed light on the conditions and context of the post-Katrina volunteer movement that sprang up almost immediately after the disaster to confront the harsh realities that now beset New Orleans, Louisiana. This thesis utilizes several complementary theoretical positions with respect to issues of social action to better assess the post-Katrina volunteer phenomenon. This research is based on of participant-observation, interviews and utilizes a descriptive strategy.

The research for this thesis was conducted over a period of fifty-three days in the summer of 2007 during the months of May, June and July.

Theory

In her autobiographical discussion of the development and history of anthropological theory, Ortner (2006) points out a common thread running through a number of the most prominent theoretical schools of anthropological thought in middle of the twentieth century. Ortner views Levi-Straussian structuralism, structural-functionalism, classical Marxism, and Geertz's symbolic interactionalism all as theories of constraint. While accepting the importance of understanding constraining structures, she raises a crucial caveat that "…a purely constraint based theory, without attention to either human agency or to the processes that produce and reproduce those constraints—social practices—was coming to seem increasingly problematic" (2006:2). Society and culture, removed from human agency, is an abstraction, a mystification. Socio-cultural reality is created and sustained by human actors; it is something that is both immanent in and, because of its collectivity, transcendent of individual human agents. A theory of constraining structure can only grasp the transcendent aspect of the socio-cultural realm.

Philippe Bourgois' (2003) work with crack dealers in East Harlem has been rightly praised as a powerful ethnographic account of the exercise of agency in resistance to dominant determining structural relations. However, Bourgois' portrayal of the often self-destructive agency of inner city drug economy entrepreneurs is somewhat theoretically limited in that the resistance he describes is also limited to a form of agency that only seems to reproduce the cycle of crime and poverty. His crack capitalists fully accept the basic legitimacy of the ruling ideology of American life, the logic of capitalism. However, their desperate attempts to comply with this ruling ideology only reinforce the conditions of their exclusion from mainstream society. As Bourgois notes, "through cultural practices of opposition, individuals shape the oppression that larger forces impose upon them" (2003:17). Their opposition allows them a sense

of personal dignity; thus they are not totally broken and ground down but neither are they liberated. However, their opposition is an immediate one, a tactical opposition, and not a strategic one. They break the law in order to achieve the higher socio-cultural imperative of accumulating wealth and power. Ultimately such shaping offers little possibility for larger transformations. This thesis seeks to build on and extend work such as that of Bourgois and Ortner by examining forms of social action that not only resists hegemonic structures on a tactical level but are also strategic, and thus *potentially* culturally transformative. An emphasis must be placed on the potential of actors to transform their environments because until the action is accomplished, it only exists potentially. This thesis examines lived processes of strategic construction and thus possibilities of transformation, not the final creation.

New Orleans can be considered a frontier city in the heart of empire. Such a statement seems paradoxical. The frontier is always on the borders of empire, always sufficiently far from the cosmopolitan center of things. However, there are, at least, two resolutions to this seeming paradox. One can accept, as this paper does somewhat critically, the argument that Hardt and Negri (2000) present that empire is today everywhere and thus has no center or periphery. An exploration of the rhetorical meanings of the frontier can be most helpful. Margins are settled and inactive. Margins are the passive recipients of the flows from the center, drab areas, places of exile and abandonment. One might think of a Siberian gulag or, to use religious imagery, purgatory—a place lacking great passions. In contrast, a frontier is dynamic and is made so through the action of agents. The margin and frontier may indeed be the same geographic distances from the metropolis but in terms of political, social and cultural space they exist on opposite poles due to the transformative potential inherent in the frontier.

To use the notion of liminality posited by Turner (1967), the frontier represents a space where the normal rules do not apply; it is a place of metamorphosis where potentials and possibilities are either realized or denied. The frontier is a site of cultural transformations. While it is true that a large portion of the population of New Orleans has historically suffered under marginalizing structures of exclusion and domination, this is only a partial truth. Beyond whatever deeply historic and contemporary oppressive structures exist there is also the parallel existence of resistance. Resistance has often taken the form of direct collective action and individual agency against subjugation. While margins are settled, the frontier is contested by the constant positioning and repositioning of individuals and groups in an on going struggle for either liberation or subjugation. In this way, post-Katrina New Orleans is a frontier in the heart of empire. While the Crescent City maintains many of its regressive and oppressive elements such as classist politics and racist policy, new structures and institutions have and are arising to meet the challenges of the post disaster environment.

The community of volunteers working under the banner of Common Ground Collective/Relief is a pertinent unit of analysis to explore the actual existing potentials for cultural transformation. Despite internal contradictions and external opposition by a host of actors Common Ground Collective/Relief has thus far managed to carry on its mission of inequitable reconstruction with an emphasis on social justice. This ideological commitment to social justice is summed up in the groups slogan, “solidarity not charity!” This is also an articulation of a vision of the future of the Lower Ninth Ward. Common Ground is engaged in potentially transformative actions on an immanent socio-cultural level. This takes place in a number of ways, through the direct action of distributing goods and services to affected individuals, the discourse of social justice and organized dissent from the dominant neoliberal

paradigm of reconstruction. Dissent is a mechanism of transformation. In the fissures, the socio-cultural fault lines, in the places where power and oppression meet it is only through the exercise of human agency in the form of dissent that transformation is possible.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have delineated the scale of transformative human agency. Resistance studies have aptly documented the realm of daily often hidden script of insubordination. While some anthropologists have studied large scale revolution (Wolf 1968), most have seen it as a project for other social sciences such as political science. This paper locates its theoretical focus somewhere between the two poles of the hidden and the open contest, the small and the large or, following Fox and Stern (1997), "between resistance and revolution."

On the level of the city, Common Ground Collective/Relief, as well as the dozens of other volunteer based relief organizations throughout New Orleans act as semi-states or semi-state sectors by the fact that the multiple volunteer-based aid organizations are fulfilling important functions such as healthcare that might traditionally be regarded as the responsibility of the state. Such organizations compensate for the shortcoming of either dysfunctional states or states that have embraced neoliberal economic models. As Jennifer Wolch explains regarding the breakdown of the welfare state and the subsequent seeking out of alternatives, "this search has culminated in the emergence of a *shadow state apparatus*: a para-state apparatus comprised of voluntary organizations" (1990: 4). Again, in New Orleans, Common Ground Collective/Relief was just one of many volunteer based relief organizations which appear to operate as a para-state apparatus for the distribution of essential goods and services.

Along with its position as an apparatus of social provision Common Ground also serves another more expansive role arising from its position as a small node in larger national and

global networks of activists. These activists are motivated broadly by the revolutionary notion that “another world is possible.” Such activists are likely to agree that a key feature of this better world would be the dissolution of unjustified hierarchy accompanied by increasingly horizontal social organization. As Hart and Negri explain, “the global cycle of struggles develops in the form of distributed networks. Each local struggle functions as a node that communicates with all the other nodes without any hub or center of intelligence,” adding, “this form of organization is the most fully realized political example we have of the concept of the multitude (2004: 217). Common Ground Collective/Relief location as a node of social action is central to its functioning as a volunteer community. Ideally, this thesis would employ a multi-sited component in order to more fully delineate the contours of the larger expansive networks of which Common Ground Collective/Relief is a part. However, being on the stationary but receiving end of many strands of connectivity has it benefits. To use the analogy of a spoked wheel: positioned on the edge one sees in the direction of the center but position on the center one can see in many directions. This thesis acknowledges the interconnected existence of Common Ground. In fact, without the connectivity provided by air travel and the internet, the organization’s ability to continually draw a stream of volunteers would be hampered. From situated position on the node one can get a sense of the multiple strands of connection and acknowledgement of such linkages is important to understanding both the ethnographic context and theoretical implications of the research conducted.

Methods

Primary ethnographic methods employed include semi-structured interviews and ethnographic methods such as daily unstructured interviews, observation, and participant-observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on both an opportunistic basis and, in a

few cases, a targeted basis. In total twenty-five semi-structured interviews were conducted during the period of field work. On average, the duration of an interview was roughly forty-five minutes. Two interviews lasted well over one hour and a two lasted less than thirty minutes. It seemed most effective to use semi-structured interviews. Nearly everyone in the field setting had demands on their time. Many volunteers were only scheduled to stay for a brief period, usually two weeks and as little as two days in some cases. The utility of the semi-structured interview is that it allows for on the spot improvisational questioning based on a flow of conversation but it also keeps the interview on track. It allows one to follow leads but gets to the heart of what one wants to know. Of course this maximizes the use of everyone's time while allowing for adaptive questioning or, as Bernard asserts, "In situations where you won't get more than one chance to interview someone, semi-structured interviewing is best" (1994: 209).

Conducting interviews on an opportunistic basis was a choice based on an evaluation of the interview environment. Given the constraints of the field environment, the relatively short duration of the project, and the nature of the population studied, primarily volunteers, the use of opportunistic, or what Bernard calls "judgment sampling," was the best fit for the situation. In a few cases individuals, key participants, were specifically targeted in advance to be interviewed due to their central role in the organization. For example, Malik, one of the organization's co-founders, was particularly targeted for an interview because of his role in the founding of the Common Ground Collective, but also for his unique experiences as a nearly lifelong resident of New Orleans, and his long career as an active community organizer and advocate.

The twenty-five semi-structured interviews produced a wide range of information about participants and their experiences in both pre- and post-Katrina New Orleans, including life histories, educational background, stated motivations for volunteering, reactions to the degraded

environment in which most volunteer activity and general social life in post-Katrina New Orleans takes place, ideological and political perspectives, and plans for the future.

Ethnographic Context:

The research for this study was conducted mainly in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans Louisiana. The research lasted from May 14 - July 5, 2007, a total of fifty-three days. The unit of analysis was the volunteer community of the Common Ground Collective/Relief located primarily in the Lower Ninth Ward.

As the context of analysis, the Lower Ninth Ward is a section of the larger metropolitan area of New Orleans and is located in Orleans parish. The parish is bordered by Jefferson parish on the west, St. Bernard parish on the east, Plaquemines parish on the south, and the southern shoreline of lake Pontchartrain to the north. Broadly, Orleans parish is divided up into subsections including: Lakeview, Gentilly, Bywater (Upper Ninth Ward), Mid-City, The French Quarter, Central Business District, Central City, The Garden District, Uptown, Carrollton, New Orleans East and the Lower Ninth Ward. These subsections comprise smaller neighborhoods. Thus one might speak in a general sense of traveling from the Lower Ninth Ward to Gentilly without specifying that one is actually going to a particular neighborhoods such as St. Anthony, Dillard, Filmore and so on which are inside the area of the city that is typically thought of as Gentilly.

History

In 1718, a French-Canadian nobleman by the name of Sieur de Bienville founded New Orleans, hoping it would serve as a major port for the greater Mississippi valley. At the time Bienville estimated that area of land that he had selected was ten feet above the water line. He had found the land that was to be New Orleans with help from members of local Native

American groups. The Bayougoulas and Choctaws seemed to be especially helpful. Almost from the beginning, the site of the future city was prone to flooding. Even within the first year the Mississippi river flooded the area, and by 1719 New Orleans' first levee was constructed out of earth. In 1722 New Orleans was flooded once again, this time by the tidal surge of what came to be known as the Great Hurricane (Brinkley 2006:5).

Despite periodic flooding, New Orleans grew and became a thriving port city and a major hub of cultural and artistic innovation. It has also been a site of continuous resistance to oppression. From it earliest days the black populations of the city have been forced by the dominant white elite to live in marginal environments. The structural dimensions of the oppression and marginalization of the black community in New Orleans were and are expansive. In their discussion of the "subaltern mainstream," and the centuries of structural violence perpetrated against the black residents of New Orleans, Helen Regis and Rachal Breunlin note that "yet, for as long as black New Orleanians have been marginalized, they have also created their own organizations that constitute a subaltern mainstream…participating in a long standing sociopolitical tradition of self-help, mutual aid, and resistance to structures of oppression" (2006: 746). The city's African American population has been oppressed, but this domination by the white elite was never absolute because resistance was never ending.

Such forms of resistance were undoubtedly common throughout the city of New Orleans over the centuries. The Ninth Ward was often a notable site of resistance to oppression and while it was certainly a marginal environment. Writing of the racial history of the Ninth Ward, Darwin Bondgraham points out that originally it was a working-class neighborhood for white immigrants and blacks; Bondgraham views oral history descriptions of the racial changeover of the Ninth Ward as an example of the racial segregation "…non-white urban migration and concentration,

spillover into accessible and marginal neighborhoods, reactionary white-flight…and the consequent social-urban ecological decline that results from environmental racism and neglect" (2007: 6). In this dynamic of racial segregation, one clearly sees the historical perpetration of the infrastructural and structural conditions that greatly increased the disruptive potential of hurricane Katrina.

Historian Douglass Brinkley notes that while the Ninth Ward was originally the home of German, Irish and Italian immigrants, by the 1950's it was certainly a solidly African American working class neighborhood. Despite oppressive segregation, this was a functional and productive area of the city. Residents made a living working on the docks and working for shipping companies. Throughout that Ninth Ward music was a popular form of socializing and entertainment; R&B, jazz, blues bebop, and swing could be heard on any given day. The Ninth Ward was lively and dynamic in the era of segregation. It was in the late era of segregation that the Ninth Ward developed much of its defiant personality (2006: 255-256).

The Lower Ninth Ward Today

When I arrived in the Lower Ninth Ward in the summer of 2007 I did not see or hear any of the exuberance of the jazz or bebop music scene. I only saw a blasted decaying urban landscape of twisted steel, scattered debris and crumbling homes and business. As I drove through the Lower Ninth Ward searching for the headquarters of the Common Ground Collective/Relief, a somewhat difficult task given the absence of signs designating street names, I passed what appeared to be a minor traffic accident. A uniformed military policeman was directing traffic around the site of the accident while his partner, seated in their humvee, seemed to be writing up a report. This typical but now militarized urban scene of a traffic accident drove home the point that New Orleans is no longer just a major American city; is also the site of

incredible social upheaval. Nearly two years after the storm, the city, particularly the Lower Ninth Ward, remains militarized. Even though emergency conditions have receded, the National Guard continues to remain in the area and, as the example above shows, participate in civilian policing functions.

It is this context of a post-disaster New Orleans that the group I lived with for almost two months, Common Ground Collective/Relief, operates. With a shoe string budget and mountains of determinations the Common Ground Collective/Relief was founded in the first few days after the landfall of hurricane Katrina to deal with immediate and desperate needs of storm survivors for food, water and basic medical attention. It seems that this early work was successful enough to justify continuing efforts by Common Ground. With a focus on organizing volunteers and building grass-roots networks of support and solidarity the original founders of Common Ground, Malik Rahim, Sharon Johnston (Malik's wife) and Scott Crow understood the situation in the immediate post-Katrina environment as dire. They saw the near total lack of government response and decided to do whatever they could to help. Since its founding in the days after hurricane Katrina, the Common Ground Collective/Relief has branched out its operations from simply providing emergency assistance to wetlands restoration projects, providing free legal advice to residents, house-gutting services, and many other activities designed to aid the rebuilding effort. While it has facilities scattered around the city, today the main headquarters of the organization is located in the western edge of the Lower Ninth Ward near the base of the Claiborne Avenue Bridge that connects the Lower Ninth to the Upper Ninth (the Bywater area). In this area, roughly centered at the intersections of Deslonde and North Derbigny streets, Common Ground has set up residence in a number of houses leased from displaced residents. Some of the homes are used as volunteer housing while others are used for storing supplies. It is

here that Common Ground operates a small food distribution center and tool lending library. While my stay took me all over the city, the bulk of my ethnographic field work was carried out in this area.

The following account taken from my field notes focuses on my experiences; it illustrates some of the problems that face individuals in the aftermath of the storm as well as continuing effects of pre-Katrina structural violence.

One morning, about halfway through my period of field work, while walking down the street from my communal sleeping quarters in 1800 Deslonde to the kitchen house further down the block which everyone simply referred to as "kitchen," I was approached by one of the volunteers that worked at Common Ground's women's shelter. She had a phone in her hand and she asked if I would be willing to go to the shelter and give a man a ride to retrieve his wife and eight year old daughter from a crack house. The women had been at the shelter the night before but had left and taken her daughter with her. Instantly a red flag went up in my mind. Growing up in rural Mississippi I had seen and been involved with enough family disputes to know that such situations are rarely simple and straight forward. Given the presence of an eight year old girl and illicit drugs in this particular case I declined to get involved and suggested instead that the police needed to be notified. The volunteer who initially approached me with the request countered by arguing that the situation was not as bad as it sounded and said that by helping out I could really affect the life of a little girl in need. The insistent volunteer handed me her cell phone so I could get a clearer story from the volunteers at the shelter who had initially been contacted by the man searching for his wife and daughter. Once on the cell phone I was told by the volunteer at the shelter that the woman had been at the shelter but had left to go to her mother's house in St. Charles parish and that her husband convinced her to come back to the

shelter but he need a ride in order to retrieve them. The husband was worried because he felt that his mother-in-law would use his wife's meager social security check to purchase drugs. The volunteer reassured me that there was little risk walking into a serious or violent domestic dispute because the woman wanted to return to the shelter with her eight year daughter and just needed a ride. After some hesitation I accepted the volunteer's assurances and agree to drive over the shelter and pick up the man in need of a ride and then drive him out to St. Charles parish to retrieve his wife and child.

