Current Anthropology Volume 43, Number 1, February 2002

An Ethnography of Neoliberalism

Understanding Competition in Artisan Economies[1]

by Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld

Both a method and a goal of neoliberal policy, competitiveness structures ever more economic practices while consolidating cultural and community commitments. Current anthropological models treat competition narrowly as a reflection of economic inputs—capital, innovation, and talent. In contrast, I show that, first, competing successfully is predicated less and less on economic factors and increasingly on expressiveness and communication. Second, competition entails not so much individualism as positioning and thus is best understood as a structural relationship among competitors. Third, the essential cultural work of competition is not to sweep away inefficient conventions but rather to reconcile the painful inequalities emergent within a community with its professed shared values. To support these claims, I analyze artisan economies, a sector of the global economy that has been surprisingly, if not always happily, revitalized by neoliberal policies. Concentrating on indigenous artisans in Ecuador, I examine how people use words, art, crafted objects, and consumer goods to construct competition as an economic and moral field and place themselves within it.

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1. Research in Otavalo was funded by grants from the National Science Foundation, the Fulbright Hayes IIE program, and the UCLA Latin American Center. A CIFRE grant from the University of Iowa supported research in Quito and Otavalo in 1999. A University of Iowa Old Gold Fellowship underwrote research in 2000, and a University of Iowa International Summer Research Fellowship supported ten weeks of fieldwork in 2001. For the information on their lives and work, I thank the painters of Tigua, especially Alfred Toaquiza, Julio Toaquiza, Juan Luis Cuyo, and Francisco Cuyo. To the residents of Ariasucu I owe a deep and growing debt of gratitude. An earlier version of this paper was presented in 1999 at the American Anthropological Association annual meetings in Chicago and at Northwestern University's Department of Anthropology. I am grateful to Michael Chibnik, Timothy Earle, and Susan Phillips for the time they have taken talking over these issues with me. All errors of fact or interpretation remain my own.

Addressing a gathering of Latin American economists in October 2000, Stanley Fischer, first deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund, reassured his audience that growth would reward reformers, including those toiling in troubled Argentina, Ecuador, and Brazil (Fischer 2000). His language was technical: "With an improved competitive position, a current account deficit under 3½ percent of GDP, the public sector deficit on a declining path, and important structural reforms enacted or under way, Argentina is in a good position to resume moderate growth." For his audience, though, he delivered a message of faith. His words affirmed the promise of neoliberal policy, including "fiscal discipline," "structural reforms," and "export competitiveness."

Ecuador has struggled to implement such IMF-backed reforms since the nation's near financial collapse in 1998. As subsidies have been removed, industries have stumbled, with unforeseen consequences. In the Andean market town of Otavalo, for example, a union of 2,500 indigenous artisans organized a boycott in June 2000 against the seven major factories that supplied them with yarn for their sweaters, bags, and wall hangings. Since the adjustments, yarn prices had more than doubled while quality had plummeted. At a meeting called to resolve the boycott, the union's president lectured factory representatives, often in terms that echoed IMF concerns with export competitiveness: "Now craft commerce is practically finished, especially sweaters. We have great competition with very, very famous markets such as Nepal, China, Bolivia, and Peru, that for us, with the quality of wool that you produce, it is an embarrassment to take [to market] the products we do."

But one need not travel to the Andes to observe the tensions that arise when states insist that local enterprise and rural communities make their way in the global economy. In the United States, the Bush administration has nominated for undersecretary for rural development an Iowa farmer so unpopular in Iowa that he "couldn't get elected dogcatcher" in his own hometown (Lee 2001). Seen locally as "the poster boy for corporate agriculture" with a farm that is close to ten times the size of his neighbors', the nominee enjoys backing in Washington because he "has worked hard to harness technology and improve agricultural operations in an increasingly competitive world market." America's family farms, like Ecuadorian craft merchants and Argentinian exporters, are expected alike to become fit to compete in the global market.

James Carrier (1997) has written that in the long decade of the 1980s the concept of the market solidified its hold on Western culture. This cultural model assumes that the world consists of free individuals subject only to the constraints they accept voluntarily. These individuals are rational and operate best in markets with manifold choices. In the logic of this model, choice brings about competition, a moral good that insures efficiency and better products and prices for buyers (1997: 3). A description of neither how people actually interact when they buy and sell nor current economic theory, this model, he argues, has profound social and political influence, becoming "as important for understanding the West as *ie* is for understanding Japan or *nifs* is for understanding the Kabyle" (p. 1). As the above vignettes suggest, far from being contained in the industrial West, the market model is in an expansive mode, being urgently spread in Argentina, Ecuador, and the rural Midwest through its most dynamic element: the discourse and practice of "competition."

Elaborated through multistranded promarket policies, the pursuit of competitiveness aligns institutions, states, and citizens in a deceptively simple project. "The neoliberal programme tends," as Bourdieu notes (1998:96), "to construct in reality an economic system corresponding to the theoretical description, in other words a kind of logical machine, which presents itself as a chain of constraints impelling the economic agents." Internationally, nations adopt policies that enhance their position, searching for advantages amid "market directed flows and outcomes" and sacrificing political autonomy to do so (DeMartino 1999: 343; Laurie and Marvin 1999; Strange 1996). Nationally, governments sell state-owned enterprises and cut their financial support, forcing them to compete for customers and investment irrespective of national boundaries (Conaghan, Abugattas, and Malloy 1990). Individually, the construction of selfhood draws less and less on waged work (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). Rather, working through revised labor laws, states set forth powerful new projects of subjection that bind nation, market, and person in the effort to make citizens themselves competitive actors in the global economy (Petras 1997).

With the exception of the Carrier volume, though, anthropology has had little new to say on the topic of competition. Over two decades ago, Moore (1975) noted that competition is considered one of the "universal contexts of social contact," yet anthropological theory has construed its cultural and social consequences narrowly, often using one of two approaches. For some, "competition" describes the objective interaction of actors pursuing a finite resource. While described in individualized terms, these competitive interactions can have cumulative, collective, and potentially beneficial cultural consequences. In Ecuador, for example, two generations of anthropologists have trumpeted the commercial expertise of the Quichua-speaking Otavaleños, highlighting a widespread proclivity for industriousness and risk taking that has raised their profile in relation to other native ethnic groups (Buitrón 1947, Chavez 1982, Meisch 1998, Salomon 1981). Similarly, in Côte d'Ivoire, Hausa are singled out as taking "pride in their business acumen and their monopoly over many different forms of commerce" (Steiner 1994:53). Shifting from intragroup dealings to intergroup interactions, anthropologists have argued that competing for economic resources motivates individuals to affiliate situationally as an ethnic group in order to improve prospects of gain (Eriksen 1993, Olzak and Nagel 1986).

For others, however, competition is less an objective process than a coercive one. It is antisocial in the inequalities it produces and anticultural in its destruction of communal norms. Here the inspiration is Marx, who argued that the "coercive laws of competition" stem from even deeper laws of capitalism: the imperatives to increase productivity, drive down costs, and capture more of the products' value (Marx 1990:433). Stressing competition's corrosive potential in a peasant community, for example, Scott (1985:261) asserts that the poor must not undercut one another and quotes Marx (1964: 133): "Otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors." In Barth's (1998 [1969]:20) work, competition between ethnic groups produces an unstable situation that must yield to either displacement or complementarity. Others have also characterized realms of competition as "areas of disorder" (Bourdieu 1998, Hinton 1983).

While disagreeing on its ability to produce viable communities, these two approaches similarly cast competition in terms of the market model as described by Carrier. Both emphasize that economic resources, including capital, information, and innovation, largely determine who succeeds in competitive markets. Both accept that competition rewards individualism, elevating that actor who dispenses with cultural constraints or social bonds to achieve economic advantage. By extension, the two implicitly agree that, culturally, competition represents the general triumph of efficiency over convention.

My goal in this article is to lay out a fundamentally different approach, one that does not simply recapitulate the tenets of the market model. Instead, I want to analyze the distinctive inequalities that afflict people seeking livelihoods in capitalism's austere margins and explain how internal discourses of "competition" naturalize these inequalities as an acceptable (for the moment) community condition. In particular, I hope to show how competing in the production and sale of commodities consolidates cultural identities and community commitments even as it produces sharp differences in material well-being. Indeed, with the cases collected here, I show that intragroup competition has entangled economic performance with cultural expressiveness and thus does crucial work to foster the multicultural diversity that others argue to be a hallmark of capitalism's current phase (Harvey 1989).

As a starting point, I invert the assumptions set out above. The argument runs as follows: First, competing successfully is predicated less and less on objective economic factors of capital and innovation and more on expressiveness, communication, and creative responsiveness. Second, the competitive dynamic is frequently not go-it-alone individualism but positioning, and, consequently, competition is better understood as a vital relationship among competitors than as discrete acts of identification of winners and losers. Third, the essential cultural work of competition is not to sweep away the inefficient but rather to reconcile the painful inequalities emergent within communities with their professed shared values.

To develop this argument, my analysis proceeds on two tracks. First, I investigate patterns of earnings, income, and accumulation in order to pinpoint the nature of contact, dependence, and divergence among competitors. Subsequently, I examine how people use words, art, crafted objects, and consumer goods to construct competition as an economic and moral field and place themselves within it. Artisans, both those who have found competition with "very, very famous markets such as Nepal, China, Bolivia, and Peru" and those struggling with and against their sisters and brothers next door, illustrate the problems at hand.

Artisans, Globalization, and Andean Communities

Casualties of industrial expansion in the West, artisan trades, understood broadly as small-scale, minimally capitalized commodity production and sales, have surged elsewhere, perhaps no more strongly than in places that have embraced promarket reforms and global integration. In Mexico, for example, the nation "shares its accelerated industrial reconversion with an intense support of artisanal production" that has swelled the ranks of artisans to 6 million (García Canclini 1995*a*:154). In Senegal, new trades of making trunks, memorial staffs, and other goods out of recycled materials have grown, employing cobblers, chemists, and teachers unable to find steady work in their original professions (Roberts 1996). Such expansion reflects the failure of industrial modernization to incorporate the entire workforce (García Canclini 1993, Kleymeyer 1994, Rosenbaum 2000). As Ferguson (1999:251) has noted in a related context, "the 'dead ends' of the past keep coming back, just as the 'main lines' that are supposed to lead to the future continually seem to disappoint." The collapse of subsistence systems exacerbates the weedlike growth of artisan trades as peasants congest street markets in order to supplement anemic agrarian production (Eber 2000, Nash 1994, Rus 1995). Women, in particular, have tried to improvise artisan trades and marketing organizations in order to secure the autonomy and dignity that farming no longer affords and multinational factory work destroys (Nash 1993).

While hardship drives many into artisan trades, expanding payoffs due to international links bring in still more producers, including ambitious young men and women who might have other opportunities. Here globalization has gilded weaving and wood-carving trades in Oaxaca, Mexico (Chibnik n.d.*a*, Cohen 1999), and offered international glamour to some makers of *bogolan* or "mudcloth" in Mali (Rovine 2001). In the Andes, internationalization delivered to some indigenous communities their first opportunity to circumvent economic discrimination. Otavaleño textile entrepreneurs had traveled to Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, and the United States by the early 1960s, long before they had gained formal economic opportunities and political stature in their home province (Buitrón 1962).

For all the attention that global flows of craft goods have received, though, national factors—internal migration, the struggle to authenticate local culture—add their own momentum to craft production, not only in Mexico and Mali but in France and Japan as well. Commenting on the rise of master chocolatiers in France in the 1990s, Terrio (1996:77) writes, "The very persistence of skilled craftsmen and family modes of entrepreneurship in these [post-industrial] economies means they can be absorbed within and designated as unique manifestations of a unified national culture." Japanese potters have also had to embody a distinctive national aesthetic during a moment of industrial transformation (Moeran 1997). Such cultural roles for crafts do not stand outside the market issues previously raised but rather structure earnings and accumulation within the marketplace. Just how much cultural and economic matters are enmeshed will be explored here in the context of two Quichua communities from Ecuador: Tigua and Otavalo.

Piecing together wages, farming incomes, and craft profits that may come from roadless Andean valleys or art galleries in Buenos Aires, Tiguans and Otavaleños represent the dynamic Andean cultural worlds described by Starn (1994:19): places where "the intensified rhythms of intermixture and mobility have created a dizzying proliferation of differences."[2] Yet desperation tinges this mobility and intermixture. With neoliberal austerity closing down a past generation's career paths and subsistence resources faltering (Acosta 2000, Edwards 1995, Green 1995), Ecuador now suffers 19% unemployment and, by some counts, up to 60% underemployment (Rotella 2000; cf. Waters 1997).

