

‘The Problem of Delimitation’: Parataxis, Bureaucracy, and Ecuador’s Popular and Solidarity Economy

Pre-publication version

Final version available from the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21(2), 2015: 106-126, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9655.12149/abstract>

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Abstract

What happens when an alternative economy becomes subject to a state bureaucratic apparatus? The question is posed in the context of a state project in Ecuador to institutionalize a so-called ‘*economía popular y solidaria*’ (or EPS). This ‘popular and solidarity economy’, part of a project of ‘post-neoliberal’ state transformation, invites questions about how to delimit its boundaries. This article offers an ethnographically informed account of the expert knowledge forms and bureaucratic techniques of Ecuadorian state actors charged with institutionalizing the EPS. I argue that in descriptions of the EPS, officials deploy an open-ended aesthetic (which I term ‘parataxis’); in response to everyday bureaucratic demands to identify existing EPS practitioners, however, officials rely on techniques of provisional delimitation. The case promises insight into alternative economic imaginaries and the post-neoliberal turn in Latin America and it raises questions central to the anthropology of the state about the intersection of expert knowledge and bureaucratic practice.

In March 2011, Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa introduced a law that would acknowledge, thus making possible state support for and regulation of, a so-called ‘popular and solidarity economy’ (*economía popular y solidaria* or EPS, as it is known in Ecuador).¹ According to Correa, the actors whose contributions constituted this economy – a range of individual and collective enterprises linked by an orientation to ‘*fines sociales*’ (social ends) and origins in ‘popular’ life – had ‘been made completely invisible’. That exclusion was exemplary of larger patterns of marginalization and the reason why ‘there have been neither institutions nor public policies for this sector’. ‘With this law’, Correa (2011) declared,

we are giving fair recognition to that which has always existed and which has done so much for the country ... to the housewives who work at home, to the informal merchant who toils and risks it all day after day (*se la juega día a día*) ... We are recognizing those co-operatives, we are recognizing those solidarity enterprises, we are recognizing the family economy.

The search for alternatives – economic, political, social – often begins from the ground up. Correa expressed just such a scalar orientation to alternative economic imaginaries, one seeking to make visible and sustainable existing (‘local’, ‘informal’, ‘popular’, ‘community’, ‘civil society’) practices (Gibson-Graham 2005; 2008; Wright 2010).² But in Ecuador, the EPS is also part of a sweeping project of state transformation, and that project is itself part of an apparent ‘post-neoliberal’ turn to the left in Latin American state politics (Escobar 2010; Yates & Bakker 2014). While drawing on the experiences of ‘popular’ actors, Correa’s project made the conceptualization, identification, and cultivation of alternatives the work of the state. While

resting on an alternative representation of a socially embedded economy, the law, which responded to a mandate in Ecuador's constitution to build an 'economic system' that is 'social and solidary', also set in motion a process of bureaucratic reform and institution-building through which that alternative was to be constructed.³

A few months after Correa's speech, I met Javier, a mid-level official at the Institute of the Popular and Solidarity Economy (IEPS).⁴ IEPS's mission was to foment the organizational, productive, and commercial capacities of actors of the EPS. I observed energetic discussions among IEPS officials about how to identify and engage those actors. During one conversation, Javier wondered about how to 'measure' what made the EPS different:

[Take] a woman who makes school uniforms for her children and her neighbour's children. She makes a living, but she also feels good about participating in the local economy and contributing to (*colaborando con*) her community. That's a different kind of usefulness, a different kind of profit. How do you measure that? I don't even know what to call that.

At a meeting with his colleagues later that week, Javier repeated his question, this time naming that which before he could not: 'We are trying to understand the social. What are its properties? Its values? Its limits? How does one measure the social? (*¿Cómo se puede medir lo social?*)'

I met another functionary who took exception to Javier's framing. Arturo had arrived at IEPS several months before with a background in telecommunications; he worked at a desk across the room from Javier. 'I didn't come to IEPS to do something "social"', he told me.

For me, [the EPS] is just another economy. These actors, they are often just starting out, but the model is the same. Buying and selling, barter, supply and demand of a good or service—it's an economy ... I guess some people would say something about how the business is organized in terms of solidarity (*solidariamente*). But for me, ... they are small, medium-sized businesses.

Arturo argued against a strong differentiation between the alternative and the conventional. Yet he and Javier shared a concern with the practical.⁵ 'Our job', Arturo said, 'does not have anything to do with "the social". Our job is to support small businesses by connecting them to a market for their goods. It's a technical problem'.