Once I arrived at the shelter located several blocks away on the other side of the Claiborne Bridge, I was greeted by the volunteer to whom I had spoken and the man who was going to ride with me to pick up his wife and daughter. His name was Manny (a pseudonym), he spoke in a thick New Orleans urban black working class accent and he smelled of cheap gin.

Our trip got off to a rocky start because I relied on Manny to give directions out of the city. We missed a turn on the interstate because when I asked whether to go west or east at a split in the highway he looked at the fast approaching signs and seemed unable to remember. Finally at the last minute he pointed to the east sign and said "there dat way." I took the east split but reminded him that he had earlier back at the shelter had talked needing to go west. He confirmed that west was indeed the direction that we should have gone. I quickly got off and then back on the interstate head west. At the time I was frustrated by Manny's semi-drunken inability to give clear directions west or east but looking back on the incident, I believe there was another explanation that at least added to the mishap. Manny probably could not read, he was most likely illiterate or semi-illiterate. At one point during the trip Manny noticed an audio copy of Elaine Pagel's *Gnostic Gospels* in the back seat of my car. He indicated recognition of the cover art on the case that held the CDs and, pointing to a picture of Jesus, exclaimed that he had seen it at the

movies. It became clear that he was referring to the popular recent film *The Passion of the Christ*. Manny never seemed to read the words on the CD case. His focus was on the picture.

During the roughly forty mile drive from Orleans to St. Charles parish I tried to learn about Manny's life. I asked about his wife and daughter. He explained that he had put his wife and daughter in the women's shelter because the family was homeless. He lived in a shelter for men in another part of the city. Explaining why his wife had left the shelter he said, "She a little slow and from the country and she ain't use to the city. She ran home to her momma but her momma is using her check to buy drugs and it is almost the first of the month." He repeatedly emphasized that fact that his wife was from rural St. Charles parish, while he was superior for being city-dwelling New Orleanian. This emphasis became especially pronounced on the way back to New Orleans with his wife and daughter in the car.

Manny told me that he and his wife had been married for eight years and that they had lived in the Iberville public housing project but had been forced into a FEMA trailer in the aftermath of Katrina. Eventually FEMA evicted Manny and his family along with everyone who lived in his particular group of trailers. "You should have seen all of the people, families walking down the street with everything that had and no place to go," Manny said wistfully in his heavy New Orleans accent. At this point, Manny's family became homeless. He gave me his rationale as to why he had placed his family in shelters, "I can find a job, dat ain't no problem but I can't take care of what I need with her on my back," referring to his wife.

The time at Manny's mother-in-law's home was brief. The house did not look like a "crack house." It was tucked away in a low income subdivision. Certainly not a metropolis, but hardly what I would have called "country" living either. But to Manny this was the height of rural inferiority. The house was small but well kept. I was invited inside while Manny's wife,

Dorothea, collect her things and said goodbye to her mother. When I entered the house after greeting Manny's mother-in-law the first thing that I noticed was a water color painting, yellowing with age, hanging on one wall. The painting depicted Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. flanked on both sides by John F. Kennedy and Robert Kennedy. It reminded me of some kind of saintly relic, an object of hope from a bygone era. But the hope seemingly embodied in the object was not transcendent; its promise of better days was not in the hereafter but rather in the here and now, at least the here and now of the nineteen-sixties. The object spoke to both the failures and real achievements of yesteryear and all the work left to be done.

Manny's interaction with Dorothea and their daughter, Casey, was affectionate for the most part even though he complained almost non-stop on the ride back to New Orleans about how he never wanted to go to the country again. For her part, Dorothea was mostly quiet. Casey seemed to be a typical smiling eight year old happy to see her daddy again. I attempted to change the subject of the rural-urban divide by inquiring about their experiences associated with the storm. Manny expressed the belief that the Katrina was God's punishment on the poor blacks of New Orleans for not living righteously enough. "God has a strong hand and he could have reached out and stopped the storms but he didn't because he was punishing us." However, Manny did not feel God's wrath had totally abated. He anticipates at least one more Katrina-like storm that will punish the "rich white folks" for their sins which Manny understood mainly as greed. At a later point in the drive back to the city, I asked Manny what he thought that he had done to be punished by God. From his surprised reaction, it seemed that he had not thought of his punishment hypothesis in personal terms previously. He thought for a second and said that he did not know what he had done and then likened his situation to that of Job; perhaps God was testing him.

Once I dropped the family off at the shelter he almost began to cry as we said our good-byes. He kept saying that he wanted to give me some money for gas and pay me back for the food that I bought them (we stopped by McDonald's on our way back into the city). I shook his hand and told him not to worry about paying me back, and that I just want him to watch after his little girl. He hugged me and I got into the car and left Manny and his family at the shelter.

Manny and his family seem to be outside of the purview of state function in many ways. Where the state has failed them, the volunteer community has attempted to fill the gap. Manny is just one example of the plight of many thousands of New Orleanians in similar circumstances. Even before the storm Manny's family was forced to live in one of the city's increasingly marginal housing projects. Now Manny and his family face an incredibly uncertain future. Where the state has neglected, the volunteer communities in post-Katrina New Orleans have attempted to help, often in innovative ways.

The Common Ground Collective/Relief's attempts to provide free healthcare, their emphasis on rebuilding in environmentally friendly ways, their use of non-toxic mold remediation technology and their attempt to strengthen the wetlands as a natural defense against future storm surges all hold the potential for important social and cultural transformations. These transformations might be defined as a movement towards more libratory and autonomous forms of organization and participation coupled with environmentally friendly planning and management. At the locus of state failure, human made and natural disasters, urban decay, the volunteer community of the Common Ground Collective offered the small but important possibility of alternative development, or participatory development.

CHAPTER 2: Disasters, Vulnerability, and Response

Hurricane Katrina was an epochal event for the populations that live along the Gulf Coast of United States; particularly affected were areas of Southern Louisiana and Mississippi. The storm was among the worse disasters in the history of the United States and the human dimensions of the disaster are so large and numerous that just attempting to address them seems an overwhelming task. However, understanding the disaster is of the utmost importance for mitigating such occurrences in the future. It is projected that by 2010, fifty million people will be displaced by environmental disasters and associated management policies (Petterson et al 2006:643). A disaster can be defined as:

> …a process/event involving a combination of potentially destructive agent(s) from a natural and/or technological environment and a population in a socially and technologically produced condition of environmental vulnerability
> [Oliver-Smith 1996:305]

Following this definition a central theme emerges from the social science literature on disasters and hazards: disasters are constructed features of the social environment; they exist at the intersection of society, technology, and the environment (Oliver-Smith 1996:304, Dawdy 2006:723, Austin 2006: 672, Adger et al 2005: 1036, Breunlin and Regis 2006, Enarson 1998:158).

The term *punctuated equilibrium,* is used in evolutionary biology to refer to periods of relatively rapid change followed by periods of relative stasis; it can be said that disasters are the socio-cultural equivalent of a punctuation event. Many of the salient features of the socio-cultural environment that existed before the disaster will continue to exist after the disaster but perhaps significantly altered. For this reason, disasters require the attention of social scientists. It would seem that anthropology has much to contribute, and much to learn from the study of disasters because most of the major categories that concern anthropology such as gender, health,

power relations within a society, symbolic aspects of culture, meanings and values, class, race, inequity and so on, are all present in the context of disasters and hazards.

In her analysis of the Katrina disaster, Diane E. Austin (2006) utilizes a historically oriented political-ecological approach. Austin sees the historic and contemporary political processes affecting Southern Louisiana as similar to those that affected colonial possessions. In a very real sense the relationship between Southern Louisiana and the rest of the United States can be understood in terms of the core-periphery relations that characterized the interaction between the colonialists and the colonized. Over the last few centuries Southern Louisiana has been an extractive colony for the rest of the country or at least certain sectors of the U.S. economy. Louisiana represents a textbook case for political ecologists (2006: 672). The Civil War and its aftermath are understood as the proximate starting point for examining the political-ecological history of the region. Austin (2006) describes the changing circumstances of production throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and through twentieth century, and describes the various natural resources and extractive industries. The Civil War would have opened the region to Northern industrial capital.

Austin's main focus is on the petroleum industry, although she briefly examines earlier industries such as sugar, cypress logging and coastal shrimping. During the first year of the twentieth century the oil and gas industry was initiated in Southern Louisiana. It soon began to have an impact on the environmental, economic, social and cultural landscape of the region. During the Second World War, Louisiana's petroleum industry was considered vital to national security. After the war the petroleum industry was a giant in the region. The success of the oil and gas industry had its downside and detrimentally affected residents of the region. As noted previously, the economic system that developed was one that in many ways resembled the

extractive activities of colonial regimes. For instance, a near permanent class of laborers developed that attended to the worst jobs. Examples of such work include sandblasting and tank cleaning. The people employed in such jobs were mainly unskilled and desperate for work. Company vans would drive through poor neighborhoods recruiting workers (Austin 2006:681).

However, because of new strategies and methods of extraction, including deeper offshore drilling in federal waters, the interaction between oil and gas companies and local communities has changed. In fact, the petroleum industry only comprises twenty percent of the state's budget which is significantly below the fifty percent it contributed in the 1970's (Austin 2006: 683). Even as the economic interaction between local communities and the oil and gas industry have altered, the environmental impact of the industry's operations over the last century has become increasingly clear. Oil spills, improper waste disposal and coastal erosion are now being recognized as major environmental problems (Austin 2006:684-686). Austin concludes by pointing once again to the parallels of development in Louisiana with those in third world colonial domains. Like the environmental situations in many former colonial possessions, Louisiana's environment needs enormous investment to begin to repair the damage done by resource extraction. However, it appears that little investment is forthcoming (2006:687-688).

One important component of the economy that was severely affected by hurricane Katrina was Louisiana's oyster industry. Tom McGuire (2006) has documented the aftermath of the both Katrina and Rita on the locally based oyster fishing industries. While McGuire acknowledges the shock of the post-Katrina reality that continued to be bewildering months after the landfall of both of the late summer hurricanes, he also points out that in attempt to assess the impact and the consequences of the storms on the oyster industry there are some baseline data available to which the fallout from Katrina and Rita can be compared. Specifically McGuire

points to documentation of the aftermath of hurricane Andrew on local Florida based fisheries and scholarly work done on the dynamics of the system of controls and management of the Louisiana's oyster resources. However, McGuire acknowledges that these data baselines can shed little light on the current situation facing the oyster economy post-Katrina. In the case of the post-Andrew Florida fisheries there, McGuire notes that the industry was virtually destroyed and abandoned by various parties of local interests. In the baseline data on the case of the political-economy of the oyster industry system in Louisiana, McGuire notes that the industry had been weakening in both environmental terms and in terms of public support (692-693).

In his description of Louisiana's oyster management system McGuire draws connections and points to the relationships existing between the consumer demands and thus the market mechanism, the ecology of the oyster fishing grounds, the political and bureaucratic response to the disaster. The one of the most important links between the combined fate of the city of New Orleans and the oyster industry is the state of the ecology of the wetlands. Oysters require a delicate balance of water salinity in order to reproduce in sufficient numbers to be commercially viable. After decades of human tampering with freshwater flows that emptied in the salty gulf and damage done by off shore oil exploration, the damaged ecology appears to only cyclically exacerbate and be exacerbated by the effects of hurricane Katrina. As McGuire argues, Katrina encountered an already degraded environment as the hurricane approached New Orleans and this weaken wetland buffer system failed along with human made pumping systems to mitigate the damage from the storm. Ultimately, McGuire utilizes these linked but separate strands to interrogate the possibilities of the future of New Orleans, its interdependence and its historic relation to the oyster industry (2006: 701-702).

Disasters are obviously destructive events but there is an potential for creation involved as well. Shannon Lee Dawdy (2006) argues that the creation of a new archaeological record is a primary means by which communities reconstitute themselves in the aftermath of a disaster (720). As communities burry, build over and resettle on formerly occupied ground, an archaeological record is produced. All the processes that build the archaeological record are called taphonomy and can be used by cultural anthropologists. Observing taphonomic processes as they occur (rather than consequences and outcomes as with archaeology), a cultural anthropologist can learn about the micro and macro processes at work in the socio-cultural system in a way that may have advantages over more conventional methods. The taphonomic focus emphasizes the past and thus instead of a focus on the aftermath of a disaster, the taphonomic inclined researcher uses the aftermath to learn something about the society before the disaster. The disaster can be understood retrospectively (720). Dawdy sees the current planned process of taphonomy as providing an amount of insight into the emotional factors that create the archaeological record. In the process of cleaning and rebuilding some individuals decided to simply abandon their property, while other returned to carefully salvage what they could. Abandonment, reclamation and every situation in between is indicative of the powerful emotional processes involved in the post-disaster reality (722).

While accepting Oliver-Smith's (2001) approach emphasizing the nature/culture nexus of disasters, Dawdy argues that even though the etic orientation of Oliver-Smith is useful there is need for ethnographic and emic understandings between nature and culture in the context of the Katrina disaster victims (2006:723). Dawdy reinterprets the notion of disaster vulnerability in terms of viewing the taphonomic processes as expressed signs of perceived vulnerability (2006:724). An examination of taphonomic processes is typically consider to be an exercise in

etic investigation (especially in its archaeological context). However, Dawdy's suggests that cultural anthropologists attend to the emic dimensions of taphonomic processes as they are carried out in the present by people making choices based on their perceptions and actual experiences of the situation. After a discussion of past and recent studies on the archaeology of disasters, Dawdy (2006) emphasizes the importance of her approach of retrospective ethno-archaeology whereby attention to the present process of taphonomy can shed light on the past conflicts and contradictions of the society and culture in the pre-disaster period. Dawdy points to the emergence of new social groups in post-Katrina New Orleans, and argues that this development is one of the most salient features of post-Katrina New Orleans (2006:724). In the context of her argument, the new social groups can be understood as highly involved in the taphonomic processes.

Emergence and Pro-Social Behavior

Rodriguez et al (2006) seriously calls into question the commonly held belief, promulgated by the media that rampant anti-social behavior occurred in the wake of the hurricane Katrina. The authors point to a large body of empirical data that suggests emergent pro-social behavior far outnumbered instances of anti-social behavior. Ethridge (2006) also points to numerous acts of emergent pro-social behavior encountered during the immediate aftermath of hurricane Katrina along the Mississippi Gulf Coast, including the author's own efforts to assist in disaster relief. Rodriguez et al explain that pro-social behavior can be observed in the context of emergent groups which can be defined as a group of people in the context of a disaster that unite to undertake non-regular tasks and in the process form a new organizational structure (2006: 85).

It should be noted that Rodriguez et al (2006) argue that hurricane Katrina was not a disaster, but rather a catastrophe; apparently there are at least six critical distinctions between disaster and catastrophe. All of the criteria cited relate to matters of scale, and distinguish between limited and localized aspect of most disasters and the much larger extended nature of catastrophe (2006:87). However, because such a distinction seems to add little to a general discussion of disasters beyond a certain technical specificity, this paper will continue to refer to hurricane Katrina as simply a disaster.

Rodriguez and colleagues (2006) confine their analysis to five specific domains: hotels, hospitals, neighborhood groups, rescue teams, and the JFO (Joint Field Office of responding agencies); they surmise that, given the extent of the disruption and specific conditions brought about by the hurricane, emergent pro-social behavior was probably prevalent across virtually all levels of the affected society (2006:87). Rodriguez et al (2006) focus on emergent behavior within institutional structures. Their findings concerning the emergent pro-social behavior of non-institutional groups is notable because such groups represent the most bare bones level of emergent behavior.

Another key issue is to understand "looting" in the context of a catastrophe. Is looting always anti-social? Can looting be understood as pro-social behavior? Rodriguez et al (2006) argue that looting can be understood as pro-social if the taking of property is of a necessary nature and is also improvisational. In contrast, criminals who regularly steal and simply carryover that regular activity into the context of looting during a disaster cannot be understood as enacting emergent or truly improvisational behavior. The authors acknowledge the complexity though of generating encompassing categories (97-98). Disasters are unique events and every

disaster is different. Individuals will respond to disasters in many different ways. Given the contextual nature of disaster and response, it is seemingly very difficult to generalize.

From their more extensive study of looting, Barsky and colleagues (2006) make an important terminological distinction between looting (taking non-necessities) and appropriating behavior; "appropriating behavior involves a person taking property owned by another to use it for emergency purposes and, depending upon the item, with the intent of returning it at a later date" (2006:2). However, Barsky et al (2006) note that the difference between looting and appropriating behavior is often hard to distinguish in the whirly context of the immediate situation. One reason for this is because how witnesses report such behavior depends on their own perceptions which may or may not reflect actual intentions of those engaged in the behavior (2006:8).

Vulnerability: Human Rights, Gender, Race, Class

Elaine Enarson (1998) examines three key aspects of disaster: vulnerability, impact, and recovery, and determines that all are highly gendered. Enarson also points out that the study of gender and disaster in First World countries has been relatively minor as compared to the number of studies carried out in developing countries (1998: 158-159). While Enarson focus is on developing countries, she argues that since the global political-economy is a key factor in producing vulnerability, a better understanding of the gendered needs of women caught in disasters can be useful in both developed and developing countries (1998:160). Enarson argues that researchers should attempt to understand how disaster relief organizations operate in terms of gender and the enactment of gender roles (1998:162). Both top-down and grassroots groups will reflect existing gender relations, and research can help increase more equitable disaster mitigation work (Enarson 1998:165). The long term effects of disaster and the role played by

gender (i.e. biased resource allocation, culturally prescribed roles and etc.) is an issue Enarson sees as crucial to understand better how women's relations with men are affected and altered by disaster; the long term study of women in the aftermath of disasters can greatly increase instances of disaster mitigation in wealthy and poor societies. Enarson argues that serious disaster mitigation is tied to the global struggle for more generally sustainable development that enhances human wellbeing (1998:166). Disaster can exacerbate existing gender roles, that may or may not be oppressive depending on the particular time and place, but disasters can also disrupt and alter the practice of existing norms. Cultural restrictions concerned with preventing the intermingling of men and women have been observed to slacken in the transformative condition of disasters. Disasters can create unpredictable gendered interactions. Often women are found to be key players in emergent social groups, and Enarson notes the "riveting effect" on women organizing in post-hurricane Miami (1998:167).