Dispersed among ten peasant sectors in the Tigua Valley in the dry, western cordillera of the Andes and migrant communities in the cities of Quito, Latacunga, and Ambato, Quichua-speaking Tiguans number between 1,500 and 2,000. While they have historically farmed barley and potatoes on eroded, steep slopes above 3,000 m, households devote themselves more and more to commercial and waged work on coastal commercial farms or in highland cities (Weismantel 1988). Since the 1970s Tiguans have distinguished themselves from other peasants by embracing and commercially developing an art form invented by Tigua resident Julio Toaquiza. Working with Quiteño folk-art gallery owners, he began to paint scenes of fiestas and rural lives, emphasizing the Corpus Cristi celebrations and the arid, open landscapes that distinguish his people's culture and homeland. Composed with bright enamel house paints, these *cuad-*

2. My field research in both Tigua and Otavalo began in 1991, but the work has followed different paths. My Otavaleño work has centered on the sector of Ariasucu and involved a series of visits in 1991 (two months), 1992 (six weeks), 1993–94 (one year), and week-long to two-week-long visits in 1996, 1999, and 2000. My contact with Tiguans has been more dispersed. In 1991 I visited artists in Quiloa, Tigua, and Quito. In 1992 I spent three weeks in Quiloa and a fourth in Quito with painters. In 1993–94 I followed up with Tiguans who sold in Otavalo. In 1996 I spent ten days with painters on the recently divided hacienda on the outskirts of Quito, and in 1999 I spent two months living with and visiting painters throughout southern Quito, conducting life history interviews, attending association meetings, and gathering data on the markets.

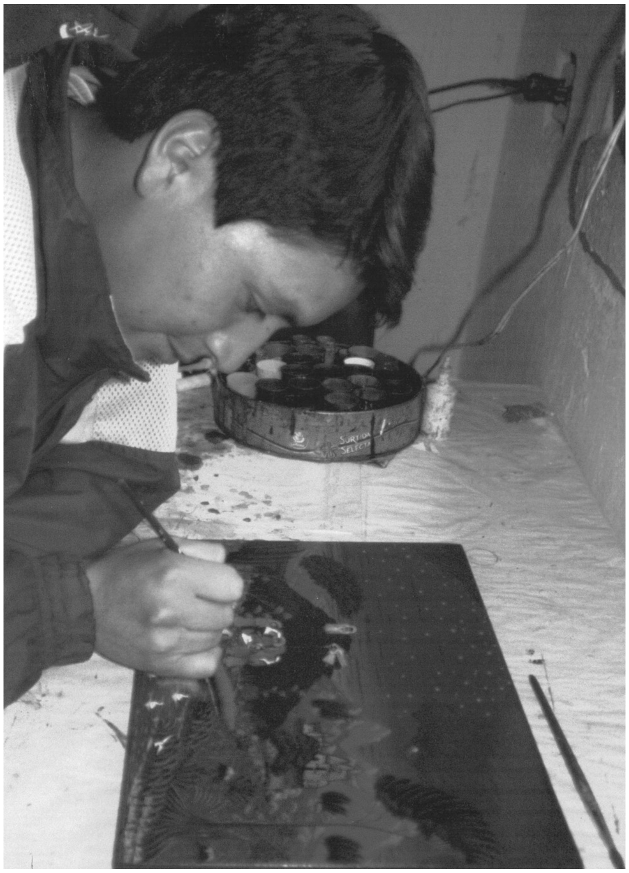

FIG. 1. *Tigua artist Olmedo Cuyo paints a nativity scene in June 2000, using a medium and format pioneered by Julio Toaquiza during the 1970s.*

ros ("canvases" of leather) were sold to foreign tourists and collectors. This craft has expanded to shape the fortunes of many Tiguans through the activities of artists' associations and charismatic artisans (fig. 1).

Painting is one of the few crafts that has not been either invented or made commercial by indigenous Otavaleños (Buitrón 1947, Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999, Meisch 1998, Salomon 1981). Having turned cottage crafts into export industries (indigenous merchants sold over a million sweaters a year in the late 1990s), the 70,000 or so Otavaleños have become national icons in Ecuador for both their economic success and their ethnic pride (Hurtado 1980, Whitten 1985). Regardless of the merchants' fame, however, many Otavaleños remain poor, dependent on overexploited maize-based subsistence agriculture and undercapitalized textile industries. In Ariasucu, one such rural peasant-artisan community of 136 households (approximately 600 residents) and the focus of my research in Otavalo, life follows commercial rather than agrarian routines. After the fiscal crisis of the early 1980s, Ariasucu's out-of-work migrants returned from Quito and pioneered the mass production of belts (*fajas*), the brightly colored, 3-m-long sashes sold to an emerging national market of indigenous women (fig. 2). Yet even as this treadle-loom industry emerged as a viable trade, Ariasuqueños continued to diversify, traveling to Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, and Europe to sell crafts.

Losing farming and wage resources that allowed households to generate incomes irrespective of their neighbors' fortunes, peasants crowd into shared market niches. They live as petty entrepreneurs "looking for an edge" (Whitten and Whitten 1992) first against their kin and neighbors and then against other communities and tradespeople from other lands. In the 1970s and 1980s, anthropologists intensely debated the consequences of emerging structural relations among "petty commodity producers," examining how local production articulated with national economies and contributed to class formation. Issues raised then still must be answered to understand not only the differences that emerge among those who participate in a trade but also what artisanal work means for community stability and growth. More succinctly, as Carol Smith asked (1984), paraphrasing Lenin, "Does a commodity economy enrich the few while ruining the masses?"

Artisans, Inequality, and Income "Superstars"

Smith's question raises another: What is it that enriches the few to begin with? What makes an artisan prosper?

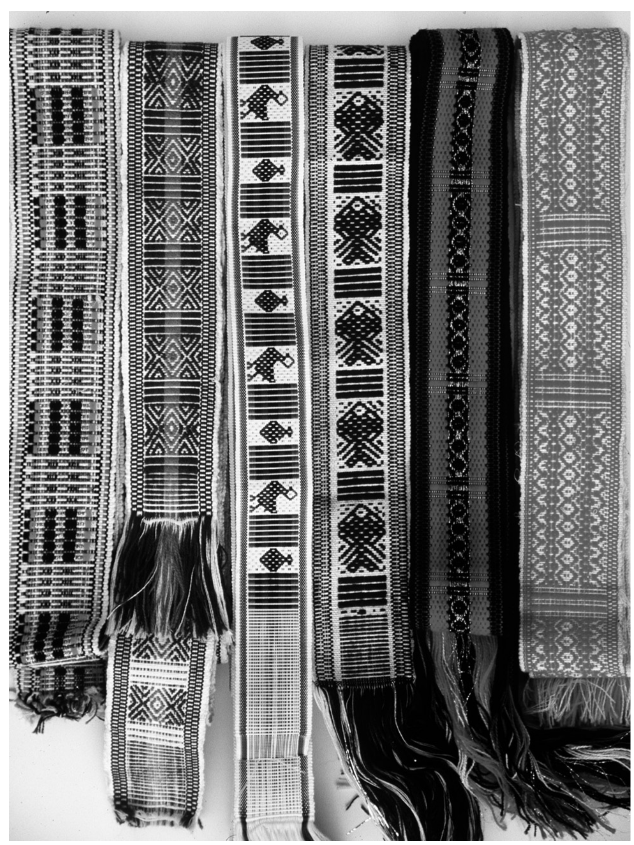

FIG. 2. *Samples of six* faja *designs.*

Knowing what puts some on top will make clear the consequences for those left behind. Perhaps the most rigorous efforts to answer the question have been offered by anthropologists working from a Marxist perspective. Asserting the primacy of capital, some anthropologists have argued that a segment of any artisan community can accumulate wealth through strategic use of wages, subsistence agriculture, and the terms of trade between producers and merchants (Friedmann 1978, Kahn 1980, Littlefield 1978, Stephen 1991, Tice 1995). Cook, for example, argues that small-scale, "endo-familial" accumulation allows some weaving and brick-making enterprises to get ahead (Cook and Binford 1990), although the "hegemony of merchant capital" frequently caps artisans' chances for real advancement (Cook 1986:79).

But too often capital comes up short as an explanation for the specific patterns of economic differentiation among artisans. In her study of weavers in Totonicapan, Guatemala, for instance, Smith (1984) details how the town's commodity-producing peasants rose to prominence as "the most market-dependent peasants in Guatemala." By specializing in ethnic clothing worn by Maya woman throughout the country, they exploited a market that grew with urbanization and the dislocation of Maya populations from relatively self-sufficient rural municipios. Yet as the trade grew and became concentrated in "western Guatemala's core" (Smith 1978) it produced an unexpected sort of accumulation. Unable to capitalize their operations, the peasant weavers "have not differentiated into two classes (although they have greatly differentiated with respect to income)" (Smith 1984:61). Discounted within a Marxist framework, these income differentials can be severe. Smith, for example, records that Totonicapan's top weaver netted $7,350, while the next-highest income was little more than $4,000 and the median income was $2,807 (see fig. 3, *a*).

This imbalance gains further significance by its cross-trade presence. Potters in Sarayama, Japan, a community with 14 artisan households, have been praised for creating pottery whose beauty is at once "natural," "traditional," and "cooperative" (Moeran 1997). Producing teapots, sake cups, rice bowls, and other objects that embodied *mingei* (folk art), ideals, Sarayama artisans enjoyed rising demand for their goods from the 1950s onward because these goods collectively represented ordinary (Japanese) craftsmanship to a society undergoing rapid modernization. The anonymity of the artisans added value to the work; a shared kiln and other resources insured the viability of each family enterprise. Yet even when capital and aesthetic differentiation were minimized as economic factors, economic success became radically imbalanced. Moeran's (1997) income figures show two households earning close to double the median income of the other potters in the village (fig. 3, *b*).[3]

From a neoclassical perspective, the gains would be attributed to innovations on the part of the successful operations. In a Smithian world of "pure" competitive markets (Miller 1997:44), prosperity will go to pioneers—those who create new objects, improve techniques, and open up markets (Frank 1999:146). In several cases, anthropologists have approvingly documented this "selection by merit" (Landes 1998:43), despite whatever broader reservations they may have about the impact of capitalist markets on indigenous or rural societies (Graburn 1976, Ryerson 1976). Improvements in technology, communication, and techniques have indeed boosted the trade and weakened social cooperation in Sarayama, although such improvements do not seem to have been monopolized by any single operation.

Among belt makers in Otavalo, Ecuador, the case to be made for innovation is even less clear. The dominant weaving operation emerged by carefully following in the footsteps of earlier entrepreneurs. One of the last trades to convert from household-based, subsistence production to commodity production, belt making became a viable career in the 1970s with a formation of a national mass market for belts. The growth echoes that of the weaving trades in Guatemala, which likewise profited when rural indigenous people forsook subsistence autonomy for wage work, urban residences, and other opportunities for cash incomes and consumer goods (Smith 1978, 1984). Converting from laborious backstrap looms to treadle looms, two brothers in Ariasucu pioneered techniques in 1978–79 that boosted their belt production tenfold. They then traveled to major cities selling belts directly to the burgeoning urban population of migrant native women and to retailers who took the belts to remote provincial towns. But financial success never came to these two men. Rather, it was the weavers who passed through their shops who went on to prosperity.

A former construction worker named Jaime Cuyo rose to prominence in part by devising the most intricate pattern to date, a diamond design that required a nine-pedal loom (rather than the common four- or six-pedal designs). Yet, in a community where competitors were also family, designs never remained exclusive. Thus, belts became more or less standardized commodities. Increasingly, therefore, the commercial importance of technique yielded to the need to maintain high levels of output, and Jaime Cuyo succeeded because he managed to find workers to keep eight looms in production churning out his diamond design. After his gains, the operation run by Enrique Teran and Rosa Chiza emerged to dominate the market, although they introduced no new design, labor form, material, or marketing angle. Instead they excelled at recruiting and retaining workers and went on to accumulate consumer goods at a far higher rate then their peers, with the value of their possessions reaching

3. Shared access to a communal kiln makes actual ownership of capital equipment less of a critical factor in production. The key to productivity lies in the number of firings a household can manage in the course of the year, and some households have invested in private kilns to allow them to control their own firings. And yet a large number of firings does not guarantee highest earnings. For example, the largest number of firings was eight, and not only the top-ranked operation but also the sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-ranked ones reported this number. Because of access to the communal kiln, monetary figures are given for capital investments.