That 'technical problem' emerged as officials took on the administrative work of identifying EPS actors and providing training, financing, and regulatory oversight. Still, Javier's questions persisted. If centralized state bureaucracy privileges formalistic, rule-bound rationality over substantive values, as Weber (1978 [1922]) famously argued, and if the alternative is conceptualized as reversing that equation and privileging the search for new 'social ends', then what happens when the alternative itself becomes an object of bureaucratic imagination and intervention? What is the role of the bureaucrat in fostering alternative economies?

This article offers an ethnographically informed account of the expert knowledge forms and bureaucratic techniques of Ecuadorian state actors charged with institutionalizing the EPS. I follow a cohort of young, newly empowered officials like Javier and Arturo from sites central to the production and socialization of a ‘post-neoliberal expertise’ to the government offices where they were tasked with identifying and engaging existing EPS actors. Across these sites, state actors confronted what one of my interlocutors termed the ‘problem of delimitation’ (*problema de delimitación*) – that is, how to demarcate the EPS as a ‘social’ alternative. That problem looks different when dealing with the bureaucratic exigencies of governance. I argue that in descriptions of the EPS, state actors deploy an open-ended aesthetic, in response to everyday bureaucratic demands, they rely on techniques of provisional delimitation.

The article’s first three sections describe the appearance of the ‘problem of delimitation’ and locate it within the larger process of state transformation in Ecuador, which includes a shift in what constitutes expert knowledge at the ‘end’ of neoliberalism. I argue that Ecuadorians turned to ‘paratactic’ descriptions of the social to capture the EPS, serially multiplying its possible forms in ways that echo Correa’s account of the EPS above. By ‘parataxis’, I mean the non-hierarchical, side-by-side arrangement of terms, apparently without limit. In the case of the EPS, such listing consists of variations of ‘the social’ (principles, values, practices, or organizational types) grouped together by their shared ‘ends’. Parataxis as an open-ended aesthetic form – both inclusive and inconclusive – provides a political and ethical ‘end’ for alternative economic expert knowledge: it sidesteps the problem of delimitation and makes the listing of possibilities the point.

The article's final section shows how the problem of delimitation recurred in everyday bureaucratic administration. Officials tasked with identifying 'popular and solidary' actors were confounded by the diversity of existing practices. The openness of the paratactic form, which proved a resource in thinking the EPS-as-alternative, became troublesome when state actors were faced with the immediate demands of their offices: to locate specific, existing EPS practitioners for the purposes of governance. At stake was legal recognition, regulatory oversight, opportunities for financing, training, expanded business, and so on. Officials resorted to techniques of delimitation that interrupted their own paratactic sensibilities and asserted, for the time being, a distinction or limit between (in their words) 'theory' and 'practice'. This distinction was for these officials neither metaphysical nor deterministic, but pragmatic and provisional. The relation between the two remained a key site of debate, but it was the very separation of 'theory' from 'practice' that allowed state actors to resolve, however temporarily, the problem of delimitation while, at the same time, keeping in view the paratactic horizon of the alternative.

A brief note on method and motive before I begin: I conducted more than eighteen months of fieldwork in Quito, Ecuador's capital city, with government officials and others connected to the EPS (including participants in local financial associations and vendors in an urban marketplace). In this article, I draw on research into the discursive and administrative practices of bureaucrat-experts.⁶ Although I make reference to the kinds of activities that became the object of state attention, a comprehensive report from the perspective of EPS actors is beyond this article's purview (but see Nelms 2014). This is not an arbitrary delimitation, but, like the delimitation my interlocutors make, a pragmatic and provisional one. Ethnographic examination of expert discourses and bureaucratic practices offers one way of getting inside the state.