The relations and changing dynamics of social and cultural and gendered arrangements may begin in the initial stages of the disaster, but from this starting point have long lasting effects. Enarson argues that further research in this area should include analysis of how gender specific disaster decisions affect gender equity in families and households. Enarson also identifies the need for comparative analysis of gender power at the local community level as a factor of grass roots organizing. Along with this call for research, Enarson also suggests that comparative and historical analysis should be focused on understanding the factors that hinder women from grassroots organizing. One example of a post-disaster hindrance on women is that they may become more dependent on income brought in by men in a post-disaster community if reconstruction planning excludes them from participation. Another example is that girls may end

up being more likely to not receive access to education in the aftermath of a disaster depending on the cultural priority placed on maleness or femaleness (1998: 167-168).

As Enarson (1998) acknowledges, gender is one component in a host of overlapping factors that affect the impact of disasters on individuals and communities (158). Betty Hearn Morrow (1999) explores gender as well as other interrelated factors such as age, ethnicity, class and resource availability and argues the need for emergency planners to identify and map community vulnerability. Additionally, while pointing out that most research into community vulnerability has been conducted in developing regions, Morrow argues that developed nations such as the United States also have similar concentrations of risk related to certain types of individual and households (1999:1). In terms of data collection, household resources are an important aspect of accessing vulnerability. The household is among the most common contexts in which disasters are experienced and households in the United States are expected to draw upon their own resources in the event of a disaster. The household is not just an abstract category that can stand alone; vulnerability to a disaster is influenced by combinations of factors such as racial or ethnic identity and wealth or poverty, as well as age and gender (Morrow 1999:2).

While the U.S. is among the more affluent countries in absolute terms, there is still a considerable amount of relative poverty to be found in the United States and there seems to be a continuing long term trend towards great inequity in the distribution of wealth and resources. There are numerous factors that contribute to the vulnerability of poor households; these factors include a lack of financial reserves that are sufficient to buy supplies in the event of a disaster, the actual physical structure of poor homes are often inadequate in their initial construction and later maintenance to withstand a disaster event, and these dwellings are often located in areas that are more geographically vulnerable. The poor have less access to transportation out of a

disaster area and thus evacuations are even more difficult for the poor. The poor are often employed in jobs that are unstable and likely to be lost in the event of a disaster. Jobs associated with post-disaster clean up are too often relegated to younger and stronger members of the community as well as going to outsiders. With all of these economic factors in play, it is increasingly apparent that proper disaster mitigation planning must address the underlying economics conditions of vulnerability (Morrow 1999:3-4).

Morrow identifies human or personal resources as being important factors in understanding disaster response beyond strictly economic means. Health, age, experience, skills and physical abilities are all components of personal resources that must be taken into account when assessing community vulnerability. In developed nations such as the United States, the population that is elderly is increasing due to medical and technological advances that allow people to survive longer into old age. The elderly often are especially vulnerable to disaster conditions and generally will need disaster related assistance. On the opposite side of the coin are the needs of children in disaster which can be exacerbated due to a lack of family support systems. Physical and mental limitations of individuals are obvious components that must be taken into account when assessing vulnerability. The size of a family, which is often affected by cultural factors such as, for example, whether it is acceptable to use birth control, must be taken into account. Single parent families are often headed by women and are often economically marginal. Large families that share the same household may also be particularly affected by disaster conditions due to the presence of small children and elderly family members. In contrast, lack of social and family networks can be a limiting factor in disaster mitigation. Resources from extended family and other networks can be mobilized to help relatives who are directly affected by a disaster recover (1999: 5-7).

Political resources are also important in the mitigation of disasters. The relations between household and community decision-makers can be important components in disasters. The social and political structures often promote the interest of some over the interest of others. The concerns of business leaders may, for instance, take precedence over that of poor single mothers. Promoting the idea that disasters are purely natural actually serves the interest of the politically invested (Morrow 1999:7).

Morrow points out that all of the factors can combine in various ways to affect individuals and community members while arguing that one of the first steps towards better disaster preparedness is the construction of a community vulnerability inventory which would reflect all of the factors mentioned above. By using local maps one can pinpoint where vulnerabilities are most likely to be concentrated. The next step is to provide mitigation services and programs to people in such neighborhoods on the basis of their needs assessment. This involves working with grassroots groups to bolster effectiveness of planning. Disaster mitigation can only be truly effective if it incorporates people on a grassroots level (1999:11-12).

Of central importance to planning for and mitigating any disaster is a concern for and promotion of human rights. Lucia Ann McSpadden and John R. MacArthur (2001) argue that human rights abuses are embedded within complex emergences; they define complex emergences as, “local, regional, national and international systems overwhelmed by the rapid, large-scale movement of people fleeing actual or anticipated human rights abuses” (2001:36). While a complex emergency is not a disaster in the strictest technical sense of the term, and while McSpadden and MacArthur’s main focus of concern is the plight of refugees populations, there seems to be significant overlap between the two categories, so much so that in any general sense the terms can probably be used interchangeably. For their conceptual background, the

authors utilize international humanitarian norms that have developed since the end of the Second World War as exemplified by the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (2001:37).

Central to any concern with preventing human rights abuses is the understanding of power imbalances. Among some of the most pertinent imbalances is the common occurrence of men in higher status positions to take up the role of spokesperson for women and lesser status men, and this leads to a resource brokerage on the part of the higher status men. Another area of power imbalance is that imbedded in the system of relief organizations themselves. As McSpadden and MacArthur note, a typical approach to relief work among refugees communities is a focus on the part of relief organizations to maintain control, rather than put an emphasis on the participation of the affected community in decision making processes (2001:39-40).

In regards to relief resources McSpadden and MacArthur argue that one of the most effective methods of identifying problems with access, is to encourage refugees to organize themselves and hold meetings to address such issues. Of course, the authors understand that even this course of action has the potential to produce inequalities because some marginal groups within the refugee community will continue to be ignored. One solution is that anthropologists can help identify such groups and help arrange for separate organizations and meetings if necessary (2001:43-44). McSpadden and MacArthur explicitly argue for a role for anthropologists in relief efforts which prominently includes that of advocate for the affected population. Anthropologists can advocate for programs and approaches that minimize situations of dependency (2001:52).

Socio-Cultural Movements

In their Ten Theses on Social Movements, Marta Fuentes and Andre Gunder Frank (1989) attempt to delineate and describe the key features of social movements. The authors enumerate several related aspects of social movements. The authors point out that many of the social movements that seem new to contemporary observers actually have historical antecedents, peasant, communalists, ethnic/nationalist and religious and feminist or women's movements have all existed before. However, these movements have new features as they pertain to the general and particular aspects of the modern and post-modern world. The authors point out the irony of calling the old labor movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as "classical" social movement because these movements are actually much younger than such movements as community movements for self-determination. The authors identify the environmental and peace movements as among the few movements that actually can be considered without historic precedent. However, the authors argue that whatever their chronological classification the social movements of today are the most common mobilization channel for people pursuing a common interest and most of these groups do so outside of established political and societal institutions. Importantly, the authors cite at least four idealized (in a Weberian sense) types of dimensions of contemporary social movements. Movements can be separated along lines of whether they take an offensive or defensive posture. Offensive groups tend to be in the minority, while defensive groups occupy a majority, people defending their perceived rights or access to resources against repressive and regressive authority. Movements themselves can be progressive, regressive and escapists. Examples of these might be labor, religious fundamentalist, and religious cults or millenarian groups, respectively. Contemporary movements tend to be comprised of increasingly more women than men. The authors related this trend to the tendency of contemporary social

movements to be less hierarchical. Some social movements engage in armed struggle, while others are unarmed and explicitly committed to nonviolence. The authors observe that armed groups also tend to contain more male members and are often more hierarchical. The central link in a world of heterodox social movements is sense of morality and defensive commitment to enacting justice in the world. Of course the definition of what is moral and just is a relative. (180-181).

Interestingly, the authors, writing right before the fall of the Soviet Union, argue that the replacement of capitalism by present existing socialism is not a viable option. The authors go on to argue that in the final analysis the utopian (i.e. Owenite and anarchists) socialists might be considered more realistic than the so call "scientific" socialists because the utopian socialist tended to focus more on small scale "do-able" projects and were more consistently committed to women's rights and implementation of participatory democracy and in this since have more in common with contemporary social movements than state socialism or authoritarian socialism (1989: 188).

Perhaps the most important observation made by Fuentes and Frank (1989) of the characteristics of the contemporary social movement is their grounding in and relation to the emergence of "new civil democracy." In the face of the willful or impotent neglect of the needs of individuals and groups on the part of traditional institutions such as the state, social movements have arisen to fill a void this is often accompanied by the extension and redefinition of democracy (190-191).

A careful reading of Fuentes and Frank (1989) reveals analytical leaning towards understanding contemporary social movements as being more heterodox and diverse than those of the recent past. This changing terrain of social movements drove Alain Touraine (2004) to

question whether or not it is advisable or analytically useful for social scientists to continue to use the term social movement. Touraine argues that the category of social movement is more general than analytic and more particular or historical in the sense that it has been used mainly in the context of a certain type of society, industrial. Touraine also contends that the advent of globalization has shifted and changed the traditional categories of opposition from a fairly well defined political and territorial entity (the state) to actually challenging the mechanism and processes of globalization. In this sense Touraine believes that the concept of social movements must be reserved to refer to collective action that, "challenges a generalized mode of social domination…" Touraine goes on to state, "the idea is to study movements that protest, under particular conditions – that is, in socially-defined domains – a domain that is general in both nature and application." In other words social movements must act under particular conditions contra to a generalized hegemony. Even though the conditions of contestation might be particular, the social movement and it adversary must contend in a generalized domain. Touraine identifies this domain as culture. Importantly Touraine posits a central concept to his understanding of social movements, "a social movement is the combination of a conflict between organized social adversaries and a common reference by both adversaries to a cultural stake without which they would not confront each other" (718).

One salient aspect of Touraine's (2004) analysis is his contention that analysis of social movements can be carried out separately from the analysis of crisis. For instance, Touraine points out that traditional Marxists have often analyzed the crisis of capitalism and the world system without the need for analysis of the actors involved. In contrast Touraine argues that any analysis of social movements is actor-oriented and thus involves "looking through the eyes of the

actors" (719). Essentially Touraine, a sociologist, is making a considerable anthropological argument and distinction, that between etic and emic.

Touraine (2004) also sounds rather anthropological when he argues that the traditional tendency of sociologists to understand social movements only in the context of industrial society is not analytically ineffective, and argues that as long as the basic conceptual criteria cited above are met social movements should be understood in terms of non-industrial societies as well as industrial ones (720). From this point, Touraine argues that in the era of information and communication, societies and global forces can to be understood to exist, they did not pass with the transition to the post-modern world economy. After all, while globalization has tended to blur the edges and boundaries of traditionally defined social space (i.e. industrial society) for sociologist such as Touraine, as long as Touraine can apply his culture oriented concept of what constitutes a social movement he seems content to maintain the analytical usefulness of the notion of social movements (124-125).

In essence one can view Touraine's theoretical discussion of the proper way to conceptualize social movements as a meditation on the changing circumstances of the conditions of post-modernity. While Touraine's sociological imagination seems to wrestle with notions and concepts that have long been key to anthropological investigation such as the emic/etic distinction and the centrality of culture, his basic definition of social movements appears to be a useful one, especially as it touches upon and to some extent echo the concept of the multitude posited by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000).

Hart and Negri (2000) contend that the conditions of post-modernity are laying the groundwork for the rise of a global super-movement which the authors terminologically identify as the *multitude* (60). In essence the multitude is the dialectical postmodern opposite of what

Hardt and Negri term *empire* through their book. The multitude exists but it is not quite yet true a political power.

In a very general sense, Hardt and Negri's concept of the multitude is simply a reworking of Marx and Engel's notion of the proletariat as opposed to their dialectical opposite the bourgeois. In fact, Hardt and Negri acknowledge that the multitude is a "new proletariat" (402) but not a new working class and this is an important distinction. This distinction actually corresponds to the notions put forward by Touraine concerning the idea that social movements can no longer be understood sociologically as a product of industrial society (2004:720).

One centrally important aspect of Hardt and Negri's (2000) analysis of the multitude, or rather the historic conditions that give rise to this new phenomenon, is the idea that social action is cumulative. The movements and revolutions of the previous centuries have had a certain cumulative effect on the world stage. In fact the authors even go so far to contend that it is the movements of the past that have actually laid the groundwork for emergence of "empire"—that assemblage of postmodern authoritarian ideas and practices closely linked with the new regimes of accumulation and authority (394). It is important to note that this conception of cumulative historical action is directly counter to the analysis of Fuentes and Frank who implicitly hold that social movements have no real cumulative historical affect with the possible exception of the some of the great religious movements such as Christianity and Islam (1989:184). This difference in analysis seems to manifest mainly the different over all theoretical programs of the authors. Fuentes and Frank (1989) are closely aligned with world systems theory and this probably inclines them to minimize the capacity of agency to direct lasting change in order to maintain the analytically deductive basis of world systems theory. Theories based on deductive principles are weakened with the introduction of contingency. Any lasting change or dramatic

shifts in the world system produced by social movement agency must be accounted for in the theory. Agency tends to throw to much contingency into the mix and thus undermines heavily deductive theory.

While admitting that at the movement the multitude is not implicitly a political subject, Hardt and Negri (2000) identify some salient features of the multitude which seem to them to be laying the groundwork for the emergence of a more politically conscious multitude. The multitude is in continuous movement across the globe in the service the new regimes of capital. However this movement is facilitating the demand for more freedoms in the flow of persons across borders. Ultimately, this will result in the demand for global citizenship (400). Another feature of the multitude is the emergence of the need for a social wage which differs in the old tradition notion of the family wage (i.e. males work and support the unproductive but reproductive activities of women). The social wage is based on the idea that in the new and diffuse world of cultural production it is difficult to say that there is any activity that is unproductive in term of total social capital and thus the social wage is would be a form of guaranteed income for all (402-403). Another emerging feature of the multitude is the demand for the right of reappropriation. In the old tradition of worker ideology the idea was to appropriate the tools of production but in the new condition of the post-modernity many of the tools of production are informational and cultural thus the, "right of reappropriation is really the multitude's right self-control and autonomous self-production" (407).

One more important term utilized by Hardt and Negri is that of *posse* which they borrow from the renaissance Latin use of the word. Posse refers to power in an active sense, as doing; "Posse refers to the power of the multitude and its telos, an embodied power of knowledge and being, always open to the possible" (407-408).

Another key understanding of the multitude is that of the *social worker* which is contrasted with an older *mass worker*. The important difference between the two is the mass worker developed under the fordist regime and focused on self-valorization that meant challenging the conditions of work, mainly factory work. The new social worker's self-valorization is extended beyond this to include the very valorization of humanity and human rights (Hardt and Negri 2000:409-410).

Finally Hardt and Negri write of the new militant. Unlike the militants of old such as knights in service to kings or militants in service of a state, the new militant is a person who is positive and constructive and set on building organization. The new militant is not representative of a cause or power but rather constitutive. "…*In other words, resistance is linked immediately with a constitutive investment in the biopolitical realm and to the formation of cooperative apparatus of production and community*" (2000:413 [original emphasis]).

In the context of anthropological research into hazards and disasters it would seem that a certain focus on social movements makes sense. As already noted by Rodriguez et al. (2006) emergent groups can have considerable influence on the post-disaster social landscape. However, social movements in general, and in the particular context of disasters have been traditionally under-theorized by anthropologists. Marc Edelman (2001) explains that while anthropologists were often participants in the protests and demonstrations of the nineteen-sixties, they remained mostly on the social science periphery when it came to theorizing collective action. Notions of an academic division of labor ("that's a job for sociologists") may account for much of the hesitancy of anthropologists to engage in an extended theoretical discussion of social movements. However Edelman points out one early pioneering attempt to bring social movements into the anthropological discussion, Eric Wolf's 1969 book *Peasant Wars of the*

Twentieth Century. Edelman acknowledges the intense and relatively recent interest in everyday "resistance" but does not see this development as an embrace of social movements because daily resistance is not really organized collective action in the way that would qualify as a movement (285-286). As noted above, although he does not say so explicitly Touraine (2004), a sociologist, seems to have reached the conclusion that for his field to continue to study social movements efficaciously there is a need to incorporate more anthropological methods and concepts. Importantly, Edelman examines ways in which anthropology can significantly contribute to social movement research. Edelman suggests that ethnographic analysis can be very useful by focusing on broader cultural and historic context of collective action, instead of focusing on single organization and single-issue of mobilization (2001:309).