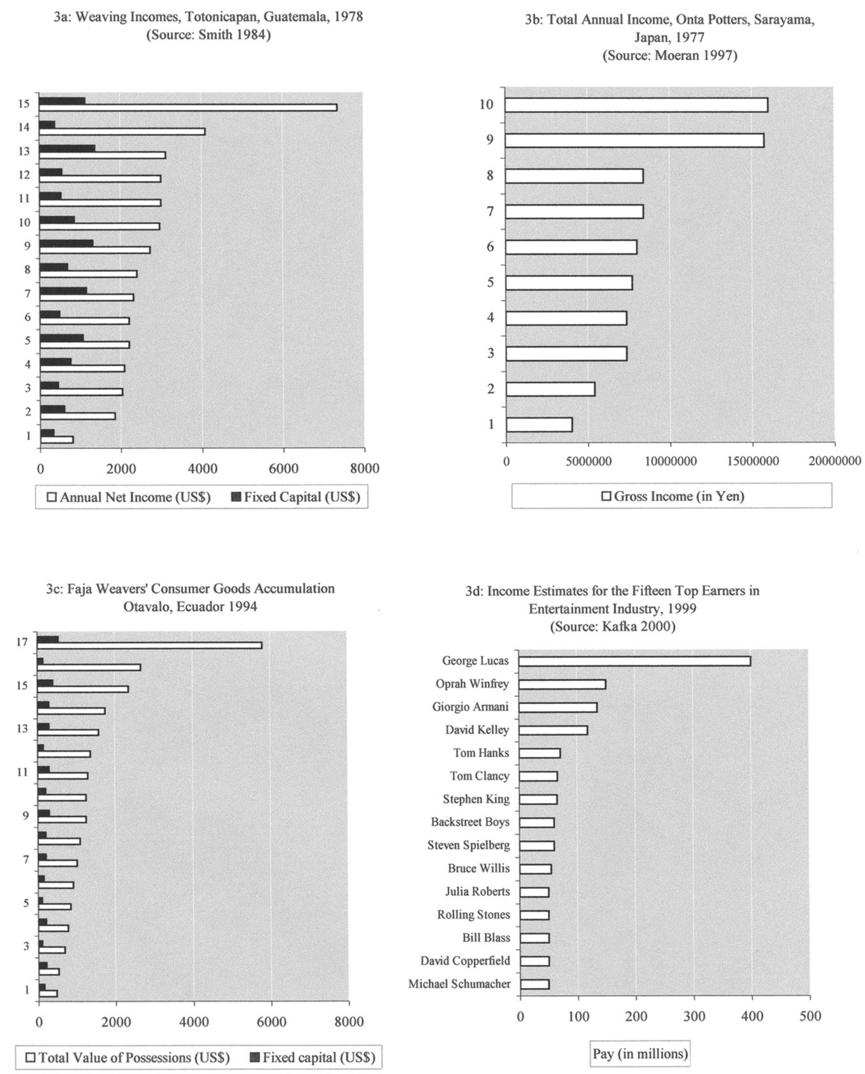

FIG. 3. *Income inequality in four economies.* a–c, *data on local populations of artisans;* d, *data on a subset of an international population of individuals in the entertainment industry who achieved the highest earnings in 1999.*

$5,801 in 1994.[4] The next-largest inventory was worth only half as much, while the median value of all specialized weavers' households was $1,243 (fig. 3, *c*) (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:chap. 5).

In short, artisan markets do enrich the few, and in ways that defy economic anthropological conventional wisdom. Substantial earnings accrue to a fortunate operation in the face of more or less equally talented rivals. They grow in markets indifferent to the "brands" of goods and persist without any fixed capital advantage. Documented first in the 1970s, the pattern can hardly be attributed to neoliberal policies, as they had yet to become dogma. However, neither is it a generic feature of capitalist expansion (see, for example, Cook 1986 for data on more proportionate earning stratification). Rather, Totonicapan, Sarayama, and Otavalo illustrate a historically specific market structure that sets up only a few operations to capture the lion's share of revenues. The dislocation of parochial production, the emergence of transregional markets through migration, and the fortuitous, even capricious, connection of poor artisans with "deep-pocket" buyers—all factors augmented by

4. Analysis of 20 years of purchases among Ariasucu households suggests that consumer-goods accumulation serves as a good proxy for income. First, the annual rate of accumulation varies with income; during years of low earnings, purchases drop off (see Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:141, fig. 8). Second, proprietors of belt-making operations expressed similar priorities in spending on building a house versus accumulating consumer goods to furnish it; none of them seemed to be accumulating goods or a car in lieu of housing investments that might make one operation's earnings seem artificially low relative to others. Among nonweavers, especially young handicraft dealers, however, values concerning the relative importance of modern consumer goods versus housing ranged widely.

neoliberal policies—have skewed the rewards of the marketplace. These radically uneven payoffs now signal competition's most polarizing form.

Another issue emerges in these cases. These disparities appear among intraethnic competitors or others with a marked community identity, in sharp contrast with the prevailing theory that "embeddedness in ethnic networks and communities leads to cooperative, if not conformist, behavior among ethnic economic actors" (Waldinger 1995:556; Granovetter 1985). Indeed, the obverse is happening here. Stark inequalities are embedded in growing collective commitments to status, identity, and community expression. To account for this mesh of conformity and inequality as well as the structural weakness of capital, skill, and innovation, I have found it necessary to look beyond the anthropologist's peasant-artisan to the economist's Hollywood superstar.

The Materiality of Artisan Market "Stardom"

Focusing on industrialized economies, economists have likened sharply biased market outcomes to tournaments (Lazear and Rosen 1981) or winner-take-all lotteries (Frank and Cook 1995), where, like pop singers and Hollywood stars, many compete but only a few strike it rich. The theoretical challenge has been to explain the growing presence of "superstars" (Rosen 1981) in mundane occupations beyond entertainment. In their analysis of these markets, Frank and Cook (1995) underscore the central importance of relative position rather than, or in addition to, absolute performance in the allocation of awards. Consumers do not have to settle for second-best or local goods when low transportation costs, new information technology, and the mass media allow them access to the "top" performers. In reality, "number one" may be only minimally better than a lower-ranked alternative—say, George Lucas's film instead of Steven Spielberg's—but a reputation as "the #1 film in America" insures much greater earnings (Kafka 2000). With ever more consumers involved (through globalization or rising incomes), the rewards have grown larger even as they have become more concentrated, and a successful film or record album enables a celebrity to enter into other entertainment fields to increase his or her income still more (see figure 3, *d*, for 1999's top 15 celebrity earners in the interrelated fields of film, television, the music industry, fashion, and sports). For producers, therefore, such markets place a premium on activities, symbols, and pedigrees that secure preeminent position. Within the anthropological literature, Plattner (1996) is one of the few to explore the issues of winner-take-all economics. In an economic ethnography of St. Louis's art market, he considers how markets allocate rewards when earnings bear little obvious relation to either production costs or talent. His analysis emphasizes the power of one locale (New York) to define what is significant in the art world and "the social construction of fine-art value that makes the social setting of a work paramount over its physical characteristics" (1996:8).

For all the reasons that American artists and Hollywood producers garner disproportionate earnings, however, Fourth World artisans should not. Indeed, artisans are supposed to relieve buyers from media-saturated consumerism. Functional in nature and produced in anonymity, crafts do not easily produce art-market-like "superstars" (cf. Cabeen 1993, cited in Plattner 1996). To be sure, a few trades have adeptly exploited postindustrial yearnings for craft (and cultural) authenticity, using the power of the media to elevate both a specific tradition of work and a few practitioners. Facing competition from Belgian franchise outlets in the 1980s, for example, French chocolatiers consciously elaborated a new esoteric taste standard. On the one hand, they set out an axis of distinction emphasizing freshness, purity, and a French heritage of skilled craftsmanship (Terrio 1996). On the other hand, they mobilized contemporary craft associations to publicize the exemplary upholders of the standard. Elaborate public ceremonies, well-placed seasonal articles on top shops, and other efforts to educate the public combined to secure the stature of a few important chocolatiers.

More commonly, artisans do not control the publicity related to their work but instead make the most of the writings of outsiders. Wood carvers in Oaxaca, Mexico, for example, have capitalized on a *Smithsonian* article and a popular book on their art—publications that helped to attract tourists to an overlooked carving community (Chibnik 1999). Yet, in Oaxaca and more generally, such writing has not produced superstars (Chibnik n.d. *b*). Usually if an "ethnic art" does receive media attention in either scholarly or popular writing, publicity often focuses on common motifs without describing any individual's body of work (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998: chap. 1; Steiner 1994). In Ecuador, for example, Tigua painters have begun to capture wider international attention with new publications and exhibitions, a development that could account for the growing inequalities in their ranks.[5] However, one painter dismissed the economic effect of all this attention, saying, "The people of Tigua, we have fame. But for each one of us, we have nothing."[6]

Those excluded from mainstream media, corporate marketing programs, and other mass-market means of reputation building must cultivate their potential through localized spending and material practice. These positional races are less reducible to a few key parameters or fixed standards of judgment. Certainly, money matters. Producers use their appearance and inventories to signal their solvency and trustworthiness. But material displays of commercial wealth, especially for diverse

5. Since 1990, for example, more than a dozen exhibitions of Tigua art have been held in university museums, fine "folk art" galleries, and elsewhere in Ecuador, the United States, Canada, and Europe, and books related to two exhibitions featuring the founder Julio Toaquiza and his family have been published (Colvin and Toaquiza n.d., Ribadeneira de Casares 1990).

6. Indeed, in 1999, getting a Julio Toaquiza painting required only $24 and the patience of shuffle through a stack of 60 anonymous paintings in a mid-range Quiteño gallery.

audiences of foreign buyers, potential piecework laborers, and rival merchants, can ignite debates rather than settle them. Building an image or bankable reputation frequently requires working across communities, where spending that impresses one group may fall flat for another. Under the circumstances, brute conspicuous consumption achieves little.

As a decade of research on commodities and consumerism has shown, however, consumption does not merely objectify accumulated resources. It is a performative act that mediates cultural values, constituting them through the dining, dressing up, house building, entertaining, and object collecting of social life (Douglas 1979, Friedman 1994, Miller 1987, Orlove 1994). Positional spending, therefore, launches competitors into not merely or even primarily an "arms race" but an open-ended social interaction slowly worked out through goods. Dependent on the emulation and improvisation of others, superiority rests less on single overwhelming displays than on competent, regular performances that are as responsive as they are innovative.

In the sections that follow, I trace the interactive dimension of consumption and its importance not just for the rise of a few artisan "superstars" but also for shaping the distinctive means of participating in community life. Market structure is crucial. In the Otavalo case, weavers sell an increasingly standard commodity to an emergent national mass market. Success here comes to depend on performance in one narrow area—attracting labor. In the Tigua case, top performers must work more broadly, raising their profiles for the "deep-pocket" collectors, foreign dealers, and national gallery owners as well as for the piecework painters who stoke the inventories of the largest merchant-painters—a more delicate business.

The Otavalo Workshop as a Place of Consumption Pleasures

Ariasucu's belt weaving fed off Ecuador's 1982 economic crisis, experiencing a surge in new producers who had lost jobs in the city. In 1980, fewer than 20 weavers made belts. By 1992, over 100 did. After learning the trade in established operations, new weavers jumped to their own homes and experimented with the creative possibilities of treadle looms, weaving their belts with radiant suns, interlocked diamonds, and delicate hearts, all made vivid through bright colors. One rough measure of the importance of talent during this early stage was skilled weavers' collective advancement in relation to a random sample of their nonweaving neighbors. The median replacement value of possessions in the top 17 households that specialized in belt making (out of 65 households involved) was US$1,189 in 1994. The median value (US$555) of those of 15 nonspecialized households was less than half that (Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999:175). Yet, already in the late 1980s, incomes began to diverge sharply, and a few rose above the crowd.

Jaime Cuyo, the first major economic "winner" in this trade, rose to prominence not only by devising his diamond design but by consolidating piecework labor practices. In contrast to proprietors whose workers stayed only long enough to learn the trade, Jaime Cuyo positioned his shop as a more enduring place of employment. His eighth weaver in 1991, in fact, was a brother-in-law who gave up his independence to sign on. Stature was first raised through community-based rather than individualized consumption.

Once little more than a border settlement between two large, well-known communities, Ariasucu achieved corporate recognition through the efforts of Jaime and several other migrants-turned-weavers. When Jaime served as president in the 1980s, he obtained a preschool and an outhouse-building scheme for his sector. All of these projects were run out of his house/workshop—to the point that children from the preschool got tangled up in spinning wheels. The development programs turned his home into a dynamic center of community life, attracting both those who wanted jobs or benefits from civic projects and those who wanted to participate in his rising commercial fortunes.

Yet as Jaime Cuyo's and other shops took on more labor, the problems of competition and overproduction only worsened. Some skilled weavers benefited from customer loyalty, but there was not one Ariasuqueño who did not report the loss of a regular client's sale to another weaver who was willing to reduce the price. Increasingly, the only positional competition that mattered was the one that elevated a shop's reputation according to the standards of the teenage boys and girls who now made up the labor force.