CHAPTER 3: Networks, Practice, and the Shadow State: Methods and Theory

This study is informed by the general empirical emphasis of anthropology. Ethnographic methods are central to my overall research strategy which includes description, analysis and the application of theory to the data derived from my period of field work. Three related research questions ground and direct this study: 1) Do volunteers working with Common Ground Collective/Relief use ideological constructions to give meaning to their efforts and experiences? 2) How are volunteers with Common Ground attempting to affect post-disaster conditions in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans through daily practices? 3) Do the efforts and commitments of volunteers represent positive social and cultural transformation in the post-Katrina Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans?

As noted previously in the introductory chapter the research for this study was primarily located in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans and its surrounding environs. More specific, however, the roughly two blocks of territory occupied by Common Ground near the base of the Claiborne Street Bridge is where I spent the majority of my time during the course of field work. This is where Common Ground has its supply distribution center, bunk houses for volunteers, a community garden, a kitchen and storage facilities. Twenty of the twenty-five interview participants lived during their time with Common Ground. Even though the organization had housing and offices in other areas of the city, the site in the Lower Ninth was a hub of activity and a symbol of the organization as a whole.

From the beginning to the end of my field work, I roughly estimate that one-hundred new individuals arrived to volunteer with Common Ground during this fifty-three day period. I was able to formally interview twenty-five participants. The average age of these participants was twenty-five but given that two of the interviewees were age sixty or very near there the

participant's median age of twenty-eight seems to be a better representation of the group of interviewees. While all participants had at least completed high school or gain an equivalent certification, the majority of interview participants were well educated with eighty percent either being currently enrolled in college or having received a Bachelor's degree or higher. A large majority, sixty-eight percent, of participants were white. The picture of the average interview participant that emerges roughly from these statistics and is illustrated more exactly through ethnographic description is a picture of primarily young, white and middle to upper class individuals.

Methods

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are fundamentally methods for analyzing data and they are not necessarily tied to humanist or positivist epistemologies but rather both epistemologies can and do utilize qualitative and quantitative analysis (Bernard 2000: 20-21). However, that being the case quantitative analysis deals with numerical measurements, descriptions and comparisons based on those measurements. Qualitative analysis focuses on those parts of reality that can not be, or resist, numerical quantification and are instead meaningful.

A research strategy that uses qualitative methods would adopt "verstehen" or "empathic understanding" and would involve at least three components in terms of ethnographic procedure: (1) a process of discovery wherein the ethnographer attempts to tease out the subjective meanings and definitions of the situation under study; (2) interpretive descriptions; and (3) finding elements of data that can be generalized (Schweizer 1998: 60). A research strategy that focuses wholly on quantitative data would attempt to collect data, measurements of at least one variable, and then assess this data using appropriate mathematical devices such as univariant,

bivariant, and multivariant statistics. For example a survey instrument may be employed to collect data on how many radios belong to a household or how many cattle and individual in a community owns; once these data are collected can use statistical tests to compare it to other relevant data.

An ethnography that uses a mixed methods approach would utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods. For instance, an ethnography of a contagious disease using mixed methods might use qualitative methods to explicate the meanings attributed to and experiences of the disease. Quantitatively the ethnographer might use a survey instrument to measure how many people have the disease or to measure popular attitudes towards the disease.

Ethnographic study of social movements and in particular the Common Ground Collective volunteer community in post-Katrina New Orleans relies mainly on understanding and interpreting the behaviors, experiences and meanings associated with volunteering in a disaster zone. My primary methods of data collection were observation, participant-observation and semi-structured interviewing. Obviously the application of quantitative methods would have been useful to the research but given the focus on the primary experiences of volunteers in the social and historic context of post-Katrina New Orleans, a mainly qualitative approach was most appropriate.

Beyond its status as the signature method of socio-cultural anthropology, participant-observation is important because it deepens the quality of the data collected and it deepens the interpretation of the data and in this way is both a collection and analytical tool (Dewalt et al 1998: 264). Semi-structured interviewing was used because it provided the best value in terms of time of data collection. Even though a number of volunteers often complained about disorganized work scheduling and not having enough to do, there was still a premium on time; a

stay in the Lower Ninth might only last a week; as Bernard suggests, “In situations where you won’t get more than one chance to interview someone semi-structured interviewing is best” (2000: 191). semi-structured interviewing allowed for exploration of participant responses and maintained a relatively consistent structure to each interview and maximized the efficiency of data collection.

Ethics

Ethnical considerations were central to my field work. The fundamental principle of “do no harm” was central to my ethical considerations while conducting field work. I took, and continue to take, every effort to protect those who participated in my research. All interview participants were required to read and sign an informed consent form. I also took every opportunity to inform those around me, even those with whom I came into casual contact, that I was conducting anthropological field work and was collecting data for my Master’s thesis.

During and after my period of field work I incorporated the principles of “responsibility to people…,” “responsibility to scholarship and science,” and “responsibility to the public (AAA Code of Ethics 1998). In congruence with these considerations I obtained Institutional Review Board consent to conduct research at my field site.

My role as a researcher/volunteer: Following Kozaitis’ characterization of anthropology as, “…the study of humanity at the service of humanity” (2000: 45), another key ethical consideration was to give a portion of my time and effort to Common Ground in terms of volunteering. Beyond the particular case previously described in the introduction to this study, I also participated in a number of other activities intending to either assist the organization in its goals or directly aid individual in need. Using my research skills I, in collaboration with another volunteer, aided Common Ground’s co-founder and acting leader, Malik Rahim, in preparing for

meetings with city and federal officials pertaining housing issue in the city. I picked up and delivered donated baked goods to Common Ground's distribution center on a daily basis during the latter part of my field work. Along these more structured activities I also participated in various activities ranging from giving volunteers and residents rides in my car to picking up and helping dispose of debris from the area.

Theory

One of the few readily apparent representations of government in the Lower Ninth Ward is a militarized police force, a mix of regular police and national guardsmen. Humvees patrol the Ward on a daily basis. To see these large military vehicles slowly traversing the shambled landscape with their uniformed driver and passenger, one is reminded of some kind of occupation force in a distant war wrecked country. However, the Lower Ninth is not a foreign country but rather a historic African America community in one of America's great cities. Of course the argument that security is needed is a legitimate one. With a battered civilian police force, the continued presence of the National Guard seems an appropriate option.

It is significant to note that it appears Guardsmen are mainly focused on patrolling the Upper and Lower Ninth Wards while their presence in the rest of the city seems negligible. This situation did not go unnoticed by Common Grounds volunteers. However, there was an almost unspoken social armistice between volunteers, many of whom held rather anti-authoritarian views, and police. Most of the time when a Humvee would roll by the block occupied by Common Ground Collective/Relief, volunteers would take the time to politely wave at the passing Guardsmen who would wave back just as politely but there was often an underlying passive-aggressiveness to the interaction. For instance it would not be out of place to hear an epithet gently and quietly hurled at the departing Guardsmen as the engine faded into the

distance. It is impossible to say what the Guardsmen took from these daily encounters. However, the following statement from a volunteer who had been in the city for nine months gives an idea of certain perception of the Guardsmen's attitude. "They're doing far less good than even the NOPD was doing. They don't smile when they wave at you. Even though the NOPD is as crooked as hell, the MPs are even further than that because they don't live here, they don't have to worry about it." While it is the case that many of the volunteers held decidedly anti-establishment views and the sight of soldiers patrolling the streets was enough to incite such passive-aggressive play. There are other more direct reasons why volunteers often held, at best, ambivalent attitudes towards the authorities.

Stories frequently circulated about abuses carried out by the police and Guardsmen on volunteers or residents. These incidents were either experienced first hand by the volunteers or witnessed by them. One such incident involved a volunteer by the name of Dan, a forty-nine year old African American. Dan had been raised in New Orleans but had spent years traveling the country, living in various places and working various jobs. After the storm, Dan returned to New Orleans in January of 2006 to help out however he could. He almost immediately began working with Common Ground because, as he says, "Common Ground was the only ones here, besides the military and the police." At first Dan was cynical about the group's intentions but eventually this cynicism faded away and was replaced by a strong commitment as a member of Common Ground. Dan during an interview recounted a range of interactions with police, some petty, some serious. At one point Dan was stopped by police for riding a bicycle without a light. In the areas of town where volunteers are active, bikes are common and most are refurbished to the point of being usable but often lack standard safely equipment. Once questioned about the lightless bicycle Dan was arrested for having a bottle of alcohol in a backpack and for lying to an officer.

Dan was asked where he was from and with his thick southern accent he replied, “New Orleans.” However, his driver’s license was issued in California. Of this particular incident, Dan explained that he probably got off on the wrong foot with the officer because when he was first approached by the policeman Dan jokingly exclaimed, “Oh my god don’t tell me I was speeding.” The officer did not appreciate the humor.

Another incident recalled by Dan was far more serious. Dan was standing in line at a convenience store when he noticed the police lining people up and searching them. The individuals being search had been position again the truck Dan had driven to the store. “So I went out to ask them what was going on. You know it was already in my mind, ‘why ya’ll got them on my truck, put them on your cars.’ But right as I get out there he’s approaching me and I’m approaching him and I say ‘what’ and before I can get ‘what’s going on’ out he’s done grabbed me around my throat and he’s saying don’t look at me mother fucker, don’t look at me!” Dan claims that this left his throat sore for days and he was arrested yet again. According to Dan he was charged with possessing an open container of alcohol from the convenience store from which he had just walked out.

Other volunteers also reported encounters with the police. One night a small group of volunteers were dumpster diving, scavenging for food, behind a fast food restaurant in the Upper Ninth. Guardsmen interrupted the volunteers scavenging by waving guns in their faces and threatening them with harm if they were ever caught dumpster diving again.

Another volunteer who had gotten a night job in the French Quarter recounted an incident that occurred early in the morning after getting off work. The volunteer was stopped and verbally harassed by the police. From the content of the questions hurled by the police, the volunteer got

the impression that the harassment was because he was white and police suspected that he was trolling the area for drugs.

The only direct encounter I personally had with the military police was closer to ludicrous than frightening or abusive. I was among a small group of volunteers, dirty from work, and standing near the side of the street that ran through the block occupied by Common Ground. A humvee with two National Guardsmen rolled up next to our little party and began to warn us about a large escaped alligator stalking the area. This instantly struck me as strange because alligators do not usually leave their homes in swamps and wetlands and go wonder around urban areas. Of course someone's pet alligator might have escaped, but considering the state of the area it seemed unlikely that anyone could have afforded to house and feed a large alligator. The guardsmen were having fun with us. We all played along and shortly the guardsmen resumed their patrol. No one believed the story and there was no further mention of an alligator stalking the area. One can only speculate as to why the guardsmen decided on their little joke. Perhaps they saw a bunch of dirty looking "hippy kids" standing on the street and wanted to see what their reaction would be.

Clearly in an area such as the Lower Ninth Ward where the one highly visible arm of government is the military and police, the symbolic statement alone would make people uneasy. In order to simply mail a letter at a post office one has to cross over into the Upper Ninth. Street signs are either non-existent or hand written by volunteers. This says something about priorities on the part of city officials: social control is more important than public services. This is the unstated but seemingly apparent statement made by the continued presence of the military and absence of noticeable long term relief efforts on the part of the government.

On the one hand, the government, be it local, state or federal has receded from the scene. Volunteer organizations now act to provide assistance to hurricane survivors and the needy in general. However, on the other hand, the case could be made that the government has not receded so much as it has been simply striped down to its core powers. A minimum definition of a state relies on its monopoly over the use of violence as a means of coercive control (Weber 1978: 54). Catherine Lutz (2002) describes the militarized shaping of U.S. society and culture through the various overlapping strands of foreign wars, domestic military contractors, government spending, cinematic valorization of war as well as many ways in which the military has expanding and entrenched ever deeper into domestic life. Lutz sees this mainly in terms of the movement of public money in to military industrial sectors of the economy or U.S. aggression abroad or economics and cultural affects of military base locations.

However, New Orleans provides an example of the U.S. military actually being deployed in a major American city for an extended and indefinite period of time in a state of semi-emergency equipped with civilian policing powers. If Lutz's pre-Katrina claim that the militarization of U.S. places urgently requires ethnographic understanding (2002: 730-731), how much more urgent is the need for ethnographic understanding in the case of post-Katrina New Orleans? Unfortunately, this paper can only provide the most scant of accounts of the militarization of the Lower Ninth Ward and New Orleans more generally.

At this point the seeming necessity of the presence of a militarized police force in the Lower Ninth Ward, cannot be assumed a priori but rather has to be assessed in daily practice through the it interaction with the local population and the volunteers who temporarily (and not so temporarily) call the Lower Ninth Ward home. I have attempted to show the general, but by

no means universal, view from the position of volunteers participating in reconstruction and relief with Common Ground Collective/Relief.

If it can be said that the police and military operating in the Lower Ninth Ward are the government stripped down to its core powers, than what of the other functions and responsibilities of the state that have been curtailed or totally abandoned? It is an interesting juxtaposition that in many cases the various volunteer communities operate in the capacity of a state, except for the ability to use legitimated violent force which is reserved for the real state. One useful way to view this situation is through the concept of the shadow state (Wolch 1990). The shadow state is a volunteer based apparatus of distribution of goods and services which began to rise globally in response to the spread of neoliberal polices that mandate a reduction in state spending and the privatization of public services. Of course, New Orleans has been the victim of neoliberal policies prior to hurricane Katrina, and instead of leading to doubts about efficacy neoliberal prescriptions in policy circles, the crisis generated by the storm actually aided further neoliberal policy (Peck 2006). Neoliberal New Orleans has even been unfavorably compared to Mumbai India which also suffered severe flooding and a rush of neoliberal privatization (Whitehead 2005). So it is in the context of a neoliberal crisis of the state and the Katrina disaster that the voluntary state in New Orleans arose. It is easy to see how this new voluntary sector can actually further facilitate the processes of neoliberal urban transformation. The newly constructed volunteer apparatus manages to remove some of the immediate sting from government reductions, thus lessening popular outcry (Mitchell 2001). However, at least in the case of the Lower Ninth Ward and the volunteer base of Common Ground Collective/Relief, there are reasons to suspect some slight countering influence arising directly from the voluntary sector.

One immediate reason why neoliberal policies will find little shelter in the shadow state is that despite the large and continuing flows of volunteers in to the city, their efforts are simply not enough to mask the sting of an unresponsive government sector. Another consideration is that, in the case of Common Ground at least, the volunteers come with the hope of not only helping the victims of the storm rebuild their lives but volunteers also arrive with the purpose of supporting survivors in their efforts towards social justice. This ethic is summed up in the group's slogan of "solidarity not charity." While the neoliberal ideology and policy favors the material construction of the shadow state apparatus, presence and practice of ideologically committed volunteers ready to stand in solidarity with affected communities and individuals actually undermines the neoliberal design, perhaps though, in an ultimately limited way.

A key aspect of Common Grounds ability to organize and communicate with potential volunteers is the internet. Even during the early days of the groups existence, in storm ravaged New Orleans the Internet played a vital role. Another important aspect is the overlapping affiliations of certain volunteers with other activist groups both in New Orleans and in other parts of the country. Thus Common Ground Collective/Relief is not just a local organization but it draws strength and support from a larger pool of volunteers on a national level. Indeed the vast majority of volunteers were not from New Orleans, but rather traveled there from other parts of the country and, in some cases, the world.

This can be understood from the concept of network struggles (Hardt and Negri 2004: 79-91). The network is a horizontal structure without hierarchy that is composed of a plurality of unites, or "singularities." In the case of New Orleans, while any particular group (including Common Ground) might practice some form of internal hierarchical organization, the relations between groups or between activists representing groups was horizontal and democratic. The

idea of network struggle is also tied into the notion of biopolitical production, the production of forms of life—culture and society are produced anew. “Biopolitical production…is immanent to society and creates social relationships and forms through collaborative forms of labor” (Hardt and Negri 2004: 94-95). The attempts by Common Ground to participate in and influence the reconstruction of the Lower Ninth Ward are geared towards producing a radically different landscape then the one that was destroyed by the storm. For example, ideally Common Ground Collective/Relief would like to see thoroughly replenished wetlands to serve as a buffer against future storms, and new housing that utilizes forms of autonomous power generation whether solar or wind energy, and an unpolluted environment to name just a few goals. Of course there is a large difference between what the group wants in an ideal outcome and what the groups has already and can in the future actually accomplish. However, the real cooperative activities of volunteers and the linkages formed between geographically desperate groups of activists are particular accomplishments that speak to the possibilities of ideal positive developments and seem to conform to the more general trends posited in the theoretical work on the multitude (Hardt and Negri 2004).

Perhaps another way to examine the situation from a more conventional theoretical point would be to look at Common Ground as a type of class formation. Hardt and Negri are somewhat ambivalent about class in relation to their notion of the multitude. However, properly constructed the notion of class is not necessarily or wholly incommensurate with the idea of the multitude. In fact, the language of class precisely articulated might be understood as another way to talk about network struggles. Interestingly, enough anthropologists have failed to examine class as thoroughly as some other conceptual categories such as gender or race. Marvin Harris views social class as the differential relation of access groups have to power and basic resources within

a given society (1993: 326). Harris' approach adopts what Raymond Williams calls class as a "category" and distinguishes from class as a "formation." Williams explains that class as a "category" is simply the objective relations of individuals as groups in the structure of economic hierarchy. Whereas class as "formation" is the active self-aware identification of distinct interests and culture from the interests of other social groups; in other words class formations is the active process of organization and mobilization around perceived common interests in opposition to other perceived classes. Importantly this understanding of class as formation implies class consciousness. Individuals can be typologically positioned within a particular economic category that can objectively be seen comprising a class. However, class formation can exist within as well as between categorical classes depending on the formative classes' consciousness of perceived common interests in opposition to others (1983: 68). Hardt and Negri succinctly sum this proposition up by stating, "Class is determined by class struggle" (2004: 104). Hardt and Negri link class with race and state that, "Race is just as much a political concept as economic class is in this regard" understanding both class and race as being defined by opposition, they note that "…race arises through a collective resistance to racial oppression…" and go on to argue, "an investigation of economic class, then, like an investigation of race, should not begin with a mere catalog of empirical differences but rather with the lines of collective resistance to power" (104). Gender might be conceived in a similar vein.

Of course, while these insights are essential to understanding aspects of the volunteer experience at Common Ground, it would be ludicrous from a cultural anthropological point of view to suggest that class (as categories) and racial (as social construct) differences evaporate with the emergence of class and racial (formative) consciousness. Undoubtedly, the habitus, sans its full Bourdiuean meaning, of one's racial and class experience will exist along side whatever

class formative projects an individual might be engaged in. And thus it was with the Common Ground Collective.

If this study rest on three major theoretical columns, the shadow state and networked struggles being the first two, then these considerations lead to a third commiserate and final analytic, practice theory. Practice theory is, in it broadest sense, concerned with articulating the relations between structure and agency and how these two aspects of the human world interact and mutually affect one another (Ortner 2006: 16). Bourdieu (1977) is the most heralded explicator and innovator of suggestions first made by Marx (1978). In Bourdieu's original conception of practices tended to reinforced the overarching status quo or "doxa." For instance, Bourdieu gives comparatively little attention to his notion of the heterodox. However, the general argument of this thesis is, that volunteer activism in the context of the common ground collective holds the potential for change through transformative practices (i.e. network struggle and ideological-political commitments to solidarity). This seems contradictory. However, this thesis, while relying on some of Bourdieu's theoretical concepts in some instances rejects others. This is not an exercise of "cherry-picking" to fit predisposed preferences but rather the result of necessary modifications in light of actual observed realities.

It is important to note that the main real life case study used to underline Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical construction was a small scale and relatively isolated agrarian village, Kabylia Algeria. In the context of an increasingly interconnected and constantly shifting world the notion of doxa, while still vary much a signal contribution to social theory, is not beyond reexamination.

Bourdiue's notion of habitus, "…the harmonization of agents experiences and the continuous reinforcement that each of them receives from the expression, individual or collective…" (1977: 80), is closely linked to his concept of doxa. In fact, it is the practical

outcome of doxa, the internalized understandings of the overarching principles of order. In a way habitus can be understood as one's cultural or cognitive horizon beyond which nothing can be seen. However, the world does not end at the horizon and it must be recalled that there are many horizons seen from many points of view. While one person may see the onset of night as the sun falls behind the horizon, another person will witness a new morning. In a world of vast and complex networks and activists, the internet allows for rapid communication from many points beyond the horizon. What can be said of the overarching power of the habitus and its ability to maintain more or less the status quo? Undoubtedly, the concept of habitus is still important. In fact, some of the antagonism and contradictions internal to Common Ground Collective/Relief might be profitably understood as the clash of distinct habiti. However, within the antagonisms internal to the organization there is also an exchange of ideas, an emergence of something new and possibly transformative. In this regard, this thesis does not make an attempt at refuting the general ideas of practice theory as articulated by Bourdieu (1977) but rather takes a more fluid approach, more in the vein of Sherry Ortner's analysis of practice. Ortner essentially takes an approach to practice theory that is historical, in the sense that history is the contingent ground of reproduction or transformation of power and inequality (2006: 11). And finally this is necessarily linked with the other two theoretical prongs on which this thesis is balanced. The networks, the overlapping connections of activists, the shadow state apparatus these activist make possible and the clashing yet potentially transformative habitus all serve to lend theoretical insight to the ethnographic observations the ground this thesis in the daily reality of disaster and volunteerism.

CHAPTER 4: HANDS IN THE MUD, EYES TO THE SKY: THE VOLUNTEERS

Before moving deeply into the general ethnographic description of volunteer life in the Lower Ninth Ward, it seems worthwhile to explain my own reasons for conducting the research that I did and the personal stake that I had in the research. In doing this I follow the suggestion of a movement within the discipline of anthropology that has argued for the inclusion of such reflexive materials (Briggs 1970; Rosaldo 2000).

How I ended up choosing to carry out my field work with Common Ground Collective/Relief is simultaneously straightforward and complex. My decision to work with Common Ground was based on a number of factors. Economic and logistical consideration of getting to and living in the field site were important. Equally important were my personal experiences with both Katrina and activism; my anthropological imagination was fired to examine the problems and possibilities of post-Katrina New Orleans.

My wife, Amber, and I had been living in Athens, Georiga for only a few weeks when we learned that a major hurricane was headed for the Gulf Coast. Amber and I had both been undergraduates at the University of Southern Mississippi. We took a year off from school after receiving our bachelor's degrees and mostly struggled to keep our heads above water, financially. There are not many opportunities for people holding Bachelors degrees in anthropology and psychology (mine), so when Amber got accepted into the anthropology program at the University of Georgia we were incredibly excited, but our excitement for the future was tinged with sadness.

Over the course of our time in Hattiesburg Mississippi, the home of USM, we had built a rich social life. As undergraduates we had been leaders in the student human rights group, Amnesty International, and we had many friends. We had organized protests against the Iraq

war. When two tenured professors were illegally fired by the university's president, Shelby Thames, for questioning his policies on behalf of the campus chapter of the American Association of University Professors we, along with many others, organized protests and minor acts of defiance such as wearing anti-Shelby pins and t-shirts, chalking sidewalks and hanging protest flyers around campus. Ultimately the issue was resolved through arbitration, but the campus activism certainly produced a climate that pressured the administration to explain its actions and probably refrained from further outrages. Those were happy times and we had many close friends who in many ways were our family during our time in college.

We left Hattiesburg in the middle of August of 2005 and we had barely settled into our family housing unit at University of Georgia when we learned that a massive storm was churning in the Gulf. It all happened so fast after that. As the storm started on it path towards the Gulf Coast, we tried to maintain phone contact with as many of our friends back in Hattiesburg as possible. The last person I talked to was my friend Kayo. The electricity was out in Hattiesburg and I described the television image of the monster swirl of storm clouds approaching Hattiesburg even as we spoke. Finally the cell phone reception was lost and Amber and I were cut off from just about everyone we cared about in the world. Even though both of our families were more or less safe and mostly out of reach of the storm in the Natchez area, our friends could have been in serious danger. Hattiesburg is only about seventy-miles from the coast and as we watched the televised weather, it was apparent that after Katrina was done with the coast it would be on a near direct course north towards Hattiesburg. Indeed, it hit Hattiesburg as a category three storm.

In the following days we would stand outside our apartment and continuously re-dial numbers in our cell phones desperately hoping that we could get somebody, anybody, but it was

not until day three that we managed to get through to a professor in the anthropology department. She was okay and was busy trying to check on her colleagues and others affected by the storm. We had a list of people we asked about but she could tell us very little. In the ensuing days and weeks phone communication became more regular and we learned that all of our friends had survived the storm. One lost an apartment, another a car but they were okay. In the next week or so I planned to drive down and do whatever I could to help my friends and the city that I had come to love during my undergraduate career. My efforts were thwarted by the fact that gas in Athens became scarce due to panicky hording over fears of gas becoming unavailable. I had no way of knowing if I would be able to get gas along the five hundred mile journey from Athens to Hattiesburg. I decided to purchase extra gas tanks, the big red plastic kind. The idea was to carry the tanks in the car and use them if the need arose. However, there was a run on large plastic gas tanks. People wanted to horde as much gas a possible. I was forced to realize that I would have to wait and remain in contact with friends by cell. Eventually things began to normalize and Amber and I had focused on our lives in Athens; she was in school and I was working part time as an archaeological field technician. It was a happy and sad reunion when we finally made it to Hattiesburg for Christmas. We enjoyed seeing our friends but were saddened by the still extant damage done to the city by hurricane Katrina.

I eventually entered the graduate program at Georgia State University in anthropology with a plan to carry out my field research for my thesis in Bolivia. I have a close friend who I met as an undergraduate who is Bolivian. I was going to travel with her to Bolivia and live with her at her father's house in La Paz and conduct research on political movements in the city. However, my friend was not able to return to Bolivia over the summer and I did not feel comfortable enough without her as a translator to go alone. I needed another project. As I

searched through possibilities I recalled reading an article in the center-left Magazine *Mother Jones* about a group in post-Katrina New Orleans who had organized emergency medics and created a free clinic as well as other programs. It all came together: my anthropological interests in social movements and an opportunity to participate in something that appeared to be helping the survivors of hurricane Katrina.

In order to learn more about Common Ground Collective/Relief I simply did a Google search and hit upon the organization's website. From there I obtained contact information and I subsequently wrote an email to the volunteer coordinator. I explained that I was a graduate student in anthropology and that I wished to carry out research for my thesis with Common Ground. After a number of emails back and forth, we agreed that I could volunteer with the organization, and that it was fine that I also conduct research. I arranged to stay in the Lower Ninth Ward in volunteer housing provided by the group. This was all a relatively straight forward process.

The duration of my field work was fifty-three days in total. My research was primarily ethnographic and I used participant-observation, semi-structured interviews and informal interviews to collect data on the Common Ground Collective/Relief and the experiences of volunteers working in post-Katrina New Orleans. As praxis I worked closely with Common Ground's co-founder by doing research and participating in meetings with city officials. I also delivered donated bread from a local bakery to Common Ground's distribution center in the Lower Ninth Ward and also whatever various other tasks that needed to be performed around the site.

Searching for Common Ground

In the post-Katrina landscape of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast many individuals and organizations took it upon themselves to aid the survivors of the disaster in the absence of any substantial government support. I conducted my field research with one such group: Common Ground Collective/Relief. The organization was formed almost immediately after the storm, within the first week. Three co-founders, Malik Rahim, Sharon Johnson and Scott Crow, huddled in the kitchen of Malik's home near Algiers Point across the river on the West side of New Orleans. Algiers had not been flooded and it was from this relatively dry ground that the three friends began organizing volunteers and "street medics" who managed to get into the city. Within a short time the volunteers had put together a medical clinic and began distributing food and water to needy residents. They used the internet to get the word out that help was need and the call was answered by a continuous stream of volunteers arriving in the city.

The an examination the life history of Malik Rahim can lend deeper insight into the paths that led to the formation of Common Ground Collective/Relief. Malik, as an individual, is both an agent and product of history. By examining pertinent aspects of his life history the nexus of structure and agency might be better delineated.

Not long after I had arrived in the Lower Ninth Ward, a few days, I found myself seated on the small second story porch of the volunteer sleeping quarters listening to a conversation between Malik and a volunteer named Jim. Jim was an older man nearing sixty and he had been volunteering for about a week. It was evening and Malik had stopped to check on the place and do some work related to the little community garden next to the volunteer quarters before driving to his home in Algiers. With his task complete, Malik sat on the upstairs porch surveying the nearby fields of debris and empty lots where homes once stood. At one point Jim turned to Malik

and gently asked, “Do you ever feel like you’re fighting a losing battle?” Malik thought about it for a brief moment and replied with a bit of pride, “I’ve been doing that all my life.” Indeed in through his nearly life long social activism Malik has lived a life of defiance.

During an interview conducted towards the end of my stay with Common Ground, Malik recounted some of his history. While Malik’s story is personal and individual it is not difficult to see Malik’s actions and practices within the larger mix of socio-cultural relations and history. At the outset of the interview Malik explained that he had reached a milestone with his approaching sixtieth birthday, “and I’ve been involved in the struggle for peace and justice for over forty years.” Malik went on to recount some of the causes that he had been involved with over the years. Malik was active in opposing the death penalty in New Orleans along side Sister Helen Prejean. Malik was heavily involved in a group known as Critical Resistance that opposes “the prison industrial complex.” In 1998 Malik went to Iraq as part of a group called “Iraqi Sanction Challenge.” “…Well, we was trying to bring an end to the sanctions that, you know, truly crippled that great nation, explained Malik. Much of Malik’s activism has been focused on New Orleans, “I’ve been working on the cause of residents of section 8 and public housing for well over forty years.”

However, Malik’s experiences with the New Orleans Black Panther Party have been the most influential, and in some ways set the stage for his role in the founding of Common Ground. As he said, “…just about ninety-five if not one-hundred percent of things that I’m doing now is based upon the principles that I first learned in the Panther Party.” In 1970 Malik had a chance encounter with a man selling papers on Canal Street. This man was Malik’s first contact with the New Orleans Black Panther Party. He had been aware of the Party’s existence on the West Coast because his first wife, who was from California, had lived near a major Panther Party enclave.

Malik had just been fired from his job. He was working for a company called AC Price and he inquired about the possibility of moving up the pay scale by becoming a welder for the company. He was told that "…AC Price don't hire niggers as welders." Malik would not stand for the insult and a fight broke out between Malik and the individual who insulted him. However, when the fight was broken up, this act of defiance of the racial hierarchy only earned him further insult because he was fired with no questions asked. Malik's response to this injustice relied on emphasizing his status as a veteran. "I said I'm a veteran and this is just a white boy."

Before Malik met the individual on Canal Street, he had been planning to move back to California where he had met his wife and lived previously. The only thing stopping him from making the move was lack of money. But his chance encounter on Canal Street changed his plans.

Malik and two friends decided to go to the housing project where the Panther Party had its offices and offer to join. The three friends were put to work with some minor chores doing "community work." At one point they were tasked with laundry duty. This did not work out as planned and Malik and his two compatriots ended up accidentally ruining a load of laundry. One of Malik's friends suggested that they all just cut out and run away. However, after a tense debate the trio decided to do the right thing and confess their mistake and confront the consequences. What occurred convinced Malik that he was working for a different kind of organization. A different paradigm operated in the Panther Party. "You know, they just said, well hey, that alright you tried brother, you tried. That's all it was, there wasn't no criticism attempted so we started going to meetings."

In 1970's New Orleans joining a radical political organization was dangerous and nobody knew this better than the Panthers. "They tried to talk me out of joining because I had a family—

we were the first family to join the Panther Party." Eventual Malik and his wife took on leadership roles in the Party. "My wife was in charge of the free breakfast program. By the time we moved to Desire, this was at the St. Thomas housing project, I was head of security.

Clearly this was an important time in Malik's life. He had returned from service in the U.S. Navy during Vietnam, but despite his status as a veteran his status as a black man was a defining characteristic in 1970's New Orleans. It is important to note that Malik got fired from his job for two reasons, one, he asserted himself by asking about becoming a welder and, two, he did not quietly submit in the face of a racial slur. In this instance one may discern the specific individual outcomes of the historic and structural fields of race and power in New Orleans. However, Malik, rather than follow the accepted path of submission, resisted and lost his job for his troubles.

Ultimately Malik's resistance led him to join with others in the intensely oppositional political Party of the Black Panthers for it was here in this space that Malik could experience the dignity and self-respect that the larger racist society sought to deny young black men. Ortner notes that, "the agency of (unequal) power, both domination and resistance, may be contrasted with the second major mode of agency…the intentions, purposes, and desires formulated in terms of culturally established 'projects.'" Ortner goes on to argue that this dimension of agency is in ways central to the notion of agency, "…And finally it is this—an agency of projects—that the less powerful seek to nourish and protect by creating or protecting sites, literally or metaphorically, 'on the margins of power'" (2006: 144). The next part of Malik's story of involvement with the New Orleans Black Panther Party further illustrates the point.

After Malik became head of security for the Party in the Desire Housing project there was a stand-off and ultimately a shootout involving Panther Party members including Malik and

the New Orleans police. After the shootout Malik became the party's second in command but first he spent time in jail.

Malik was imprisoned for about a year before he and most of his comrades were found not guilty. Malik remembers this time fondly, "It was the most glorious time of my life, the time I spent incarcerated. Because I seen and—I seen that regardless of what's happening or what kinds of conditions you're under that no one can break a collective spirit." Possibly as a scare tactic, the Panthers were placed on death row during their pre-acquittal incarceration. Beyond this, the prisoners were harassed in various brutal ways including being beaten and dosed with tear gas and mace. Malik sees these confrontations not just as the violent expression of individual racism, but rather as a concerted effort to intimidate the jailed Panthers. "They did everything and anything to try and break our spirit. Through it all we persevered. We organized the first inmate council here, we improved the food, and ended the segregation of white and black prisoners."

Malik is also proud of the fact that they managed to drastically decrease the instances of "jail house rapes" which according to Malik were rampant at that time. The prison official or at least the guards attempted to set inmate against inmate in their quest to crush the spirit of the prisoners. The guards attempted to arrange a confrontation between the Panthers and members of a local street gang. "[the guards] said we thought we were some tough niggers—they were going to send some tough niggers down there and they was going to punk us out." What happened next was, perhaps, not what anyone expected. Instead of a vicious prison brawl, "…most of them joined the Party so then I was blessed to be part of the only chapter in the Panther Party history to establish a prison chapter, which was the Angola chapter." Malik added solemnly, referring to a trio of prisoners who have come to be known as the Angola Three, "I'm

sad to say it but two of my comrades from Panther days is still in solitary, been in solitary for thirty-five years."