Throughout the early 1990s, the shop of Enrique Teran and Rosa Chiza not only met but set these standards, partly because of sound financial practice. With the shop's high cash flow, they paid their workers each week while other proprietors often had to put off paydays until after bimonthly sales trips. They did not, however, just buy worker loyalty; they also cooked and entertained for it. The meals were probably most important. Putting in hours to assemble lunches of beans, lentils, *muti* (boiled corn), and chicken soup, Rosa did not cut corners with purchased bread and other light fare; her workers dined on cuisine otherwise reserved for fiestas or other special occasions. In addition to food, modern consumer goods also played a part. As they put in long hours on the loom, the boys and girls made the most of the TVs and stereos that Enrique kept updating for them.

The attractions of Enrique and Rosa's shop forced other weavers to follow suit. One proprietor who struggled to keep six looms in production mentioned Enrique as the reason he had purchased a large color TV and a used stereo system. Another, who had lost three workers to Enrique and Rosa, grumbled about his and his wife's inability to produce anything but "humble meals" of maize or barley or quinua soup. In the belt-weaving world, success as a multiloom belt operation not only naturalized exploitative piecework practices as part of local labor mechanisms but did so by reengineering home life as a vibrant, commodity-animated commercial locale. Qui-

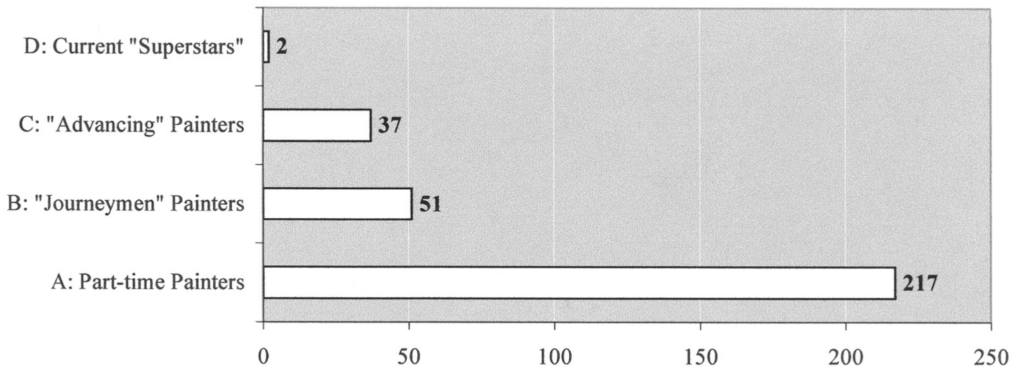

FIG. 4. *Distribution of Tigua painters among economic categories, June 1999.*

chua domestic production rocked to loud reggae beats even as it wove for the wholesale merchant's pocket.

The Ascendancy of Tigua's Merchant-Painters

In Tigua, the painting profession developed a split personality early on, with the founding Toaquiza family committed to living and working in their rural Cotopaxi community while ambitious painters from the valley's other sectors moved to Quito. José Vega led the migrants. Winning second place in a national painting contest in 1977, José moved to Quito with his wife and children three years later. Throughout the 1980s, the steep recession pushed more Tiguans into the profession.[7] Working with these newcomers, Vega formed an artists' association and led it in a successful fight for the right to sell their art in Quito's central park in 1983. The new marketplace revolutionized Tigua art and business. For neophytes and experienced painters the park became a center for commerce, the exchange of ideas, and the establishment of the reputation of a new generation of painters.

The rural sectors of Tigua, however, still conferred status and identity on those who worked the craft, and painters represented themselves back home with tin roofs on houses, gas stoves in kitchens, and finer wardrobes. Collective goods trumpeted even greater triumphs, especially for José Vega. His Quito-based artists' association secured money to build a handicraft center in the heart of his home sector of Quiloa. In 1988 he persuaded the Spanish government to fund the construction of 40 new homes, arguing that only with houses that had large windows could their art and economy develop. Although they never moved back to live in them, José and his wife got two houses next to Quiloa's church and traveled to help with their construction. Such public works literally built the painters' new profession into the Tigua countryside and solidified the stature of migrants in general and Vega in particular.

Throughout the 1990s, as more people entered the trade, stratification among Tigua artists sharpened, producing a few clear winners among many anonymous toilers. With data gathered from interviews with 26 artists and an analysis of 559 paintings in Quito's six main folklore galleries in 1999, I have ranked the artists in accordance with their presence in the marketplace (see fig. 4). At the base of the ranking are the hundreds of Tiguans who have sufficient talent and interest to maintain memberships in the artists' associations but for the most part paint only part-time (group A). Approximately 90 households earned their living from their art (groups B, C, and D combined); 51 of these earned US$30–$120 per month,[8] around the Ecuadorian minimum wage (group B).[9] Thirty-seven earned consistently higher incomes of approximately US$200 a month or more—a rate that allows for some material advancement (group C). These painters can be divided into two overlapping subgroups—one of "first-rank" artists and the other of *intermediarios* or *comerciantes* (painter/vendors) who sell others' works as well as their own.[10] Finally, two artists

7. In 26 life-history interviews I conducted in 1999 with painters from Quiloa, only 8 reported having learned their trade in the decade prior to the 1982 crisis, while 16 said they had learned it in the ten years after. (Since 1992 only 2 had turned to painting.) Although the vagaries of tourist demand, household demographics, and other factors influence the profession's growth, the painters' own accounts emphasize their art as relatively easy work that provides a more or less steady income.

8. Husbands and wives usually work as teams, with the men composing paintings and the women helping to finish them. Women do much of the street selling and stall tending.

9. At these wages, "journeymen" (group B) painters deemed painting comparable to and substitutable for other employment (working on commercial potato farms, apprenticing in mechanics' shops, loading cargo at the bus terminal, etc.) in the summer of 1999. In other words, they saw no economic advantage to painting per se but rather chose to paint because it was "much softer" work, because it allowed them to work in their own homes, or because they took cultural pride in it, seeing it as "our own" indigenous work.

10. To be among the 14 "first-rank" artists identified by their peers, painters must be seen as contributing to the development of Tigua art, demonstrating a creative flair, and enjoying consistent sales. From the perspective of gallery purchases, 11 individuals stand out for producing 10% or more of any single inventory, and 16 find

stand apart from all others with regard to their earnings (group D). The first is Alfredo Toaquiza, son of the original painter. He has helped organize international exhibitions of Tigua work, and many of the material rewards have been "in-kind," in the form of the international travel and sponsored trips. The second is Juan Luis Cuyo Cuyo, a controversial figure who, with his wife Maria Purificación (Puri) Cuyo, runs the largest commercial operation. Not simply a vendor, Juan Luis[11] paints ambitiously, and his oversized paintings fetch around four times the average price. With their profits, he and Puri have built a Quiteño house that cost over US$10,000.

As did José Vega, Juan Luis and Puri helped to open up a new venue for Tigua art, this time in Otavalo. Most important, they professionalized their operation, stocking a proper market stall with numerous paintings and other crafts. While the wares and Puri's indigenous outfits (with thick, pleated skirts and crocheted shawls) bespoke native authenticity, Juan Luis's own appearance altered. He eschewed country garb and presided over his wares bareheaded (without his countrymen's distinctive hat) and in bright white shirts, pressed slacks, and polished shoes. Together, his well-groomed presence and full inventory communicated his resources and tastes. Such signaling matters in an uncertain market where foreigners have little information for judging the worthiness of either the products or the dealers (Plattner 1985, 1989). With increasingly direct links between Fourth World producers and First World buyers, the stakes of market-centered character appraisals have been raised. Dealers who come to acquire inventory and place orders are, relatively speaking, "deep-pocket" customers who offer concentrated payoffs (cf. Frank and Cook 1995). Diligent participation and extensive inventories primed Juan Luis and Puri for such clients.

Yet what gains Juan Luis and Puri share—large inventories, multiplying sales posts, and an urbane, nonindigenous fashion—cost them goodwill among other painters. Resenting their success, artists have refused to sell to them. To maintain earnings they and other top resellers have had to take as much care within their artisan community as in the marketplace. Economically, this has meant buying regularly and thereby offering security if not high earnings to piecework painters. Socially, it has required ratifying mutual commitments of economic exchange through the institution of compadrazgo, ritual coparenthood sanctified through Catholic ritual. Most couples can expect to enter into three or four such relations by the time they are middle-aged. One established Tiguan dealer has 12 compadres; Juan Luis and Puri have 23.

Spending on their compadres has demanded the same compromise between their own wishes and others' expectations as José Vega's housing investments. Juan Luis and Puri enjoy pouring themselves into intimate encounters with friends. Compadres arriving at their home can always expect a warm welcome and a meal, loans if they are in dire straits, and bread and fruit to take home. Rival vendors spend differently. They lavish money on traditional celebrations. In the summer of 1999, for example, one man brought a band from Zumbagua, Cotopaxi, to his house in Quito for a three-day celebration of two baptisms and a wedding. Juan Luis was outraged: "This is bad, very bad. This is why Indians are poor. Mestizos' weddings just last an afternoon, but Indians feel they must spend all their money."

His son later told me that they were going to sponsor a baptism and wedding the following month. Theirs was to be a small gathering, in the house, with music from a large Sony stereo system that they were acquiring through installments. Soon, though, they changed their plans. Paving over their kitchen garden, they laid in a big dance floor, hired a DJ, and hosted their own gathering of family, friends, and the wider community of migrant Tiguans. In choosing compadres, Tiguans seek strength of character and of fortune. Bringing in the DJ and participating in multiday festivities, Juan Luis tries to project an image of both, even when it runs counter to his personal sense of appropriate consumption.

Over the past 20 years, the means of gaining stature among Tigua artists have varied. The material cultures sketched above—community building projects, wardrobes, inventories, houses, and parties—have become more or less important depending on national recessions, new wealth in the community, and migration flows. Changing community circumstances lead to the kind of flip-flops exhibited by Juan Luis and Puri. Sometimes they lead trends; at other times they follow, but in a showy way that commands attention. Through time, their material practices objectify a particular mix of personal ambition and community imperatives—the residue of a culture-defining contest that people like José Vega, Juan Luis, and Puri have greatly influenced but never controlled.

Exclusive and Inclusive Competition

The growth of Tigua painting and Otavalo belt making reflects both wider economic currents (Ecuador's macroeconomic failure) and internal processes that reinforce artisanal trades as vehicles of community development and identity. Central to these latter changes are what could be termed two modalities of competition. One is exclusive. As belt makers learned how to employ treadle looms, they destroyed the economic viability of backstrap looms in the same market. Urban-based painters with their electric lights and inexpensive bus rides to markets similarly threaten the livelihoods of remote rural painters. In this exclusive competition, the gains of a particular method spell not just short-term loss for others but elimination of the utility of alternative resources and skills upon which failed competitors depended. Fundamentally "predatory" (Schumpeter 1950:

their work purchased by more than one gallery. Artistic achievers total 25.

11. Because of the ubiquity of the Cuyo and Toaquiza surnames, I use first names for the sake of clarity.

80), the process often springs from new technology. Among the main things we have learned from Scott's (1985) masterful work on the Green Revolution in Sedaka is that in the contest for work between combines and teams of human harvesters, there is no middle ground. Yet even in the absence of great technological differences, some artisans have suffered permanent losses. Brought together in the international marketplace for a certain kind of folk textile, Navajo weavers have been devastated by Zapotec entrepreneurs who put their extensive cottage industries to work copying Navajo designs (M'Closkey 2000).

In Tigua and Otavalo, however, long-term interactions among competing artisans helped stabilize what might have been ephemeral market niches and reinforced community self-consciousness and even autonomy. Put another way, during the trades' expansive moments, competition has also been inclusive. In this mode, an action taken by a successful operator deprives a competitor of the gains of a transaction, but the act may enhance resources upon which the wider set of competitors depends for its living. Such enhancements may be economic, involving the opening up of new markets or recruitment of a larger labor pool, but just as important are improvisation and improvement of cultural resources. Market actors depend upon each other to create the places, innovate the symbols, and articulate the discourses from which they all create themselves, whether as authentic native artists or as fair and honest employers. Such self-fashioning is under constant threat from out-migration of workers, the fickle tastes of cross-cultural consumers, and the fraying of national and regional economies. Without their interconnected efforts, competitors risk losing continuity in their actions as employers, makers, and sellers.

In cases where the value of being perceived as "the best" painter, merchant, or employer is very high, mutuality among competitors deepens still further. Community sites of social activity, work, and ritual arise precisely where the most enterprising entrepreneurs objectify their ambitions. In fact, the cultural power of conspicuous consumption lies not simply in its showcasing of any proprietor's superiority but in the way it materially "distributes" an artisan across the settings in which careers unfold. The craft of an artisan (really a husband and wife working together), the facade of his house (identified with a man because weaving and painting have traditionally been men's work), and the taste embodied in his street stall make durable the social fields in which stature can be achieved. Newcomers adopt the styles and locales devised by others, complying with the budding standards of the marketplace, while seeking their own way up the hierarchy.