Malik's unique history illustrates the interconnecting layers of structure and agency. Malik was a victim of racism and a product of the oppressive environment of New Orleans, but through his own efforts, he managed to become an agent operating with a goal towards autonomy and liberation. His introduction to the revolutionary Black Panther ideology facilitated this transformation. It is notable that the ideology of the New Orleans Black Panther Party was not homegrown but rather built on and appropriated from larger currents of radical activism from the West coast, an environment that seems more conducive to such developments. But once established, the Black Panthers of New Orleans operated with determination to oppose the structural violence of the ruling institutions. Of course, even though there was civil progress thanks to the efforts of many groups and individuals but New Orleans' institutions reminded, for the most part, committed to the status quo of race and class hierarchy.

Mr. Kay: An Accidental Hero

The experiences of Mr. Kay, a survivor of the storm, are a powerful example of both the abilities of individuals to affect change and the continuing dangers of challenging the system of racial and class hierarchy.

Mr. Kay, recalled his immediate interpretation of the event as he attempted to negotiate the dangerous post-Katrina environment and avoid confrontation with law enforcement that, according to Mr. Kay, repeatedly mistreated him while he was trying to bring food to elderly people stranded by the storm and left for dead in their nursing home.

Mr Kay explained that at times he felt a powerful urge to resist, to stand up and express himself as a human being. He knew this might directly lead to his murder at the hands of the

people who were suppose to protect him but his desperation was so great that it was hard to care about life. “I just got tired of the National Guard. I got tired of them putting a double barrel in my face, pushing me, shoving me, I just—it was to the point where I was ready to just fight—and just lose my life…” It seemed to Mr. Kay that the country had been invaded by some kind of abusive occupying military. Life was never easy for Mr. Kay growing up in racist city but life in the immediate wake of the storm seemed impossible. He could not believe that this was happening in the United States. He thought of scenarios that might explain why his government was so hostile to its own citizens. Perhaps, a brilliant foreign military strategists had hatched a plan to invade in the aftermath of Katrina. Were the soldiers really wearing American uniforms? Would he be able to tell the difference? Admittedly such a scenario is fanciful, and Mr. Kay seems never to have really believed this but in the despair of the moment his mind tried to make sense of the absurdity of it all. As he wondered the debris clogged streets of New Orleans he saw news crews but no supplies for survivors. Like some lamenting figure from the biblical book of proverbs Mr. Kay wondered, “Why don’t I have any food, why these babies crying with parched mouths, you know. You know, they so dry that their butts are cracked, you know that the skin is cracking on their butts.” Faced with this horror, the fantasy of invasion was simply a way of coping.

Even though Mr. Kay’s interpretation expresses despair at the situation, he did not give in to fatalism. When I met Mr. Kay, he was living in a partly reconstructed house that rested inside the two or three block perimeter of the Lower Ninth Ward that Common Ground had headquartered next to the levee at the foot of the Claiborne Bridge. At the time of the interview Mr. Kay was fifty-two years old and was suffering from what he believed to be the effects of exposure to the toxic soup of water and mud that he swam through numerous times in the days

after the storm in order to survive and help others. During one conversation Mr. Kay lifted his shirt up over his head and exposed his back and it was covered in small red blisters or bumps. He had trouble eating, at times not being able to keep food down. Beyond his physical symptoms he was haunted by the harrowing experiences of the storm's aftermath. I informally spoke with Mr. Kay a number of times before he agreed to do an interview. The interview took place at a local Burger King located in the Upper Ninth. During the interview Mr. Kay choked up several times both from emotion and from difficulty with his food. He claimed that doctors had been unable to diagnose his physical symptoms and that he was nearly broke. Despite these hardships Mr. Kay struggled on. Mr. Kay explained that he had not previously been involved with other activists or volunteer based organizations but that he has had to have the mentality of an activist all his life. "[B]eing of an environment where—we're in poverty, misinformation, disinformation, and—um bad seeds, crime ridden areas—neglectful parents, neglectful society, we've always had to have an activist mentality, I've always had to have it." Mr. Kay does not believe that his role as a volunteer with Common Ground is anything new, at least not in a deep sense. "What I'm doing now with this group, Common Ground, is nothing new. This is a way of life for me. But to answer your question, this is the first organized group that I've been in."

Despite his fifty-two years and his undiagnosed illness, Mr. Kay always tried to present himself with dignity. Indeed, Mr. Kay, a tall, thin, well-built black man with a resonant voice and an immediately obvious intelligence, conveyed a sense of and a demand for, personal and collective dignity for his community. "Stoic" is an appropriate term for Mr. Kay's attitude.

"It was not surprising that the Freedom Movement took root in the neighborhood as far back as 1896, when Homer Plessy refused to sit in a blacks-only train compartment headed for Covington, Louisiana," writes historian Douglas Brinkely of the pride Ninth Ward residents took

in their “robust history of standing up against oppression” (2006: 256-257). Of course in the light of the history of the Lower Ninth Ward and its legacy of struggle, Mr. Kay’s “activist mentality” may indeed be an echo of the past as well as survival strategy for the present.

By the time I began my fieldwork nearly two years after hurricane Katrina, common Ground had numerous projects in the works, from restoring wetlands to gutting houses. The ultimate goal was to work towards a more safe and equitable environment for residents and those returning to the city from hurricane produced diaspora. The organizational slogan expressed the general motives of most volunteers succinctly, “solidarity not charity.”

Daily life in and around Common Grounds headquarters in the Lower Ninth Ward was often hectic and demanding. One problem all of the people I interviewed pointed to was a lack of communication between the leadership and regular volunteers. Also there were complaints that work was not organized well and therefore volunteers had to often find something to keep them busy. Many volunteers busied themselves by doing chores around the area such as sweeping or picking up trash in the volunteer houses. An average day at Common Ground began around 7:00am; people would wake up and volunteers working in other parts of the city, such as those volunteering at Common Ground’s women’s shelter, would ride their bicycles or catch a car ride to where they needed to go and would not be seen again until late afternoon or the early evening. Volunteers working in the Lower Ninth Ward would spend the day working on various small projects. For instance, one volunteer attempted to construct a large water distillation system so that Common Ground could provide itself and locales with potable water at low cost. This effort mainly saw the volunteer attempting to scavenge materials from the debris fields that littered the area. In the evening the volunteers across the canal in the Upper Ninth would send food for dinner from Common Ground’s kitchen located in an unused Catholic school called St. Mary’s.

However, dinner was not always delivered and, due mainly to poor planning, became less frequent almost to the point of randomness towards the end of my stay. Individuals and groups of volunteers would take a lot of the initiative to get things done. This went along with a prevalent horizontalist ethic among the volunteers and was also necessitated by a lack of clearly defined daily objectives on the part of the leadership.

My research findings concerned with the volunteer experience at the Common Ground Collective/Relief and issues of gender, race and class, show that these categories are deeply interconnected and operate on multiple levels of organizational and individual experience. While Common Ground is ostensibly a community based organization, I observe little community, e.g. residents of the Lower Ninth Ward, participation. People from the area certainly benefited from services provided by Common Ground such as the group's distribution center and tool lending library but there was little residential participation in the group itself. The majority of volunteers are from out of town and most were young and white. While not all of my interview subjects identified as middle class, most did, and all agreed that the majority of volunteers were middle class. Even though the co-founders who remained active in the organization, Malik Rahim and his wife Sharon Johnson, were both African American and local to New Orleans, the volunteer base was mostly young, white and middle class. However, class, race and gender issues were complex and dynamic.

Billy and Chris: Transgender in the Crescent City

A discussion of two interviews that I conducted might bring the theoretical aspects into a less abstract light. The first interview to be discussed was conducted with a volunteer, here identified as Billy. Billy is young white transgender person from a working class background. Billy's biological sex is female but he self identifies as male. Billy enjoys working outdoors and

is heavily involved in the wetlands restoration project at Common Ground and was often covered in dirt and mud from long days in the wetlands or tending the community garden in the Lower Ninth Ward. Billy has a small build, with short cropped hair and an intense gaze. He also had a very quiet demeanor and tended to be rather aloof except in relation to a small group of close friends with whom he shared living quarters. Billy considered himself to be a shaman and believed this was a predestined role. Politically Billy identified with a form of life-style anarchism known as ontological anarchism. In terms of his status as a transgender individual, I asked during our interview if he had had experienced any problems. "Well, yeah, last time I was down here I just decided not to tell any one and I just wanted to try that to see how it would work for me and if I would be happy not telling anyone, but I wasn't." Billy explained further that he felt disconnected and out of place while hiding a substantial aspect of his life. This time around Billy had attempted to be a bit more open, at least in a limited sense. "I certainly haven't made any concerted effort to be open about it and that's sort of the balance that I end up with in this area where I count on having a few close friends."

Billy's Experience of being a transgendered individual can be contrasted with that of another volunteer by the name of Chris. Chris is also transgender. Chris is also young and white but from a self described, middle class family. Biologically Chris would be recognized as a male but Chris self identifies as a female. Chris is tall, a bit over six three, and thin to the point of being almost gaunt. Chris kept her hair short to the point of being nearly shaved and rode her bicycle almost everywhere. Chris was active in the RUBAR bike collective, a project that refurbished used and discarded bicycles and gave or sold them for well below market price. RUBAR advocated bicycles as a cheap and environmentally sound why of getting around New Orleans.

During our interview Chris explained how her gender status affected her work in New Orleans and, in contrast to Billy, Chris appears to have had a more positive experience or at least a more positive attitude towards the experience. According to Chris, there has been a variety of reactions to her presence. She recounts how several girls from the area first reacted to her unique look. "[they] would be like 'are you a boy or a girl' and I'd be like 'I'm a girl' and they'd be like 'really? '…yeah, I'm just a really tall girl' yeah then I'd help them patch their tire or whatever it is that needs doing."

Chris contrasted the reaction of the curious "little girls" with the reaction of her friends back home in a place she described as "…one of the queer Mecca's of the North East." Her friends were concerned about the dangers associated with New Orleans and advised her not to go or at least to be incredibly careful. Chris feels that some of their fears have been unfounded. "…but you know just walking around and just in terms of people that I've met there are so many more, like, trans-women and trans-women my age than there are in many other places that I've been—maybe any other place that I've been." Beyond the transgendered community that Chris found in New Orleans she also sees the post-storm conditions as playing a role in her ability to negotiate the terrain of normative gender and sexuality. Once someone sees that the person that might have initially labeled strange or undesirable is there to offer aid and solidarity, their opinion might change. Chris explained that once this breakthrough is reached often hesitancy and standoffishness turns to joviality. "And people who have read me that as a boy then once we have that conversation they'll be like 'Oh right, okay, like girl you gotta join the WNBA you so tall."

Clearly both Billy and Chris are politically conscious and are committed to project of volunteering in post-Katrina New Orleans. However, in the same community of volunteers they

have had very different experiences in terms of their gender orientation or at least their coping strategies differ. Beyond their differing experiences of gender and class, Billy and Chris shared an ideological commitment to anarchism and concomitant to solidarity with the poor and hurricane affected residents of New Orleans. And it is this ideological commitment to social justice that binds many of the volunteer to Common Ground and the city of New Orleans. In this sense Common Ground might be understood as part of a class formation that unites diverse elements, e.g. categories, such as race, gender and economic class into an expression of political solidarity; even though such a unity is complicated by lingering structural position, i.e. the habitus, of the individual volunteers. Ortner, in a slightly different context of demonstrating class antagonism in terms of gendered discourse, argues "the displacement of class meanings in languages of gender and sexuality may take place at the level of discourse but discourse…is never divorced from real practices and feelings (2006: 41). This is an important point because it is these real practices and feelings of solidarity that have the potential to construct new formative class meanings that might in turn help produce a new discourse of gender and race.

Common Ground Collective/Relief does a very good job getting people to volunteer and it has done a lot of good for residents. For instance, the leadership of the group estimates that they have gutted more that 1,200 houses, twelve churches and four day care centers since September of 2005. However, one of the key problems that Common Ground must come to grips with is the need to clarify goals and priorities in the future to remain effective. The group is in a transition period. In the immediate aftermath of the storm, the goals were clear. Storm survivors needed food, water, and shelter. At that early period it was fairly obvious what needed actions needed to be taken. Nearly two years after the storm, the daily goals are more complex and hazy.

The organization will have to give much more priority to structuring daily tasks and activities in order to maintain volunteer morale.

Anti-Racism Potlucks

During the course of my fieldwork, I attended two meetings of regularly scheduled "anti-racism potlucks." These were organized by a sub-group of mostly Common Ground volunteers which called itself Common Ground's Anti-Racism Working Group. The stated purpose of the group was to provide an arena for volunteers (again, mostly white) to discuss issues related to racism that they encountered while carrying out their daily volunteer work. People would talk about their fears, frustrations, anxieties, inter-organizational gossip and whatever else someone brought up that others felt like contributing to. The meetings were also about building a pan-organizational dialog between the various volunteer groups operating in the city. Because these meeting can be seen as one long continuous dialog, in the following description and analysis I have assembled the content of the first and second meetings as if they were one.

Being a potluck supper and in keeping with the south Louisiana locale, someone brought boiled crawfish. There were a number of other more conventional dishes for such meetings, such as humus and bread along with a few bowls of various leafy salads. The meetings float from house to house; there is no permanent location. The organizers try to find a new host for each new meeting.

At this particular meeting there were about twenty-five people in attendance. The majority were affiliated with Common Ground, but there were also two Mennonite relief workers from a delegation hailing from Pennsylvania. There were also a few other people from other relief organizations, but I failed to catch which ones they represented. One of the organizers, and this evenings facilitator, opened the meeting and explained that the general focus of discussion

tended to be about how volunteers can be more “accountable to the community” and asking “what does accountability look like.” Indicating the need for individual introductions, the facilitator said, “We’re going to move to the left because that is the way we like to see things moving.” After a brief chuckle or two at the remark, everyone seated in as much a circle as the confines of the meeting house allowed, commenced with introductions. While the organizers knew that I was there not only as a participant, but also as researcher, I used my introduction to explain the full reasons for my presence at the meeting and explained ahead of time why I would occasionally jot down notes. No one objected and most people seemed interested in my project.

The neighborhood where the meeting was held was clearly part of the historic district. Houses were build next to each other with, perhaps, a foot of space between them. Some houses were totally destroyed and abandon, while other seemed to have just been renovated. The architectural design of the houses in the area tended to be of a classic Southern “shotgun” style: a long and narrow frame with high ceilings and wooden floors. The interior decoration was what might be described as neo-bohemian with a few well used couches and white Christmas lights strung up to provide soft mellow lighting. College text books and second hand novels rested on homemade shelves. Pieces of art, often drawn on pieces of paper hung here and there on the walls.

As the meeting inside progressed, I was seated by an open window and I noticed a light rain beginning to fall. With all the bodies in the relatively small space, the room became rather warm despite the cooling effect of the rain and the open window. It was not long before someone proposed breaking the meeting into two groups so that conversation would be easier, everyone agreed.

The most striking aspect of the meeting was the introspection and practical reflexivity exhibited by the attendees. Of course, this is not so surprising since many of the attendees seemed to be at least acquainted with radical social theory and its emphasis on reflexivity. A number of the people questioned their role as white activist in a predominately black community. One individual wondered aloud whether Common Ground was really displaying solidarity or if it was somehow contributing to the further alienation and troubles of residents.

Another attendee raised concerns over what she saw as differential treatment between volunteers and actual residents living in the area by Common Ground. She felt that young white volunteers tend to be treated better than older black volunteers. She felt that she, for example, would be able to enter St. Mary's (A site operated by Common Ground and served as Malik's office, and an unofficial homeless shelter) even if she had left or been kicked out of Common Ground, while a hypothetical older black man would not be allowed in under the same circumstances.

One volunteer questioned whether his work was contributing to the community or just the Common Ground block in the Lower Ninth. By "community" the attendee seemed to refer to current and former residents who maintain a stake in the redevelopment of the area. The volunteer hesitantly used the term, "gentrification," and then more confidently said that it sometimes seems like Common Ground is contributing to a "…weird form of gentrification." At this one of the volunteers who worked with the Mennonite relief team, a guy with a Frankenstein postage stamp t-shirt and half inch ear plugs, suggested taking more proactive steps to engage with locals beyond just delivering goods and food.

This started a conversation about talking to the leadership, but someone pointed out that this had been tried in the past but it never worked because the leadership would basically co-opt

the meeting and talked round the issues. He also pointed out the leadership's philosophy of, "If you don't like it, leave." Another person argued that some of the frustration people felt was due to the absence of clear direction as to what needs to be done.

Throughout the course of the meeting those in attendance kept questioning their own motivations and their "white privilege." I pointed out that there were no African Americans, other than myself, and no local residents at the meeting at all. Ironically one of the facilitators replied that the meetings were conceptualized as a place for volunteers to raise issues and concern about racism.

At one point we broke up into even smaller groups of two or three people to discuss issues and then bring them back to the larger group. My group consisted of myself, a volunteer who professed to be a writer, and one of the organizers. My group mainly wrestled with the difficulty of defining who one should be accountable to. I saw this as another way of asking who speaks for the community. We eventually, broke from our small groups and merged back into the larger group. People were asked to speak for their groups and explain some of the issues that they discussed. A few people pointed to the difficulty of being accountable when one works for multiple organizations, as a number of the people present did. Another speaker raised the problem of being low in the chain of command in some organizations and noted that such a low rank makes it difficult to find one's own accountability.