Others have similarly noted the tendency toward conformity among competitors. Granovetter (1985), for instance, details how a shared trade fosters moral conformity. Wilk (1995) argues that the global spread of common forms of competition—beauty pageants in the case he analyzes—both engender uniformity and compel a narrow differentiation within careful limits. Competition unites people in "structures of common difference" (Carrier 1997:51–52; Wilk 1995). Yet at the heart of this conformity is the social fact of inequality, and new studies, despite their creativity, have yet to clarify the way in which unity and inequality have become so entangled as to be (apparently) mutually constitutive. Indeed, the more inclusive the flow of social and economic action in a community of competitors, the more acute the moral issues stemming from new inequalities. The rise of moral problems, however, does not shift attention to norms that lie beyond the realm of competition but returns us squarely to the discursive requisites within it.

Morality, Primacy, and Legitimacy in Artisanal Markets

In societies where "competition" constitutes a culturally acknowledged economic behavior, it may not entail the mutuality of "cooperation," but neither does it involve the moral transgressions of "exploitation" or "coercion." By competing, market actors do indeed limit their obligations to others, but they accept, in principle, limits on their own behavior. Thus, if it is true that "at the heart of capitalism and competitive markets lies the doctrine of failure . . . the inefficient are to be driven out of business by the efficient" (Thurow 1980:21), it is also true that what counts as "efficient" business practice is negotiated. The potters of Sarayama are interesting in this regard. On the one hand, they have accepted certain innovations, for example, allowing people to abandon the communal kiln for a private one that allows more frequent firings. On the other hand, they have discouraged the use of an electric wheel. Moeran (1997:174) notes in this regard, "What is actually meant is that by continuing to use a kick wheel a potter is affirming the existence of his community, which would fall into total disarray should machinery be imported and each household start competitive production." By advocating strongly for the preservation of community "tradition" and negotiating what counts as tradition, potters regulate the basis of competition among them.

In other instances, discourses of "competition" itself mediate these concerns. Profits from a sale may accordingly be disputed not because they were earned competitively but because they violate ideals of fair competition. Given the often rancorous debates about marketing activities, discursive work—constructing the cultural category of "weaver" or "artist" or "businessman" and representing oneself as meeting its norm—becomes an integral part of competing. In Tigua, raising the question of appropriate competition provokes the exasperated responses of long-standing parties to a feud.

For many, competition is acceptable as long as it occurs among artists and not businesspeople. Describing a time in the 1980s of creative development in Tigua art, for example, Francisco Cuyo told me in 1999, "There was a lot of competition among us. We came to the park [to sell our paintings] and tried to make a good presentation. There was a lot of improvement." As president of the second-largest artists' association, Francisco was concerned about the lack of new motifs in Tigua art. At one meeting of his association he complained that one young artist named Olmedo Cuyo pioneered creative highway scenes in 1994 but now paints only generic fiesta scenes sold by Tiguan intermediaries.

The intermediaries are held responsible for this problem. They are said to have brought about too much competition and devalued the paintings. Summing up these complaints, Francisco Cuyo told me:

> Since 1990, members of our own communities have worked as intermediaries. There have been a lot of changes. Because of the intermediaries, because of the competition, technically speaking, *los compañeros* (friends/comrades) cannot improve. For intermediaries, it is not necessary to be well done. There are other paintings, for example, like those of Alfredo Toaquiza, [that are] good paintings that one may sell with good prices. But, regrettably, as I said to you, for the *compañeros* there have been intermediaries. Thus there has been competition in those paintings, and [the intermediaries] do not try to value the paintings.

Ever since the first indigenous intermediary bought an old pickup truck with his profits in 1994, members of the artists' associations have called for a suspension of all reselling by association members. Painters object to the subversion of competition by those who drive down prices without (in the eyes of critics) promoting improvement.

Responding to challenges, wealthy intermediaries point out that their reselling provides steady income at home for family and neighbors who would otherwise move north to weed commercial potato farms. However, their deeper claims for legitimacy rest on their own status as painters. Time and again, vendors have stood up at public meetings to insist that they sold their own work first, not just others', and they they not only painted but painted well. During meetings in 1999, one vendor cited the inclusion of his work in an international exhibition; José Vega spoke of the prize he had won 20 years earlier. Juan Luis remained silent and let his art speak for itself. Where most painters produce works sized around 30 cm by 40 cm, Juan Luis rarely embarks on a new composition that is less than 80 cm by 100 cm.

These paintings exert an increasing aesthetic and commercial influence. In 1999, for example, Juan Luis had only one painting in a major Quiteño folk-art gallery. When I rechecked the six major galleries in 2000, I found that the overall supply of paintings was down 15%[12] but Juan Luis now had 12 paintings in three different galleries.[13] Further, his works retailed for an average of US$100 a painting, the highest of any painter (the average was US$26). Working with young painters who supply his own retail operation, Juan Luis steers artists to the complex fiesta scenes that he favors. These compositions contrast sharply with those of Alfredo Toaquiza, for example, who has moved to fewer figures and more expressive detail. Juan Luis's style is now ascendant in the market. The shelves of Tigua art stalls in Quito are tiled with paintings of the generic fiesta scenes that, although they long predate him, find their fullest expression in his work. In light of the social legitimacy invested in painting, Juan Luis's artistic development reflects more than the maturing of his talent. The growth in his compositions' size and complexity tracks his emergence as a powerful vendor who uses economic strengths to cultivate artistic talent and influence.

As with the Tigua vendors, the large belt-weaving operations in Otavalo had to reconcile their disproportionate gains with the moral ties among weavers as neighbors, kinspeople, and fellow artisans. And, as in Tigua, wealthy entrepreneurs legitimized their position through discourse that emphasized their contributions to the community's trade. For his part, Enrique recruited workers by approaching their parents, who were often weavers themselves, and promising to use his resources to teach their children the craft. He positioned himself as building up the skills of his extended family and, given the scale of his shop, of the wider community. In turn, Ariasucu filled over the years with Enrique and Rosa's workers and ex-workers, steeped in the tastes, knowledge, and business sensibility of the prosperous couple.

Community, Competition, and Cultural Imperatives

In the global cultural economy, artisans have proliferated. Never having acted properly "modern"—rationalizing management, accumulating capital, converting to "free" labor, mechanizing—they have flourished in an era of "modernity in retreat" (García Canclini 1995*b*). With mixed production and marketing strategies, artisanal niches provide opportunities of a sort in the economies that have been excluded—or expelled—by international patterns of investment. These trades also find life in cultural spaces opened up through that same investment when citizens of an integrated Europe and an industrial Japan seize upon handcrafted objects to create images of national authenticity. And artisanship matters again in the new landscapes of group identity—"ethnoscapes"—that straddle periphery and center. Here artisans become impresarios "who thrive on the need of a relocated population for contact with its homeland" (Appadurai 1996:49). A common thread in the analysis

12. In a further sign of the general importance of rank, other top painters likewise consolidated their position in a depressed market. Four out of five galleries had increased the number of paintings they held from their lead artists, while the market share of the top five painters in each gallery had increased by an average of 9%.

13. These numbers can be distorted by the timing of a single large sale from an artist. Having interviewed Juan Luis, however, I found out that the galleries in question had purchased his art on several different occasions throughout the prior year.

of this great diversity of artisanship has been examining problems of flows (of objects, images, and people) and integration (of parochial economies with global networks). In cases such as Otavalo and Tigua, this perspective illuminates the interweaving of macroeconomic adjustment, native entrepreneurship, and inequality.

Analyzing the trajectories, however, flattens out the settings and events that construct artisans' sense of belonging and meaning. A preoccupation with flows misses the localized efforts of "making do" in street markets, storehouses, workshops, and trade associations that has wedded cultural identity with economic strivings and frustrations. To come to grips with the vital cultural specificity manifested by painters in Quito, weavers in Otavalo, chocolatiers in Paris, and potters in Sarayama, we need to see commodity production and marketing as "indissociable from particular moments and 'opportunities"' rather than as a "spatial sequence of points" (de Certeau 1984:35). The problem of competition brings such moments—the consequences of life within these "points"—back into focus. It does so not by ignoring the "denser network of international connections" of globalization (Smith 1997) but by foregrounding the fact that market livelihoods both consist of and re-create constellations of relationships, resources, and materialized expressive means.

The competitive practices producing the sharply skewed inequalities in Ecuador and elsewhere have deep roots. Economically, peasant communities, even those in Latin America once thought to have an egalitarian ethos of shared poverty, have long been sites of inequality and internal exploitation (Wolf 1986). Further, status competition, inherent in flamboyant saint's day festivals and family celebrations, has been at the core of indigenous community expressiveness for centuries as well. And, as Cancian (1965) shows, these costly material displays have related to long-term patterns of economic accumulation and the moral legitimacy of wealth, not just a shared commitment to local tradition.

The loss of viable wage opportunities and subsistence resources brings these prior forms of competition together in unhealthy ways. Increasingly, for example, the elaboration of expressive culture has become fundamental to efforts to make a living instead of an ancillary activity that morally accommodates stratification. Where market success hinges on being perceived as a "top" operator, the struggle for position becomes constant. In Ecuador, it means ceaselessly keeping up with one's wardrobe, spending on compadres, developing one's craft, expanding inventories, and participating in community life and politics. Through time, old winners yield to new ones, distinctive community tastes, styles, and aesthetics mature, and economic imbalances worsen.

Competition is culturally vital, though, not simply because of the creativity it incites but also because it provides the interactions and discourses through which market-bound communities make their own wealth and poverty sufferable. Certainly, in community debates about the acceptability of newly rich operators, big differences in opinion about both general circumstances and specific actors become apparent. In Ecuador, for example, some have faith in the rewards for individual talent, others feel that in a market for native arts "for each one of us, we have nothing," and still others feel that the practices of a few ruin it for all. A wider flux compounds these differences as men and women pick up, drop, and then restart the craft work. Yet, diversity, inconsistencies, and change are only part of the story. As Wolf (1999:289) pointed out, "once heterogeneity and variation are recognized . . . the question appropriately becomes, who or what holds it together."

At the beginning of a new century, imperatives of cultural and economic autonomy still "hold it together" for Quichua peoples. Looking past their differences, men and women have shown themselves willing to accept others' advances if the wealthy make a community's trade economically viable, expand the aesthetic potency of a craft, or make it possible for people to "have their own work in their own home." Consequently, competition, too, holds people together. It has become a "forcefield of human interaction" in which contending notions of accumulation and obligation are adjusted and through which expressive forms are improvised (cf. Jackson 1998: 14). In competing, people materialize their belonging and struggle to legitimize the disparities that that belonging entails for them and for others.

Conclusion

In his analysis of the political consciousness of Malaysian peasants, Scott (1985:35 n. 17) raises in passing a crucial issue: "One central question to ask about any subordinate class is the extent to which it can, by internal sanctions, prevent the dog-eat-dog competition among themselves that can only serve the interests of the appropriating classes." Since the mid-1990s Tigua painters and Otavaleño belt weavers have been asking that same question. Intensive competition among themselves has devalued their belts and paintings alike and produced significant inequalities, although not yet an "appropriating class." Yet, as artisans point out, competition has fostered distinctive, Quichua expressiveness—not only crafts but cuisine, clothing styles, and houses. While soda pop (Coca-Cola) and pop stars (Backstreet Boys) have come to represent competitive agency in transnational capitalism, *fajas* and *cuadros* are no less products of the mobility, market expansion, and positional rivalries of neoliberal economies. Scott's question, therefore, now leads to another: Why has competition—dog-eat-dog, winner-take-all, and other—so decisively produced symbols of sodality even as it has split a few haves from many have-nots?

What I show here is that in the new markets created by natives, migrants, immigrants, and other shadowy and opportunistic economic actors of the global economy, competition is not simply derivative of capital. Culturally and economically compelling, it is a structural relationship built through commodities, accumulation, consumption, and discourse. Competitors require each other to devise the signs and styles from which they all create themselves and their enterprises; communities organize around the imperatives that take shape in markets. Yet these interdependencies are pernicious. Migration and communication technology continue connecting peoples in ways that concentrate potential earnings; states keep forsaking responsibility to redistribute them. The celebrated flows of transnationalism thus promise to push ever more mundane acts of provisioning into these lopsided arenas, concentrating payoffs, exacerbating inequalities, and fostering the expressiveness and community solidarities of our multicultural present. For Bourdieu the inescapability of competition reflects the concerted effort to "construct in reality an economic system corresponding to the theoretical description" of neoliberal economists. For anthropology, the way forward lies in undoing theoretical descriptions that merely affirm the "logical machine" of the market model and developing instead ethnographically grounded models that make knowable the new links among competition, economy, and cultural identity.

Comments

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Colloredo-Mansfeld is correct to point out the importance of trying to understand competition in terms that are more inclusive and revealing than those of the market model. Like much else relating to the economy, the concept of competition is wrapped in suppositions and simplifications that hide more than they reveal, and it is useful to try to unwrap it.