During the conversation a little girl from across the street stopped by. She was escorted in to the edge of the room by one of several college age roommates who shared the house. The little girl was introduced as a neighbor who likes to come over and play. She had apparently formed a friendship or attachment to one of the women whose house we were in. Her friend who escorted her from the door kindly explained to her that a meeting was in process but she could stay if she

was quiet. The little girl stood with a toothy grin and a bewildered expression staring at the room full of strangers. I got the impression she was somehow mentally challenged in some way. We all greeted her warmly. She never spoke, but nodded her head and twisted her face when asked by her friend if she was hungry. The girl was taken into the kitchen and given a large plate of crawfish. I wondered if the girl's (an African American) awkward stare had anything to do with the fact the she was pondering the unexpected presence of a room full of white people who may have not been a regular site in her neighborhood, except for her friend who rented the house we all were in.

The meeting continued and the topic turned to issues of crime in the city, particularly the city's excessive murder rate. One individual pointed out that he was afraid of staying in the city, much longer because he did not want to develop the mindset that he saw so prevalent in the city. As he put it, "We live in a culture of fear and we talk about crime and violence like other people talk about sports." Another person explained that as a white female she felt like she could go anywhere in the city and feel safe. She argued that it was the young black men, her neighbors, who were afraid to go to certain areas like the French Quarter due to the fear of being unjustly arrested or harassed by the police. One individual reiterated the point about the "culture of fear" and added that "the vehicle of capitalism is eating all of us up." He added in order to change things we have to decided what it is that we want, what kind of world do we want? Throughout the discussion there was a persistent, some times explicit, some times implicit, critique of the system of law and punishment in the U.S., e.g., "the prison industrial complex" was a term that was repeated a few times. One participant argued that the people who are unjustly being locked up in prison are the people that should be out organizing. "I need these people who are in jail to be out organizing in their communities." As the evening wore on and people began tiring, one of

the facilitators asked if we could go around the room once more and “check out” by talking briefly about what we might have learned, or what we realized, or anything at all that seemed important. During this checkout period people just reiterated the main themes of the evening and said their goodbyes and left; although as I made my exit a number of people continued to stay and chat.

The concerns and issues brought up in the meeting were also echoed and elaborated on during course one on one interviews which I conducted. The following section is based on one such interview.

Kevin: The Guerilla Relief Worker

Kevin went from being a former Marine to, in his words, “a guerilla relief worker.” Kevin lived in a small camping tent in the backyard of a gutted house at the end of the block occupied by Common Ground. At the time of our interview, Kevin was living and volunteering with Common Ground for almost two years; he was among the first wave of Common Ground Volunteers. For the past two years, Kevin has lived in one or another temporary or makeshift structure. The tent that he occupied behind the house was simply the latest of these. Along with his volunteer work, Kevin also held down a job as a chef in an upscale French Quarter restaurant. He managed to do all of this with an injured back that greatly troubled him. Although to look at him one would never suspect that he had any physical impairments. Kevin was short, stocky and well muscled. Tanned with short black hair, Kevin looked the part of a Marine. While friendly, Kevin had a serious “get-the-job-done” demeanor and this surely served him well during the grueling early days of the relief efforts.

Kevin had lived in New Orleans for some time prior to the storm but when hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans he was living in Los Angeles, having moved there months earlier,

and was attending school. The disaster and the needs of survivors called Kevin back to the city. He had found a purpose and he followed it. After initially volunteering with the American Red Cross in Los Angeles and working the phones for a few days, Kevin came to feel that the organization was not doing enough to reach some of the hardest hit areas. Kevin decided to take direct action.

He booked a flight out of Los Angeles and eventually arrived at a Red Cross shelter in Alexandria Louisiana. While volunteering at the shelter Kevin began to plan. He carried out what he described as "…research and reconnaissance…" and learned the locations of all disaster response centers, Department of Homeland Security facilities, and aerial reconnaissance teams. Kevin explained that he traveled light. His limited personal belonging could fit in his backpack. He described some of the key contents of his travel kit as comprising "…a couple pairs of pants, couple pairs of boots, water and a first aid kit and gallon of Gator Aid. A bunch of white T-shirts and a bunch of underwear, lots of socks, two packs of socks. So I hit the ground like a marine…" When Kevin finally found his way to Common Ground, he realized that the system of governance and distribution was completely broken. Kevin saw the broken system as being not only dysfunctional, but also acting as an impediment to Common Ground's mission. He explains that the group found it necessary to work around the system at times. One example of this might be the group's continued occupation of the small block in the Lower Ninth Ward.

Once Kevin moved on from Alexandria, he managed to get a bus ride to Baton Rouge Louisiana where he stayed for a couple of days. He was struck by the economic and social disparity he witnessed in terms of modes of escape used by displaced residents. For many people Baton Rouge was not the end of their journey but only a way station towards some indeterminate final destination. The disparity between the modes of transportation for the rich and the poor

struck Kevin. “The bus stops, the cab stands, the train stations were just packed with poor and working class people, but I’d go to the airport in that same town and it was quiet, serene, nobody’s in a rush…” Beyond the difference in social class, Kevin also noticed the unmistakable racial dimension to the travel situation. At the airport he mostly saw “white people getting out of BMWs and Lexus SUVs with golf bags slung over their shoulders and there’s even nice music playing in the background…” This drove home the point that the disaster affected people differently depending on one’s social class and racial designation.

Finally Kevin managed to make it to New Orleans about one month after he started his journey from Los Angeles. His days in the city were filled with grueling work. At night he slept in the back of an abandoned church. He would wake up every morning and walk through the city and try to find people doing work and offer his assistance patching roofs, windows, doors or whatever was needed. After getting a feel for the various groups working in the city and desiring to working in the most desperate areas Kevin discovered a “…group of hippies in a big bus with a bunch of cooking equipment and they had set up shop in Washington Square Park…” He found in this “group of hippies” what he believed to be a sound strategy and he decided to concentrate his efforts with them. Kevin estimates that the group was providing 350 to 400 meals per day to those in need. Kevin explained that the group was the “rainbow coalition” spearheaded by a man identified as Philippe. Given Kevin’s descriptions and a brief and hurried conversation I managed to have with Philippe it seems likely that this group may be connected to the Rainbow Family movement, an anarchic movement that developed in the 1970’s counterculture.

Eventually Philippe pointed Kevin in the direction of the burgeoning Common Ground Collective/Relief operations in the Lower and Upper Ninth Wards. Kevin liked what he saw and began to participate in Common Ground’s operations which mainly involved gutting and

repairing a two story building in the Lower Ninth near the St. Claude railroad tracks along with a small church in the area. These buildings were then used to shelter volunteers arriving in the area. Slowly but surely, with much effort, Common Ground began to take shape as a presence in the Lower Ninth and Upper Ninth. They began to lease houses from displaced residents to use as storage and volunteer facilities.

Even though Kevin had been working with the group from almost its beginning, one memory stands out in his mind. Kevin explained to me that during the early days there was an elderly woman by the name of Ms. Dolores. She was a home owner who had lost her home. She waited desperately for FEMA to provide her with trail to live in. She was a widow and had no family or friends that were available to help her in the mean time.

Miss Dolores remained at the shelter for a few months. Kevin took a measure of personal responsibility for her care. Kevin split his time between working hard to keep his kitchen organized and operational as well as participating in a group of volunteers who tried to maintain the area as a safe haven in the deteriorating city. Kevin views his time with Miss Dolores as a learning experience. She was kind of a personal lens through which Kevin came to understand the full depths of the dysfunctional government relief effort. Kevin pondered why a seventy-three year old women living in twenty-first century America had to rely on "grassroots guerilla relief" workers for care and safety. Kevin took his responsibility to Miss Dolores seriously. He talked with her, made sure that she had food and water and even routinely changed her bed sheets when she inadvertently urinated on them. "I did that [changed urine soaked sheets] more than once or twice. And I tell you…you'd expect more out of this great nation. She worked hard all her life."

However, Kevin felt the need to point out that he was not a fan of "free handouts" from the government but in the case of Ms. Dolores and other similar cases, he certainly thought that the government could have done more to aid them.

Kevin felt that his political beliefs were too complex to be rendered into a simple left/right dichotomy. He stated the he was definitely not a supporter of the Bush administration and felt that would probably label him left-wing but he refused to label himself. However, his analysis of the Bush administration's role in American democratic life and by extension the political system in general might be considered radical:

> Well, I think that um, I'm very upset with the current state of American politics. The system is broken and if we don't see revolution fast, if we don't fix it, it's going to be a serious problem. I don't see the Bush administration as an American presidency; it's not, I consider it to be a psychological operation being perpetrated on the American people in order to gain control of the arm of strength, i. e. the U.S. military, in order to consolidate the resources of the earth for the benefit of the wealthy elite ownership class who own everything and disguise it as a democracy.

Kevin also offered an astute analysis of the functions of Common Ground and the organization's role in facilitating the relief effort by acting as a physical and communicative conduit for individual volunteers on a national and even international scale. Kevin described Common Ground as a "platform whereby people throughout the country have come to volunteer. A platform where people can come to bring their skills and talents to bear to bring aid and support to the situation…" Kevin put this in personal terms. He explained that when he first arrived at Common Ground he was not simply authoritatively or arbitrarily told what to do. Instead, Kevin found himself seated in a circle with other volunteers, and together they all figured out what tasks might be most appropriate for his abilities. Kevin had been trained as a cook in the Marine Corps. Kevin organized kitchens and built supply lines for food. "[I] …saw

what I could do to help and I commenced to bring my talents and my skills to bear so did many others…"

Kevin clearly articulates one of the key theoretical arguments developed in this thesis: Common Ground is a node in large informal networks of activists and it appeals to those with a more autonomous inclination.

Sean: An Introspective Anarchist

This section is based on an interview conducted during one of the seemingly random power outage that struck the area occasionally. With the lights out one could make out a star or two fighting to be seen through the low hanging hazy clouds. Their feeble light competed with orange glow emanating from the rest of the city around the Lower Ninth. A power outage had darkened the block occupied by Common Ground Collective/Relief; the outage probably would have darken the entire Lower Ninth but for the fact that most of the Lower Ninth was already lacking electric power and had been since the storm. Right before the electric power failed I had arranged an interview with a volunteer by the name of Sean at a café in the Upper Ninth or Bywater. I was glad to have the interview to conduct and I felt fortunate to have a reason to get out of the darkness and humid heat of the ground floor bunk room of 1800 until the power was restored so I could run the cheap electric fan I had set up near my bed. Sean also seemed to be especially happy to get out of the darkened ward for a time.

A twenty-eight year old college graduate, Sean had been volunteering with Common Ground for four months and he had no concrete plans on when he would be leaving. He was involved with the wetland restoration project. The people who participated in the wetland restoration project formed a small subset of Common Ground volunteers and were all close friends, almost a clique. Sean was very friendly and talkative. In the early morning and some

times in the evenings he would practice yoga positions on the concrete foundations of obliterated homes. It was probably this combined with his practice of bicycling all over town that gave Sean's medium frame a lean and supple musculature.

Before coming to Common Ground Sean had volunteered with an Indy Media group located in the North East of the country and he had worked with a non-profit organization. Sean grew up in a suburb of a major Midwestern city and, "went east for college and got political in college." For Sean his college years were a time of discovery and blooming political-awareness. He became involved in campus activism and since graduating with a Master's degree, Sean has searched for ways to stay involved with political activism. "[I am]...trying to stay involved with good groups that are working for change, real change and not just reform." Sean's main political concerns mostly focus on environmental issues and what he views as the lurking threats of authoritarianism and fascism.

Sean first learned of Common Ground when a group of representatives from Common Ground visited the collectively run radical bookstore and community space of which he was a member. The Common Ground representatives explained the dire situation in the New Orleans and the need for volunteers to come to the city and help. Sean also learned about Common Ground from a friend whom he interviewed on an Indy Media radio program. The activities of Common Ground resonated with Sean, "…it seemed to be in line with my thinking about how things could be better."

However, in the day to day reality of volunteering with Common Ground Collective/Relief Sean admits that it is not exactly what he expected. He expressed ambivalence about the organizational structure of the group which operates, in terms of decision making at least, from a top-down model instead of a collective and horizontal model. Sean admits that he

would prefer a more collective orientation but also realizes that the leadership's emphasis on environmental issues such as restoring the wetlands surrounding the city has benefited his subsection within the larger organization. For the most part Sean was happy to avoid the "drama" of internal squabbles both major and minor that would arise in one form or another just about daily. Sean felt as though he was able to use his training in environmental science to contribute to the group's environmental mission, and that was enough to keep him going.

Specifically, Sean's direct participation in the wetlands project involved the potting of various plants and tree saplings and then, along with other volunteers, manually planting them in swampy wetlands. This was an exercise that was carried out every Thursday. Sean was also able to gain access to laboratory facilities at Tulane University and he used this access to run water and soil tests to check on levels of contaminants such as oil and benzene associated with toxic spills that occurred during the storm.

In terms of his central aspirations, his political visions and his goals, Sean would like to see the complete rebirth of the Lower Ninth Ward along more autonomous lines. Sean is an anarcho-communist and admits that he does not live by his principles everyday, but sees those principles as something to strive for, a guiding force in his life. He believes in human freedom that is created through a collective effort. Sean seemed to embrace the anarchic ethic of personal responsibility with social commitment. "Politics is an inhuman way of thinking about things. You elect someone to make decisions for you and there goes your freedom, your integrity, you know." Representative politics has always been a contentious issue for anarchist. The problem arises from the seemingly contradictory nature of the arrangement. If the people are sovereign than what need is there of governing representatives? If popular sovereignty really existed than it would be indistinguishable from society and would essential shade into a kind of anarchic

industrial organization, or so the argument goes (Guerin 1970: 17). Like many anarchist, Sean sees the community as the starting point for building a new, more egalitarian, social order. “I think it’s about running your life in your community the way you see fit.” Sean sees the autonomous community as an important goal of the volunteer effort. Sean hopes that one day the returning residents will be able to provide for many of their basic needs, food, water, energy, waste and soil remediation. “If they can take care of all this stuff—it’ll necessitate their own two hands, their own community—like their *own*—then it’s autonomous.” He sees this as a way out of the cycle of poverty, disaster and corrupt governments. “It’s free from anything the government has to offer and there’s a resiliency, there’s a robustness there that I think a hurricane would be—it would be harder to destroy.”

However, Sean is no dogmatist or total idealist. He, like a number of volunteers that I encountered, expressed doubts born of self questioning and reflexive reasoning. He understands that the organization, Common Ground, does not fully live up to his vision and that, more importantly, there could be a disconnect between the goals of radical volunteers like himself and the actual needs and desires of residents.

Despite viewing Common Ground’s organizational structure as hierarchical, and thus problematic from an anarchist perspective, Sean believes that the group has managed to produce positive results. Sean appreciates and respects one of the organization’s more prominent, but unwritten policies. “…[A]nd you’re told from day one—and I was told and that’s great that I was told that, ‘you can either be with Common Grounds, accept this or you can kind of just go find your own thing.’ Sean also found that there was space for a more horizontal and autonomous form of organization within the larger group. “I stayed with Common Ground, again, I had that

autonomy…I think the wetland's group is really cool in allowing people—and supporting them in the decisions that they make."

Even though Sean found his work with Common Ground's wetlands restoration group to be personally fulfilling, he never stopped being concerned about the big picture and his role in it. "So we're coming in here with this idea of autonomous development and meanwhile people are displaced and half the city is gone and they want homes, they want homes back. I don't know it's overwhelming…" Following the reflexive train of thought further, Sean expressed his concern for returning residents and the permanence of what has been accomplished. "They need everything and then they come back and the next hurricane is going to come…and all our work, maybe not on a political level, but everything that everyone is doing, you know, this summer could be gone." Sean continued by questioning the legitimacy of his efforts:

> Where's our legitimacy come from, really, right? We're white activists and a lot of anarchist. Okay, so we're anarchist and we've got these brilliant ideas about how to bring back things, meanwhile the residents here, maybe they don't want us here, maybe they just want to go back to pre-Katrina, maybe they like what we've got to say but how much are we listening to what they have to say…we need to build something bigger than Common Ground—something bigger than our ideas.

The concerns expressed by Sean seemed to be shared by the majority of volunteers. For the most part volunteers like Sean were acquainted with history, the history of social movements and the failure of vanguardism to produce a more just society. It seems to be implicit in the anti-authoritarian doctrine of anarchism that anarchists have mostly been concerned with the ethics of practice (Graeber 2004:5).

Sean's statements hint at or point towards a certain reality of Common Ground's existence. As an organization it actually had two levels; of course, these levels were never explicitly or officially recognized, but nevertheless they co-existed. On one level was the

leadership which in the final analysis consisted of Malik and a few other volunteers that took it upon themselves to organize by giving commands. This level encompassed the bureaucratic aspects of Common Ground, the stationary and letterheads, the non-profit tax status, the bookkeeping and bank accounts. On this level Common Ground was an official entity that operated in a fairly standard capacity as a struggling relief organization. On a second, on the level of practice, Common Ground is a free association of individuals melded together in a common purpose, a commitment to social justice. However, the internal dysfunction apparently disrupted the enactment of the shared ideals of solidarity. There was always a tension between the leadership and the supposedly led. There was a constant shifting between a kind of internal "do-it-yourself" autonomy and top-down direction. This tension seemed to be one of the main foils for organizational efficiency.

Anti-Imperialism Workshop

I attended a small gathering towards the latter part of my fieldwork. The gathering was titled as an "anti-imperialism workshop" and it was held at a local anarchist bookstore called the Iron Rail, located in the Bywater area of town. The workshop is a good example of Common Ground's position as a node within larger activist networks.