The paper shows the realities and complexities of competition nicely. Gone are the atomistic individuals seeking material advantage in impersonal transactions. Instead, we have complex social and economic relations among competitors, as well as between competitors and those with whom they interact in and with regard to their commercial activities. In addition, to Colloredo-Mansfeld's credit, the paper does not neglect the larger national and international political-economic frame in which these competitors operate, and the benefits of the competitive regime are balanced by a recognition of its weaknesses.

The paper's focus on competition is stimulating. Colloredo-Mansfeld is concerned with competition as conventionally understood, which is appropriate given the use of the market model as a starting point. However, once the paper leads us to begin to think about competition, we find it in more places than we might first have expected and so find anthropological literature that touches on the topic. An interesting instance of this is Swain's (1989) discussion of competition between locals and outsiders in the tourist industry in the coastal Caribbean. Swain's concerns are very different from Colloredo-Mansfeld's, but what she describes fits within the broadened ambit of competition and helps to show its sociocultural nature and correlates. Miller's (1997) discussion of an advertising campaign in Trinidad shows competition in another area of economic life, between an advertising agency and the company that has hired it. As Miller's case indicates, we should not forget that the basic relationship between sellers and buyers has competitive elements as well, despite the rhetoric of the market model.

It is important, though, to recognize the limitations of Colloredo-Mansfeld's paper. It deals, after all, with artisanal producers well outside the world's core commercial areas. While there is good reason to believe that competition in those core areas is as complex as it is in Ecuador, the pertinent actors and their constraints look very different from what Colloredo-Mansfeld describes. It is in that core that we are likely to find competitors who deal at something like arm's length with their customers and their competitors, though certainly there are many who do not—sometimes spectacularly, as is indicated by cases of collusion, price-fixing, kickbacks, and the like.

I think that we should follow the lead of this paper in two ways. First, while we have recognized for some time that the economy is important in the Western self-conception (e.g., Dumont 1977), we need to follow Colloredo-Mansfeld in recognizing that much Western thinking about the economy is problematic and heavily ideological and so merits careful scrutiny. Second, we need to extend our concerns beyond the sorts of societies that anthropologists conventionally study to core Western commercial and economic activities. Problems of access mean that this is not always easy, but there is work in the area, not all of it by anthropologists (e.g., Chapman and Buckley 1997, Sklair 1998, Smith 1988; see Carrier 1997), that deserves our attention. Some of the building blocks that we need already exist. I hope that readers will be inspired by Colloredo-Mansfeld's paper to pursue the issues it raises.

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Colloredo-Mansfeld's article is a welcome update on several issues of long-standing interest to anthropologists. First, the study of Otavaleño and Tiguan artisans is a contribution to the historically deeply rooted literature in anthropology about the interconnections between artisanal production and indigenous identity (albeit with useful and illuminating comparisons with artisanal producers in Japan and France). Second, the article takes up a paradox that Marxist anthropologists in particular have pondered in the post–World War II era. In *Capital*, Marx made clear that the technological dynamic of capitalist production and the victory of wage over other forms of labor would tend, over time, to create societies composed of only two classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Other social classes were to dwindle and ultimately disappear. In the last decades of the 20th century anthropologists found that, rather than disappearing, artisanal producers ("petty commodity producers," "informal sector production") have proliferated in Third World economies not in spite of the spread of capitalist relations of production but because of it. Colloredo-Mansfeld's analysis of the nature of competition in artisanal economies/communities advances the study of artisanal expansion under the capitalist mode of production in the context of anthropology's contemporary iconic issue, globalization.

Colloredo-Mansfeld shows that competition manages to increase both intracommunity inequality and ethnic solidarity. He has done an excellent job in describing the articulation of commodification and identity, cultural expressiveness and neoliberal ethics in Andean Ecuador. He convincingly argues that intergroup competitiveness fosters competition and that competition in artisanal economics/communities ought to be seen as a set of relationships rather than a form of individualism. He also asserts that competition "reconcile[s] the painful inequalities within communities with their professed shared values." It seems to me that this proposition relies upon an undertheorized or at least not fully realized analysis of class in indigenous communities. This is a frequent weakness in much anthropological analysis of indigenous communities (my own included, I am sure), so I would like to comment upon it a bit further here.

On the one hand, Colloredo-Mansfeld, quoting Smith (1984), rejects a Marxist dismissal of the substantial income differences that have been generated among indigenous artisans. The Marxist approach (in this case, at least) would differentiate classes if the artisans with substantially larger incomes were to capitalize their enterprises and thereafter appropriate the surplus value of wage laborers working in those enterprises. But he also agrees that income differences have not yet produced class differences. Instead, he shows that in Otavaleño *talleres* the owners seek to outdo one another in providing homelike environments; owners in both Otavalo and Tigua also fund various community projects that redistribute rather than capitalize their profits. Yet Smith (1990) also showed that the meaning of class in her Guatemalan case could not be limited to relationships in the sphere of production but also included ethnic political consciousness generated by ongoing struggles; the differentiation between class *an sich* and class *für sich* is a recurrent theme in the Marxist literature.

I remain curious about how Otavaleños in particular would respond to pointed questions about class and class formation in their communities. These are likely uncomfortable questions given both the way in which competition has manifested itself in Andean indigenous communities and the way in which indigenous confederations in Ecuador have mobilized a vast Indian population against exploitative and oppressive governments. But I think that to understand whether competition reconciles inequalities anthropologists and indigenous intellectuals/leaders alike should ask more pointedly what class could and would mean in indigenous communities before ruling it out.

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Colloredo-Mansfield hopes that anthropology will aim at deconstructing theories that endorse the inflexible logic of the so-called laws of the market and developing explanatory or interpretive models that feature "other" relations among competition, economy, and cultural identity. At first sight, the task seems laudable, and, though remotely, it evokes Karl Polanyi's methodological concerns. Polanyi examined alternative economic mechanisms, adopting an approach that was more historical than anthropological, with the intention of showing that the market was only one of various feasible ways of managing the economy. His popularity and that of the substantivist hypotheses associated with his work have dwindled to some extent in the past decade or so. In times of accelerated economic globalization, in which the neoliberal paradigm based upon the "dictatorship of the market" is essential, Colloredo-Mansfield's article may be read as a hint of a future and, in my opinion, welcome revival of the anthropological debate on Polanyi's concepts.

While the article's aim seems not only sound but also very topical, however, the way in which it questions the pertinence of the "logical machine" set up by neoliberal strategy is perplexing. Thus, although the exposition of the Ecuadorian artisans' socioeconomic and cultural practices is certainly interesting, ethnographically accurate, and credible, the salient point remains what relevance these groups can have for translocal (national or supranational) social structures. It is my firm belief that the impact of such actors on translocal social structures and overall economic activity is relatively insignificant. The promoters of neoliberal policies do not feel threatened at all by them, and they can therefore readily afford to tolerate if not revitalize or encourage them, as the author infers. Ecuadorian artisans, *maîtres chocolatiers* in France, Japanese potters, and, even nonindustrial beer brewers in Switzerland, "slow-food" caterers in Italy, uncrowded tourist facilities on some Greek islands, and the new postsocialist cooperatives in Bulgaria are all ultimately pleasant ornaments to the globalized economy. Finally, the activities of these social actors are often tied to the more or less explicit demands of elites who (re)invent cultural identities in terms of their products' presumed "genuineness" and "authenticity,"—a relationship that is not examined thoroughly enough in the text.

Colloredo-Mansfeld focuses on the analysis of a socioeconomic and cultural niche, employing the established anthropological approach known as scale reduction. Is this really a proper way to achieve an acute critique of the unavoidable economic requirements of neoliberal rhetoric? Given the ongoing processes of globalization, is restricting research to "cozy worlds" like the one chosen here still methodologically viable?

By shaping his own "small world," the anthropologist achieves a "quaint reality" through the choice of unconventional objects, as Arjun Appadurai did with his "ethnoscapes." In the end, even the Ecuadorian artisan-artists who produce handicrafts with undoubted aesthetic merit are at once a good example of a small world and a reality sui generis less touched by everyday trivialities. In fact, we might wonder why Colloredo-Mansfeld did not choose some more widespread and perhaps less prestigious professions such as bricklaying, carpentry, or plumbing and ask whether the same practices occur amongst these social actors as amongst the artisan-artists.

Finally, anthropological research aimed at small worlds goes hand in hand with "depoliticization." By "depoliticization" in this context what I mean is not a disengagement of anthropology from politics (this would indeed be a boon!) but rather, especially in American anthropology, which is still spellbound by the sirens of culturalism, a certain disregard for and at times even some indifference toward the systematic consideration of "politics," that is, power and domination, relations between centers and peripheries, hierarchical structures, etc. The consequence of this depoliticization is a distanced and abstract view of socioeconomic processes such as globalization, which perpetuate, strengthen, or give more flexibility to (quoting Antonio Gramsci) asymmetries between hegemonic and subordinate classes—between elites and ordinary people, not to mention "winners" and "losers," etc. Of course, reading between the lines of the article, we can dimly perceive the author's aversion to the neoliberal "philosophy" and the globalization model that it postulates. However, his position is not backed by true critical analysis; in its place there is an implicit attraction, which smacks of "romanticism" (or "communitarianism" or "populism"), to niches that have been able to develop practices outside of the prevailing system.

In short, to be credible, an ethnographic critique of neoliberalism ought to take as its point of departure Mauss's *fait social total*, starting with a critical analysis of the translocal logic of highly stratified socioeconomic macrostructures. The neoliberal model should be validated (or invalidated) through anthropological research within the system itself and especially at its core. Therefore, if anthropology does not wish to be a discipline devoted to "butterfly collecting" (to revive Edmund Leach's effective wording), it cannot be satisfied with the discovery and analysis of "alternative" relations and practices found in small worlds on the outskirts of the vast ongoing processes of globalization.

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In this energetic account of artisans at the periphery of disconnected and global markets, Colloredo-Mansfield illuminates the complexities, distortions, and contradictions they face. The demand for artisan products rises and falls with unpredictable tastes, intermediaries seize control of distribution routes, designs are rapidly copied, and most original producers do not reap the largest rewards. The artisan sector itself arises as small-scale agriculturalists are forced from the countryside for demographic, ecological, and competitive reasons, and they often bring to their new trade nothing more than their honed talents of "making-do" and being a jack-of-all-trades. Their work draws on culture even as they recreate a tradition and forge an identity that is as much a category of theirs as it is of their far-flung customers. Above all, some artisans accumulate wealth, at least for a time, as others—seemingly equally talented—fail or become hired workers, and a degree of economic stratification develops. The puzzle is how to explain this shifting and widespread phenomenon. Can this collage be understood through formal economics? What does anthropology offer?

Colloredo-Mansfeld claims to provide a "fundamentally different approach" that deviates from the "market model" as well as anthropological understandings. I admire his energy and experimentation, but I think that both economics and anthropology offer us more in grasping the situation of these marginal producers than Colloredo-Mansfeld suggests.

First, I wish that Colloredo-Mansfeld had drawn more clearly and extensively on the early work of Schumpeter (1934[1926]) (who at that point might be classed as an Austrian rather than a neoclassical economist). He emphasized the dynamic role of innovation in the economy and how it created real profits, destroyed prior forms ("creative destruction"), and made for unstable, changing situations. Schumpeter had a broad and helpful notion of innovation: it included not only new "designs" but also new ways of producing, new organizational arrangements, new marketing forms, new technologies, and so forth. In the case of Ecuadorian artisans, I would apply the word "innovation" not only to artisan designs but also to new ways of distributing and marketing the products. Colloredo-Mansfeld seems to think that something has gone awry when distributors reap profits from the work of artisans, but from an innovation perspective they are adding something to the prior creation of value. Following this line of argument, one can see how monopolies or oligopolies quickly arise. An entrepreneur may try to preserve his or her innovation—shielding it from competition—in order to reap a supernormal profit. The techniques are various and range from using financial resources to building social relationships. I have been especially interested in the fact that small-scale artisans in Guatemala seem to lack this keeping power (1992), and there is an extensive anthropological literature on the ways entrepreneurs may operate in small communities to gather profits. I think Colloredo-Mansfeld could have elaborated on innovation and the holding of a productivity niche (monopoly) to deepen our understanding of what is happening with the artisans.

Second, I like the way Colloredo-Mansfeld brings out the dialectic or contradiction that, within competition, cooperation emerges and, within competition, competition takes place. Some theorists of the market term this phenomenon "co-opetition" (Brandenburger and Nalebuff 1996). In the language of many economists, innovations may create positive "externalities" or costless spillovers that benefit competitors as well as cooperators. Such spillover effects may enhance the economic standing of everyone.

My language is somewhat different, for I have come to see the presence of social relationships in the market—which can lead both to monopolies and to increased creativity—as the interaction of economy's two realms: market and community. Each implies the other, sometimes in tension, sometimes in cooperation, sometimes in opposition, and the balance varies across societies. Here, I think, anthropology has much to offer standard economics. Markets are never shorn of social relationships which surround them and grow up within them, just as the small-scale community economies that anthropologists have observed are never enclosed but undertake impersonal trade at their borders and often within them. Much of what Colloredo-Mansfeld describes in terms of attracting and holding a labor force, legitimating one's position, putting earnings into community organizations, serving food, or becoming a *compadre* is captured by this shifting dialectic. Colloredo-Mansfeld asks, "Why has competition . . . so decisively produced symbols of sodality even as it has split a few haves from many have-nots?" I answer: that is what it means to be human in the making of material life—conflicted and torn between community and market.

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I agree with Colloredo-Mansfeld and de Certeau, whom he cites, that "to come to grips with the vital cultural specificity manifested by painters in Quito, weavers in Otavalo, chocolatiers in Paris, and potters in Sarayama, we need to see commodity production and marketing as 'indissociable from particular moments.'" There are illuminating ethnographic moments in this article. What is just as impressive, the author eschews the abstractions of neoclassical economic theory and instead delineates how economic practices are embedded in social relations, arguing convincingly that competition is fundamentally relational.

Perhaps because I find Colloredo-Mansfeld's argument congenial, I am confounded by several of his major claims. For example, he claims that the idea of competition as relational is original. Yet, no less an authority than Adam Smith (1976 [1759]) alerted us to the inescapably social and interactional nature of our action and perception in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, and Karl Polanyi (1944, 1968) repeatedly underscored this point. After all, the very notion of competition entails the idea of relationality. Would it be possible to compete with someone with whom one had no relations?

I suspect that the disembedded notion of competition arises from the "market model." Colloredo-Mansfeld rightly inveighs against it, but the target strikes me as something of a straw person. In the era of neoliberalism, leading international economists ranging from Jeffrey Sachs to Joseph Stiglitz have abandoned any remaining theoretical or prescriptive attachment to the pure market model. Why should anthropologists continue to criticize a model that is touted only in introductory economics textbooks or by zealous second-rate economists?

I am also confounded by Colloredo-Mansfeld's tendency to conflate particularities and capture them with nominal concepts. From his theoretical starting point, I would have thought that his analytical strategy would be to unravel the matrix of social relations and institutions of each artisanal economy rather than proffering rather general and loose comparisons and descriptions. What is the point of juxtaposing a highly organized group of potters in the second-largest economy in the world with recently emergent belt makers in part of what the author calls the Fourth World? In this regard, the overweening ambition announced in the title—"An Ethnography of Neoliberalism"—seems symptomatic of the author's nominalist tendency. Shouldn't we seek much more specificity when we speak of "neoliberalism" or the "artisanal economy"?

Finally, I don't doubt that the rhetoric of competition does the cultural work of legitimating inequality. Yet, surely, farmers in Otavalo were not egalitarian before the rise of the new craft, and there were undoubtedly beliefs and practices that made sense of the status quo. Was there a prelapsarian state of harmony and equality? Did neoliberalism generate competition and inequality?

For what it's worth, I like neither capitalism nor the market nor, for that matter, the purveyors of indigeneity and authenticity, but it seems tendentious to talk of "shadowy and opportunistic economic actors" whose effects are "pernicious." It may be satisfying to condemn Stanley Fischer and the enriched Ecuadorian artisans, but I remain unsure what that rhetorical exercise has to do with an ethnography of neoliberalism or of Ecuadorian artisans.

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This provocative essay makes both substantive and theoretical contributions to economic anthropology. At its core is a set of observations about two groups of rural Ecuadorians who, faced with a collapsing agricultural economy, capitalized upon local artistic traditions and a recognizably indigenous identity to create a new market niche as belt makers and painters, albeit with highly variable individual success. Colloredo-Mansfeld uses their experiences to focus on the question of competition, a topic underexamined by anthropologists about which he makes some very astute observations. Rejecting the ideology of individualism, he points out that "competition . . . is best understood as a structural relationship among competitors." Furthermore, through competition actors collectively create the very markets in which they operate.

Other claims are less compelling. The vignettes of successful businesses do not demonstrate the replacement of "economic" by "expressive" factors. The story of Teran and Chiza, for example, begins with a shop that already has "a high cash flow," while Jaime Cuyo may well have crossed a crucial threshold in economies of scale when he first employed eight workers. That accurate intuitions about the desires of employees and customers were also critical is unsurprising: few would doubt that, at the microeconomic level, success relative to one's competitors depends upon a combination of quantifiable factors with those less tangible but equally critical assets that Colloredo-Mansfeld labels "expressive" and other authors have assigned to a variety of other rubrics.

Still less convincing is the claim that these data can address larger questions of political economy. In the opening, we hear from textile producers who clearly perceive the impact of national factors such as government policies, as well as the pressures of international competition, on their businesses, but in the analysis these larger structures vanish from sight. Indeed, Colloredo-Mansfeld explicitly eschews the global focus of much contemporary anthropology. His criticisms are well taken, but meaningful economic analysis depends upon an accurate assessment of which factors are local and contingent and which are systemic and structural. For instance, the absence of capital investment is an interesting feature of this particular industry and one that illuminates other features such as the difficulty in retaining employees, who tend to set up their own shop as soon as they learn the ropes. But he claims a far greater import—even that it disproves the importance of capital in economic analysis more generally. It does not; should the market space opened up by these enterprising Indians continue to expand it might well attract the interest of a highly capitalized investor, who could easily swallow up all the independent producers. Such processes occur in other industries, such as food retailing, where supermarket chains have targeted Latin American open-air markets and mom-and-pop stores for elimination. Similarly, heavily capitalized shrimp farms have utterly transformed Ecuador's coastal regions, destroying mangrove swamps and eliminating local fishing economies. Nor are the local debates about morality in exchange which interest Colloredo-Mansfeld stable over time: economic pressures tend to erode initial resistance to capitalist practices deemed abhorrent, just as they chip away at the cohesion of kin and community.

This inattention to larger processes of social and economic transformation makes it impossible for Colloredo-Mansfeld to deliver on his promise of an "ethnography of neoliberalism." Indeed, he seems ambivalent about whether the economic patterns he describes are attributable to recent policies, and I was ultimately puzzled by the statement that competition is predicated "less and less" on economic factors, which would imply a contrast to some previous, undefined period. More disappointing is the failure to develop the tantalizing hints offered early in the article about a relationship between the emergence of artisan markets, the fin-de-siècle embrace of neoliberal economic policy by Latin American governments, and the rise of multiculturalism.

In the end, then, this article works better as a provocation to take on the question of competition than as an example of how to do so. Its uncertain theoretical position about the relationship between macro and micro analysis, culture and economics, structure and history, prevents it from asking the right questions about competition itself. As a first premise, an ethnography of competition might distinguish between the several meanings of the word which surface at different moments here: the ideology of competitiveness so beloved of free-marketeers, actual competition between capitalist enterprises, and the far older and more pervasive sense of competition as rivalry, which need not be part of capitalism at all. Capitalist culture continually conflates these in its drive to naturalize its own artifices; our job as social analysts might begin with separating them out so as to understand their relationship to one another and to the neoliberal and other practices they underwrite.

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Colloredo-Mansfeld has done us a service by updating and reengaging the topic of craft economies and inequalities through the medium of an extended discussion of the concept of competition. The expansion of world trade, the continuing impoverishment of rural economies, and the expansion of communications technology are having major effects on artisanal crafts, so this is a timely effort. It builds on current anthropological writing that asserts the continuing relevance of a focus on localities and cultural specificities even as those localities become more connected with each other in new ways. This reveals an ironic parallel between anthropologists and the artisans discussed in this paper: for all of us success in the global arena depends on our continuing involvement in local culture. Selling in the vast global marketplace requires a "craft" that is at least putatively embedded in a unique locality and tradition.

The subtlety and complexity of the cases Colloredo-

Mansfeld presents could be better served by a broader analytical framework. Opposing a universal economic analysis of competition against a cultural and contextual study of different cultural models just leads back to the sterile dead end of the formalist-substantivist debate. In practice, Colloredo-Mansfeld demonstrates that macroeconomic factors—the transaction costs of marketing, the social capital built through generosity and trust, monopoly power—really do make a big difference to craft economies. He also shows that local social organization, culturally embedded ways of mediating and controlling competition, and ethnic and community identities are also extremely important. The "economic" analysis has lately been pushed forward through work in institutional economics and economic history. The "cultural" approach is thoroughly grounded in a long-standing literature on envy, witchcraft, leveling, and resistance to commoditization in peasant communities.

The problem with counterposing "economy" and "culture" as alternative modes of understanding competition is that in real ethnographic cases the two are always intertwined. The question is really not which approach is theoretically superior; in practice we see that sometimes competition is completely culturally embedded and mediated, to the point where the universality of the construct "competition" is itself questionable. In other situations, competition is part of a broad capitalist institutional structure and also the worldview of participants in the market, and a formal economic analysis proves a powerful tool. The case studies in the paper show that economic markets do operate but are embedded in various ways in long-term social practice.

I disagree with the way Colloredo-Mansfeld seems to equate economic imperatives in the craft market with inequality and cultural prescriptions with redistribution, leveling, and egalitarianism. There is nothing inherent in Andean (or any other) social organization that produces perfect equality and nothing about economic logic that always leads to stratification. The literature on common-property management, for example, uses rational-choice theory to show how in some situations communal management and restraint of competition through contracts and agreements make perfect economic sense. Competition can lead to cooperative solutions, and it does not always reward innovation or creativity. What would really lead us forward from this debate would be a deeper questioning of why some ethnic groups or communities are capable of finding cooperative solutions or submerging or limiting competition while others are riven with dissension and mistrust and find collaboration impossible. In my own fieldwork in Belize I have worked in both kinds of places and a whole range in between, and I have seen tremendous differences in the consequences when communities are faced with new problems and opportunities. The more cooperative and collaborative communities do not always do better. As Annis (1989) asserts, sometimes cooperation and social solidarity hold everyone back, leading to shared poverty.

I would also like to have seen a more complex and nuanced discussion of "inequality," which can mean many different things. Netting (1993) emphasizes the key distinction between inequality and stratification. Much inequality in rural communities is due to chance and the different amounts of labor available to households in different stages of their life cycles; this inequality often changes rapidly as household fortunes rise and fall. It is very different from the kinds of inequalities that become embedded and institutionalized through exclusive control of a vital resource, through ranking or social capital, to become true stratification. Given the rapid changes in handicraft markets and other income opportunities, I would suspect that in the long run these Andean communities have not become stratified yet. Accumulated wealth in consumer goods is probably not the best way to measure either kind of inequality, however.

Despite my arguments with the article, Colloredo-Mansfeld has produced a thought-provoking piece of work which comes at some old issues from a new direction. As more such studies of handicraft communities accumulate, let us hope that revealing comparative studies will answer some of the tough and unresolved issues.

Reply

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With these attentive commentaries raising fruitful issues of globalization, agency, and politics, among others, I would like to develop further this discussion of neoliberalism as a context of economic and social life. Additionally, the respondents' differing perspectives on how to pursue an analysis, whether along an economic or a cultural track, encourage dialogue about methodological choices. I proceed by clarifying key economic conditions that I believe mold the contemporary and distinctive reality of millennial Ecuador. Further, in light of the issues raised by the respondents, I retrace my own analytical orientation to clarify its appropriateness, to acknowledge its limitations, and to suggest integrative avenues of analysis.

My intention with this piece is to offer an ethnography of neoliberalism—a thick description and analysis of changing livelihoods and communities amid structural adjustments and promarket policy. Giordano takes issue with my selection of communities and economic actors for such a study, arguing that the investigation of the neoliberal model must occur "within the system itself and especially at its core." Carrier, too, sees a focus on artisanal producers outside the world's core commercial areas as a limitation. True enough. Anyone seeking to write an all-encompassing account of neoliberalism (I am not) must engage commercial cores, regulated enterprises that have resisted neoliberal prescriptions, artisans, and still other economic spheres. With studies on marketing (Applbaum 2000) and other dimensions of economic practice in market-saturated economies (cf. Carrier 1977), anthropologists have begun to open new perspectives into some of these varied areas.

And yet, to study neoliberalism by concentrating on core sectors identifies its impact too closely with the export sectors, branded goods, and financial institutions that are the narrow beneficiaries of its policies. This perspective ignores the majority of those bearing the brunt of strict monetary and fiscal policy, privatization, and deregulation. For many, the experience of such neoliberal programs is not inclusion "within the system" but exclusion. In several Latin American countries, neoliberal reforms have pushed half the population into the informal sector (Demmers, Fernandez Jilberto, and Hogenboom 2001). Consequently, we must not let the intentions or ambitions of policy makers and corporations obscure the scale of changes occurring outside their realm. Implying that the formal sector is ascendant, for example, Weismantel worries that supermarkets have targeted open-air markets for elimination. Maybe, but, if so, they have failed in Ecuador. With half the labor force lacking full-time jobs, markets and street selling grew substantially in Quito throughout the 1990s. By the end of the decade the mayor of the city had dedicated his administration to removing and reorganizing the 2,000+ vendors who had moved into parks, expanding stall space in several established markets, and opening up a new artisan market. This growing informal economy is part and parcel of neoliberalism.