Only a small group managed to attend, including twelve participants and three facilitators. I had previously met all of the participant at the anti-racism potlucks, with the exception of a young woman who was accompanied by her mother.

One of the facilitators posted a large sheet of paper on the wall with an outline of the meetings agenda; it read in a descending order: Welcome and Intro, Goals, Values and Vision, Time line of anti-imperialism, movement of movements, Looking at Our Work, Evaluations and Checkout.

After a brief round of introductions the meeting got started. One person acted in a primary role of lecturer and the other two facilitators mostly functioned as assistants. The main facilitator, a young athletic woman in her late twenties with blond hair and a gear tattooed on her shoulder explained that she was, “really interested in how we [activists as a community] challenge the empire from within.” Her manner of communication gave the impression that she had conducted workshops before and was seasoned. She suggested that as individuals we should try and participate as fully as possible in the workshop by either “stepping up or stepping back.” She continued, “If you know that you’re a talker, you might want to step back a little to make room for people who aren’t so excited about public speaking and if you know that you are normally quiet, you should make an effort to step up.”

As the workshop got rolling the main facilitator asked, “What the Hell is Imperialism, anyway?” which she almost simultaneously reproduced in writing on a large sheet of paper which was then placed on the shops brick wall by her assistant. She then asked if we could all spend some time naming some of the attributes of imperialism. The list included: A strong expansionist military, the taking of other people’s resources, the creation of economic dependency, ideological justifications of rule such as God and religion, the destruction of indigenous cultures, the categorization and division of peoples, genocide, and finally the creation of its own self serving history. Looking at the list, thinking of what might be added; she commented that this was a good description of empire. Focusing her attention on another sheet of paper, she asked one of the assistant facilitators to write, “What are Empires Doing.” Under this, a number of subheadings were introduced; for example, “economic structures” and the creation of debt and trade. “It seems hard to believe but the U.S. really does not have the money to pay for all the wars and domestic spending, and is running off of loans,” commented the facilitator.

The next subheading read, “corporations bypass the nation state.” At this the key facilitator recalled a brief anecdote about a conversation she had with a friend who said that it had recently occurred to her that ‘we [anarchist] really don’t need to worry about smashing the state any more because the corporations have done it for us, now we need to smash the corporations.’ She acknowledged that this was an overly simplistic analysis but also thought that it made a good point about the role of business in the world. “Private contractors” was placed on the sheet under “military force” and this produced a discussion about the rise in the use of mercenaries in U.S. wars. One of the participants pointed out that in this regard corporations use state violence to their own ends. Another person noted that there is a revolving door between the corporate world and the government in terms of hiring practices, “…it’s the same people.”

The next sheet of paper asked “what’s the cultural impact” of empire. It was suggested by one participant that the economic and social conditions produced by empire tend to break up families and communities. It was later suggested that one of the negative impacts of empire is the exportation of a “corporate cultural narrative” such as American pop culture. Also it was pointed out that empire is creating a military draft based on poverty and race. And this was related to the export of the “prison industrial complex.”

The reasons for all of this were expressed by the facilitator as first classic capitalism and now increasingly neoliberalism; nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain was used as an example of, “…an empire on steroids.”

Two sheets of paper were posted on the brick wall so that they made one continues sheet that was divided into fourteen sections, each with it own heading. The seven sections on top were divided into aspects of the empire on a global scale and the seven rows on the bottom were devoted to aspects of the manifestations of empire in New Orleans. The first section starting

from the top left was titled “the rule of the market” and an example of this included in subheadings were structural adjustments programs fostered by the IMF. Another example was the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Someone commented that NAFTA’s function is to remove the market from governing structures. One participant said that the “rule of the market” means that [corporations] make the rules [in terms of trade policy and etc.].” The facilitator asked how we might connect such global issues to New Orleans. Just about everyone agreed that it seemed that local government was giving priority to business interests over that of ordinary people and that there is a focus on market forces that seems to mirror global conditions. People proposed a number of examples such as “cuts to public services,” “deregulation,” “privatization,” “individualization” [of the problem], “militarization” and “restriction of movement.” The participants in the workshop saw all of these global issues paralleled in New Orleans.

The discourse of the three hour workshop emphasized connections between U.S. activism and movements on a global scale. As if to emphasize the solidarity between activists, the facilitator repeatedly quoted from the Zapatista’s. “I’m going to borrow Zapatista slogans today because they are beautiful and poetic but also sum up complex issues in a sentence,” she stated after writing out and reading aloud, “for humanity against neoliberalism” on a sheet of poster paper. Because the meeting was already looking to run over time, the facilitator took us through an abridged timeline of what she called, “the movement of movements.” This was basically a genealogy of events involving various social movement from around the globe. “This is about how history is dialectical and the reciprocal action of domination and resistance.” She spoke of the dichotomies of the cold war and an attempt to break free by the Non-aligned Movement at the United Nations in 1961.

However, the facilitator's discourse kept producing the basic dichotomy of "us/them." She even acknowledged this act one point saying that I'm over simplifying but I basically mean by "us" those who are working for social justice and by "them" those who are working "evil."

A number of the workshops participants also had plans to attend the U.S. Social Forum being held in Atlanta later in the month. The facilitator mentioned that two trends in global justice movement that might be seen at the U.S. Social Forum is a tension (but not a dichotomous one between reformists (NGO's and academic types) and the grassroots and poor peoples movements (exemplified by the Zapatistas). Speaking of the world social forum, the key facilitator noted that it was a campaign against "manufactured common sense." Another facilitator began to tell us of examples of grassroots movements. The list included, the other campaign mounted by the Zapatistas, The KKRS (Karnataka State Farmers Association in India), The Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee and Movimiento Piquetero of Argentina. She also mentioned a new book that she contributed to titled, "We are everywhere" and its website weareeverywhere.org. The book and website both chronicle the activities of the "movement of movements."

Towards the end of the meeting, we were asked to break up into pairs and respond to a general question concerned with how U.S. based activists can continue to building stronger movements in the U.S. but stay active in solidarity with those movements around the world so as not to reproduce U.S. hegemony. With my discussion partner, I explained that I have not recently been actively working to build movements, but I hope that my research can help raise awareness of social movements and the issues that they raise.

The meeting resumed and we all basically agreed that workshops like the one we had just attended might not result in definite solutions but certainly can be a place to start the process of

questioning. “We’re not going to walk in here and then walk out later with a five point plan—and that would be a little creepy anyway,” commented the key facilitator before closing the meeting.

CHAPTER 5: REWEAVING THE STRANDS OF THEORY: DISCUSSION

Why volunteers? One of the most pointed critiques I have received related to my research came during the start of my interview with Billy. Of all the people I interviewed, Billy was perhaps the most suspicious of my motives. Candidly he questioned the usefulness of focusing on volunteers instead of victims and survivors of hurricane Katrina. “I feel odd that you are not engaging with resident more than volunteers. I feel somewhat uncomfortable about that.” Billy explained the he had almost backed out of doing the interview but had decided to go along with it, after consultation with a friend, so that he could inform me about the wetlands restoration project. Billy stated further his doubts about my research, “I feel uncomfortable about the focus on out of town volunteer movements as oppose to local social organizing that’s happening in New Orleans.” I asked Billy if he had any particular organizations in mind. His response is interesting because two of the four organizations that he named, Critical Resistance and the People’s Institute, are also national and international organizations involving volunteers and activist beyond New Orleans. The other two organizations, Survivors Village and Resurrection City, are decidedly more locally based. The reason for pointing this out is not to undermine Billy’s argument, which is important, but rather to illustrate further the scale of interaction between the local, national and even international. Even in his critique Billy cited two organizations that operate locally but had a national membership. And this seems to be a beginning to answer Billy’s larger and more basic point. Why volunteers?

This study has engaged three interconnected research questions: 1) Do volunteers working with Common Ground Collective/Relief use ideological constructions to give meaning to their efforts and experiences? 2) How are volunteers with Common Ground attempting to affect post-disaster conditions in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans through daily practices?

3) Do the efforts and commitments of volunteers represent positive social and cultural transformation in the post-Katrina Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans?

After the disaster of hurricane Katrina a wrecked city looked for relief and support. Who would act to save the city? For the most part the government, on all levels, failed miserably to live up to the expectation of survivors. The situation demanded action and people, ordinary people, began to organize locally and beyond to answer the desperate need of the survivors of Katrina. Common Ground Collective/Relief was founded in the ruins of the city of New Orleans but, because of the wrecked society, it needed assistance from well intentioned outsiders. The internet aided in organizing the first wave of volunteers and built networks of communication and support. As time passed some volunteers left New Orleans never to return, their job was done, but many stayed on. Soon simple aggregates of individuals began to morph into complex communities. Volunteer communities such as Common Ground are acting as a bridge between the local and the national and even the global. Common Ground has become a node in activist networks.

To contrast the local and the non-local in a definitive sense is, in a way, missing the point. The large number of volunteer groups that have put down stakes in the city have taken on the role of a voluntary governmental apparatus—a shadow state apparatus that serves to distribute goods and services. As one participant simply put it, referring to the large collection of volunteer organizations working in the city, “they’re the government.” However, this apparatus of social welfare does not exist as a sovereign and complete entity bordered off from the rest of the world. Rather without the rest of the world, the systems of distribution now existent in New Orleans could not be. Many of the goods are donations come from myriad geographic locations. The services are based on volunteer labor provided by thousands of volunteers.

Beyond the immediate needs of relief and reconstruction, these new social formations offer the potential for positive change. Groups like Common Ground do not seek the restoration of the pre-Katrina status quo but rather they seek to fulfill the possibilities for positive progressive change inherent in the loosened structures and somewhat liminal conditions of post-Katrina New Orleans.

At its very core anthropology asks the question of what it means to be human. Put another way, anthropologists have always been concerned with the range of human possibilities. To conceptualize New Orleans as a frontier city is to embrace the human potential for change. Post-Katrina New Orleans is a dynamic place and one of the key mechanisms of this dynamism is the community of activist volunteers operating in the city. There are certain general tendencies observable in the wide range of social movements operating in the twenty-first century and these tendencies are based on at least four values that have been articulated alone or in combination by various social movements; as Nash describes them, "…human rights, environmental conservation, public as well as personal autonomy, and justice" (2005: 4). As this study has tried to make clear, all of these values have been expressed individually and collectively by the participants in this research, the volunteers of Common Ground. What any particular group might mean when they articulate these four broad value categories is difficult for an outsider to know unless he or she undertakes a detailed on the ground investigation. "to understand contemporary social movements one must look at the mirco-level of everyday practices and their imbrications with larger processes of development, patriarchy, capital and the State" (Escobar 1992: 420). This study has attempted explicate, and tease out some of the larger connections existing between the local level practices and beliefs of volunteers working in the Lower Ninth Ward and the larger social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political structures.

It is important to recall the highly contextual nature of this study. The volunteer movement in New Orleans exists because of hurricane Katrina. However, Katrina was not simply wind and rain but rather Katrina was a final powerful disruption to an environmental, social and political system that was already poised on the edge of disaster. Due to the cumulative historical baggage of racism, classism and environmental degradation, the more marginal and oppressed populations of New Orleans suffered the most because they existed in an already precarious situation. As this study has shown, disasters are never natural but always interact in complex ways with culture, society, technology and politics.

Individuals and groups do not experience disasters passively but often act to secure their own and other's welfare. Unfortunately the common image of the immediate situation after hurricane Katrina is that of lawless looting. Of course, there was lawlessness in the hurricanes wake but there was also even more pro-social behavior by a host of actors intended to mitigate the immediate conditions of systemic breakdown. The founders and volunteers of the fledgling Common Ground Collective/Relief played a role in this early pro-social response to the storms aftermath. It is impossible to know all the various motivations each individual brought to the fight against further calamity in the aftermath of the storm. However, it seems likely that many were motivated by a spirit of camaraderie and solidarity. In the immediate aftermath of the storm all those left behind and stranded were figuratively and, at times, literally in the same boat.

The idea of solidarity as expressed by individual volunteers and as the official slogan of Common Ground Collective/Relief is worth exploring. Nearly all the volunteers with whom I spoke cited the desire to express solidarity with the survivors of Katrina. Solidarity was both an impetus to action and a goal to be achieved. "Solidarity" is an intellectual and political orientation towards equality. However, solidarity also implies action or practice; especially when

it is combined in the "…not charity" component of the slogan. "Solidarity not charity" expresses a collective and individual commitment to a political ideal. The collective aspect of the notion of solidarity implies linguistically that which Common Ground attempted to enact in practice: the formation of large distributed networks of activists. Of course there is also a moral aspect to the ideology as well. In fact, the morality of solidarity cannot easily be separated from its political dimension. In this sense solidarity speaks of the development of community, a rule governed group of individuals with shared reciprocal rights and obligations to each other. This politico-moral understanding of "solidarity not charity" seems to be what the volunteers struggled with the most. In their own reflexive and introspective accounts volunteers concerned themselves with this latter aspect of solidarity. It was understood by just about everyone with whom I spoke that Common Ground fell short of the ideal of a harmonious and committed group of comrades striving for equity and justice. As in any human community, interpersonal conflicts did arise. Disagreements over the long term and daily direction of the organization were common. There were disagreements about who should be allowed to live in the volunteer quarters. There were disagreements about who should prepare the group's evening meal. Some volunteers relished the lack of coordinated daily activity, was often the case. Such volunteers enjoyed setting their own pace and work load. Others expressed frustration at the lack of clear structures of command.

The final outcome of Common Ground's efforts in the Lower Ninth Ward is impossible to predict. For example, it may be that the group's plans for replenishing the wetlands will yield substantial benefits for the wetlands and increased protection for the Lower Ninth but this might not come to fruition. However, between the ideal and the real there is the space of possibilities. This study has attempted to document the potentials for positive social transformation in the

post-Katrina Lower Ninth Ward by ethnographically exploring the ideology and practices of the volunteers of the Common Ground Collective/Relief.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to document and interpret the mirco-level practices and ideology of a community of activist volunteers primarily operating in the Lower Ninth Ward of New Orleans. The situation in New Orleans continues to be dire and for the most vulnerable populations it will likely remain so for the foreseeable future. However, the concern of this thesis has not been to predict the future. Instead this thesis has attempted to locate sites and practices that at least hold the possibility of positive socio-cultural transformations. Activism is always, at least, partially about the future. This ideological commitment towards tomorrow is summarized in the slogan, “a better world is possible.” However, tomorrow must be built in the present; the foundations of the future must be laid in the concrete reality of today.

The methodology underlying the research for this study is straightforward and classically anthropological. I lived and volunteered with Common Ground for fifty-three days and during that time I conducted twenty-five semi-structured interviews with volunteer participants. I also utilized the key anthropological method of participant-observation. Because of the primarily qualitative nature of this study, three underlying procedures were used in order to arrive at understanding, or “verstehen.” To build this subjective understanding the study relied on a process of discovery. This process of discover encompassed the whole of duration of the research project and involved all the significant interactions and data collection from participants. A second and related procedure was the development of interpretive descriptions which involved thinking through, questioning, ordering, and generally making sense of the material gained through interaction and data collection. The writing of field notes and then the later writing of numerous drafts and refinement of this study was key to developing interpretive

descriptions. Thirdly, the data were examined to find elements that might be generalized. This was really the process of theory construction.

This study rest on three theoretical prongs: the notion of network struggles as articulated by Michael Hardt Antonio Negri (2000; 2004), the concept of the shadow state apparatus as developed by Jennifer Wolch (1990), and practice theory as primarily explicated by Sherry Ortner (2006). The concept of network struggle elaborates on the development of horizontal structures of organization and communication between various geographically dispersed socio-cultural movements and groups of activists. Such groups use the recent advances in communication technology to cooperate and ordinate agendas and political actions. These are political affinity groups for the post-modern era: individually autonomous but willing and able to join forces and cooperate towards larger commiserate ends. Such networks are distributed in that they have no central organizational structure. There are hubs and nodes that develop in these networks of political affinity but no overriding authority giving directions or managing an overarching structure. As this study has demonstrated, Common Ground can be understood as a node in these larger networks of activism.

With the influx of numerous volunteer based organizations since Katrina, New Orleans itself might be seen as a hub in the networks of activism. The volunteer community has actually taken on the role of a shadow state apparatus. Again, as this study as demonstrated, the volunteers community in the city has become responsible for providing many essential goods and services to affected residents. However, it is important to note that even as the volunteer community is playing a significant distributional role in the social system of the city, the conventional state has not gone away but rather has been reduced to maintaining social control

by use of coercive force. This is especially the case in the Lower Ninth Ward, if no where else in the city.

Humans create the world. The structures of society are the product of collective social action. However, these same structures also, reciprocally, influence human action. This is the central concern of practice theory which seeks to understand the social and cultural processes of this construction. Practice theory, in its anthropological guise, requires an intimate knowledge of the everyday. This study has documented the ground level ideological and practical constructions of volunteers involved in the Common Ground organization. Living and working alongside volunteers gave ground floor view of the practices of volunteering in a disaster zone. During the course of my stay in the Lower Ninth Ward, I also participated in countless informal conversations and informal interviews with volunteers. These totally unstructured and often unplanned conversations helped give me insight into the experiences of volunteers, their ideological and practical commitments.

By documenting and theorizing the micro-practices of activist volunteerism, this study has contributed to the understanding of some of the processes of socio-cultural transformations. A better world may indeed be possible but it will not be achieved without understanding the processes of its constructions.

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