My main concern, however, is not to call attention to the economic spaces opening up outside the formal economy, and it certainly is not to claim that these represent "'alternative' relations and practices." Rather, I seek to explain why these artisanal sectors exhibit the same widening gaps between rich and poor that we see in the United States, the European Union, and elsewhere —down to the details of the *patterns* of lopsided earnings. The problem, as I investigate it here, is not what small-scale alternatives there are to the global economy but what causes similar patterns of inequality to re-create themselves in such different spaces of the global economy. While Lie suggests that I link the presence of inequality to neoliberal policies, I made it explicit that inequality long predated them. What I do see as new and in need of explanation is a sharp divergence between a few high earners and the rest that coincides with a strengthening of community expressive practice. I have sought the answer to this problem in the economic, social, and cultural processes of competition. To carry the project further, we need to heed Carrier's and Giordano's advice and study commercial cores and mundane trade—though not because they are where the real action is but because such research is necessary to trace the convergences that may be taking place in differently regulated, capitalized, and culturally marked segments of the global economy.

Field, Carrier, and Wilk remark that I develop my analysis in the context of the global frame in which artisans operate; Weismantel and Giordano, in contrast, feel that the article eschews a global focus. To a certain extent, the divided opinion about the place of the "global" in my analysis reflects wider differences within anthropology about what constitutes globalization. Capturing the sense of an emergent, monolithic structure, June Nash writes (2001:3), "Globalization is the process of integrating the world economy in key production investment sites. The ideological premise is a self-regulated market ensuring the free movement of goods and resources that escapes national and international controls over production process and labor conditions." Appadurai's (1996) work offers a more vernacular, pluralistic and cultural view. In my analysis, the "global" entails international patterns of investment (and disinvestment) that have led to the rise of the economies in which artisans operate, novel market payoff structures created through migration and links between local markets and international economic agents (potentially including Weismantel's "highly capitalized investor"), and ideological rhetoric about competing that is being picked up and replicated across the globe. In this formulation, globalization manifests itself in transformative connections and disconnections being made through mobile people, objects, and discourses, not in a linear process of integration that produces enduring "translocal" structures.

A linked concern of Giordano and Weismantel relates to the problem of agency in a world structured by global forces. They assert that artisan trades are too marginal and successful entrepreneurs too weak to matter in relation to "commercial cores," "heavily capitalized" operators, and "promoters of neoliberal policies." In a separate context, Wilk and Gudeman also raise concerns about artisans' ability to promote and protect their interests, alluding to the problems that Guatemalan artisans have in capitalizing on either cooperative behavior or individual innovation. The challenge here involves assessing the scope of artisans' action—understanding, as Weismantel nicely puts it, "which factors are local and contingent and which are systemic and structural." We are largely in agreement on the need for such discriminations. I am keen to show that ranked competition has become an inescapable feature of a community's economic life because national and international economic contractions have curtailed career paths. Describing small commodity producers as being in a "structural relationship," I intend to call attention to the failed labor markets that have pushed them into small commodity production. Equally, I use the term to underscore that the logic of relative competition insures that very few will get ahead through long-term artisan work.

Although Weismantel believes that I aim to disprove the importance of capital in economic analysis, in no way do I make such a claim. Formal class analysis continues to be important in Ecuador, not only among shrimp farmers but also among some artisan operations that have expanded in recent years through German-financed acquisition of machinery that costs between US$20,000 and US$75,000. But an analytical framework that privileges capital can be blind to other systemic inequalities or sources of economic power (including money power, which is not the same as capital) that are at work in less capitalized spaces. Consequently, as a model of structural relationships mine differs from Marxist analysis that would recast the problem of agency as class position and the control of capital. To insist on the structural significance of rank-based competition in some markets does not deny the importance of capital-based analysis in others.

Giordano is skeptical, however, that top-ranked artisans amount to much. He suggests that they and their trades serve as ornaments, not challenges, to the global economy. In several senses this is a fair comment. First, state culture ministries and tourist boards often do promote national artisans not as economic pioneers but as guardians of tradition. Second, the potential economic power of artisanship often lies in motifs and imagery that are occasionally appropriated by more capitalized producers (see, for example, Rovine's [2001] account of mudcloth motifs) who make profits "within" the formal economy while the original artisans remain outside. I would point out, however, that many, if not most, artisan trades emerge, develop, and go bust without attention from state or industry. The "ornamental" function must be demonstrated, not assumed.

The question of the power of artisan elites, however, is not exhausted by a discussion of craft trades' ornamental value or authenticating power. Rather, we need to include wider institutions and political events within which the development of native artisan communities takes place. As Field points out, "indigenous confederations in Ecuador have mobilized a vast Indian population against exploitative and oppressive governments." In the face of this ethnic movement, the IMF has indeed felt threatened. Native protests have compelled the Fund to acknowledge and make plans for social unrest (Palast 2001); the government has asked indigenous leaders to join the cabinet. While the indigenous movement lies beyond the scope of this article, Field helpfully draws attention to the political consequences of the stratification that is intensifying here. The indigenous leaders who are formulating policy for artisan unions, peasant confederations, and political councils do not crop up at random from a uniformly marginalized population. Both specific people and particular communities are emerging through intense political and economic competition. By raising awareness of competitive practice, we can better examine what class means in indigenous communities and for the future of the movement.

How, then, to approach competition? Several commentators interpret my approach as a rejection of economic modes of analysis. Wilk, for example, is concerned that I pit a universal economic analysis against a cultural and contextual study, once again leading us into the formalist-substantivist debate. Giordano, too, sees the ghost of Polanyi. Before getting into a discussion about the appropriateness of an economic or a cultural approach, however, I want to raise again the crucial distinction between the market model as a cultural model that emphasizes highly individualistic behavior and the way markets actually work. It is a difference that Carrier (1997) develops in his excellent essay and one that I reaffirm here. As I write in the opening paragraphs of the essay, the market model describes neither how people actually interact when they buy and sell nor current economic theory. I spend time critiquing this model, however, because it fits all too well with much of the writing on competition that I have found in the anthropological literature—even if, as Lie suggests, creative new work in economics has abandoned the pure market model.

Indeed, in this article, I embrace economic analysis. Empirically, I rely on a close examination of producers, focusing on a narrow set of variables related to fixed capital, earnings, and a statistical portrait of stratification within their communities. Thus, it was not "vignettes of successful business" (as Weismantel writes) that led me to question the role of capital in determining earnings within these trades but quantitative analysis of the relation between productive capital and earnings in cases in which I could find the data. The power of an economic mode of analysis that tracks individual economic actors, records the institutional contexts in which they work, and offers a quantitative snapshot of a trade is that it facilitates cross-cultural comparisons. As Wilk notes, some of my measures of income could be improved. Nevertheless, they offer the possibility of useful comparisons. Lie expresses reservations about these comparisons, including the appropriateness of juxtaposing Japanese and Ecuadorian artisans. I would point out that my likening them is not general and loose but specific; I measure the uneven distribution of earnings in each case. Ultimately, I do so to suggest that there is something systemic and structural about the type of inequality that emerges.

Further testifying to my economic commitment, I turn at the critical point in my discussion not to Polanyi but to the insightful work of such economists as Lazear, Rosen, Cook, and Frank. To be sure, I could have done more with older economic theory. Gudeman, for example, urges a more careful reading of Schumpeter, while Lie reminds us about Smith's comprehensive moral and social account of competition. A more sensitive reading of classical economic theorists would help anthropologists (including me) to sharpen our social analysis of competition. So too, as modern economists expand their horizons and explore social practices ranging from marriage to drug use (Tommasi and Ierulli 1995), anthropologists would do well to pay attention. Behaviors that we would be inclined to portray as culturally and historically situated may well be explicable by more general models of information uncertainty or the costs and benefits of decisions taken under specific circumstances. And, of course, as an anthropologist, I argue that economists would do well to attend to ethnography as they move away from markets. To return to the arguments of this essay, I am particularly dissatisfied with the way that economists conceive of material culture, as mere indices of economic clout, and I seek to show the community-forming power of the commodities, architecture, cuisine, and crafts used to signal position.

New work by economists only reinforces what anthropologists have long argued: economy and culture are always intertwined. Observing this, Wilk points out that neither an economic nor a cultural approach is theoretically superior. The variability of competition—which may be culturally embedded and mediated or part of a broad capitalist institutional structure—requires careful selection of analytical tools, he says. While I agree with much of this, I want to be clear about why I turn to different modes of analysis.

Working in an economic mode, I look for the presence of material regularities. Yet in the cases at hand, economic outcomes produce strong social discontinuities and pressures that undermine the stability of the economic relations. Explaining regularity thus requires a broader framework than one that dwells on earnings and accumulation. With a cultural analysis, I explore what permits regularities even to exist as economic, ideological, and moral crosscurrents destabilize work and erode the meaning of making, buying, and selling. I should point out that I do not think that an economy's degree of embeddedness in social institutions is what calls for a cultural analysis. This problem of regularity is present for economies unfolding both through formally capitalist institutions (corporate boardrooms) and ostensibly noncapitalist ones (families).

In linking culture and cultural analysis to the problem of consistency, I draw from both Moore (1975) and Wolf (1999). In contrast to much current theorizing about culture's contradictions and contingency, Wolf urges the idea of culture, linked to power, that explains how heterogeneity and variation become organized and held together. In this view, culture is the set of practices and understandings that make possible shared perception of circumstances and, further, sets out the motivating truths capable not of organizing minds in a homogeneous fashion but rather of moving them in the same direction (Wolf 1999:289–90).

I have discussed cultural analysis at length to make a crucial point about culture and inequality. Wilk writes that I seem to equate cultural prescriptions with redistribution, leveling, and egalitarianism. In fact, I argue the opposite. Writing that the cultural work of competition is "to reconcile the painful inequalities emergent within communities with their professed shared values," I mean that the speeches, artistic innovation, and other "cultural" practices work together to contain the resentment sparked by rich intermediaries and enable communities to grow despite the wealth that a few make from many others' products. Gudeman offers that the tensions in these communities stem from being "conflicted and torn between community and market." In Tigua and Otavalo I see a related but narrower rift concerning livelihoods, equality, and autonomy.

On one hand, people insist upon fair access to trades developed out of community traditions, access that severe economic inequality appears to threaten as rich intermediaries expand their market influence. On the other hand, many also believe that it is vital that the power of their trade be expanded so that it remains a viable form of "one's own work, in one's own home"—a vehicle of some economic autonomy. In the course of competing (in the broad sense that encompasses markets, meetings, and social events), wealthy artisans and their supporters have linked their practices with the ideals of autonomy. The connection heads off open challenges; it helps make their gains acceptable. But income differences are never leveled, and the conflicting views are never tidied up in a new shared framework. Instead, each new crisis or initiative brings old disagreements into the open. The significance of competition as a cultural framework is that it continually offers settings and discourses for affirming key values related to work as part of the definition (and expansion) of the bounds of acceptable stratification. Indeed, I claim that competing accomplishes this in many different communities and markets. This assertion clearly needs more empirical support.

Another area that needs further investigation is the historical context. Weismantel is right about my ambivalence about the extent to which the patterns of competition that I document here are attributable to recent policies. While I describe the conditions of the past two decades that have both created a specific market payoff structure and pushed people into these markets, the importance of relative rank in artisan and peasant commodity markets warrants a more careful historical analysis. Similarly, Giordano should be listened to when he insists on paying closer attention to politics and power, although, in light of modern identity politics, the transformation of civil society, and the entry of social movements into party politics, I think this investigation requires more precise language than "relations between centers and peripheries, hierarchical structures, etc."

In sum, I want to get anthropology to engage the problem of competition. I have done so with materials from Ecuador not simply because it is a "small world" that I know but because there the artisan economies are being called upon to support ever more people in the midst of the neoliberal reorganization of the nation's economy. As I mention at the outset, though, the discourse and practice of competition expand in my home state of Iowa, too. "Being competitive" preoccupies policy makers, elevates the work of economists and management specialists, and confronts us as our universities, our kids' schools, and hometown businesses all must come up with strategies "to compete in a global economy." Yet anthropologists have had little or nothing to say on the topic. In *Public Culture's* recent "millennial" issue on capitalism (*Public Culture* 12[2]), for example, not only is competition not addressed but, ironically, Robert Frank and Michael Porter, two academics who have done an enormous amount to raise the economic, cultural, and political profile of competition, are cited only in passing. I think it is time that anthropologists got more involved; the respondents' commentaries published here offer a productive first step.

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