Here I build on a long tradition in anthropology of studying those in power (e.g. Nader 1974; Shore & Nugent 2002), including experts and bureaucrats (e.g. Boyer 2008; Mitchell 2002). Anthropological investigations of the state often examine, following Foucault, the technologies and rationalities through which populations are made legible and governable (e.g. Mitchell 1999; Scott 1998) or, following Weber and Gramsci, the ideologies of rule through which sovereign power is legitimated (e.g. Abrams 1988; Corrigan & Sayer 1985). This dual approach has produced studies about the production of ‘state effects’ (or what Coronil [1997] called the ‘magic of the state’; see, e.g., Mitchell 1999; Trouillot 2001), and many calls to ‘mov[e] beyond macro-level institutional analyses’ in order to scrutinize ‘the micropolitics and daily practices of such institutions’ (Sharma & Gupta 2006: 27; see also Hansen & Stepputat 2001: 17). This research warns against reproducing ‘the state’ as a coherent, stable, and autonomous actor. Instead, many have tracked the technologies, techniques, artefacts, and aesthetics of bureaucratic practice (Feldman 2008; Ferguson & Gupta 2002; Göpfert 2013; Hetherington 2011; Hull 2012*a*; 2012*b*; Navaro-Yashin 2007; Riles 2000; 2006). Bureaucrats are also, however, active interpreters and critics of their own work (Deeb & Marcus 2011; Holmes & Marcus 2005; Riles 2004). I thus situate my interlocutors’ bureaucratic stance at the intersection of mundane technical practices and post-neoliberal expert knowledge forms.⁷

This article seeks, then, to contribute to multiple conversations within anthropology: not only about bureaucracy and the state, but also about alternative economies, expert knowledge, and ‘post-neoliberal’ state transformation, especially in Latin America. I tackle each of these in reverse order. In the conclusion, I offer less a summary of findings than a reflection on their

significance for an anthropology concerned with the limits of its own knowledge and the relation between that knowledge and the world. I suggest that we take seriously delimitation – of, for instance, theories and practices of the social – as productive of possibility.

The problem of delimitation

Save for a pile of office furniture and a guard propped against a folding table across the bare, tile-floored entry hall, the first floor of the new Superintendency of the Popular and Solidarity Economy (SEPS) was empty. After handing over my identification, a SEPS staffer led me up the stairs past stacked boxes and half-built cubicles to the office of the Superintendent, a former economics professor named Hugo Jácome Estrella.

‘The principles of the private economy are different from the principles of the public economy’, Jácome told me, ‘and they are different from the principles of the popular and solidarity economy’. Such assertions of alterity were central to the EPS; officials and practitioners alike sought to keep the alternative stable by defining it apophatically, by reference to what it is not: neoliberal capitalism and its manifestations in economic thought.⁸ The alternative in Ecuador was defined generally by a critique of capitalism as an economic system that reduces human beings to means. Indeed, some referred to the alternative as simply ‘*la otra economía*’, ‘the other economy’ (Cattani, Coraggio & Laville. 2009). Such difference, Jácome suggested, made necessary a different approach to the supervision of EPS practitioners: ‘One of the challenges of the Superintendency is to establish methodologies that effectively conform to the characteristics [of the EPS], that take into consideration its ... internal logics’. What were those logics? What

methodologies could be devised to take them into account? The question echoed Javier's: what made the EPS different?

This question also surfaced among students taking a class on the 'social and solidarity economy'. The course was offered over four months by a state postgraduate educational institution, whose express mission was to train members of the Ecuadorian bureaucracy. I enrolled with thirty or so other students. Many were current or former government employees; others were practitioners (activists, community leaders, managers of savings and credit co-operatives) seeking to complement their hands-on experience. The organizer and first instructor of the course, whom I will call Tomás, suggested that the solidarity economy was a re-embedding of the economy in society; he also insisted, however, that the outcome of this process was far from decided.⁹ I often heard debates, inside and outside the class, about how to differentiate the EPS, but Tomás gave the trouble a name: the 'problem of delimitation'. What, exactly, did an alternative economy, one both 'popular' and 'solidary', look like? And how were bureaucrats to delineate its boundaries?¹⁰ Answers varied, but like Tomás's (and Javier's), they frequently privileged 'the social'.

The concept of a solidarity economy refers to? a model of economic organization characterized by a set of principles or, as it was often put in Ecuador, 'ends': solidarity, co-operation, reciprocity, mutual assistance, *buen vivir* ('living well' or 'good living').¹¹ As Correa asserted in his March 2011 speech, the solidarity economy operates 'according to the common good and concepts based not in egoism, not in individualism, not in competition, but rather in principles much closer to our reality, our tradition, like the principle of solidarity'. He continued: '[S]ociety should always control markets for common objectives ... and not become, as it did in the long

and sad neoliberal night, one more piece of merchandise to be traded (*tranzarse*) in those markets'. Building a solidarity economy is, as J.K. Gibson-Graham (2006b: 79) write, a matter of 're-socializing economic relations', and, as Jácome told me, a 'process of revolution in how to conceptualize the economy'.

As interest in the EPS has grown in Ecuador, so too have the number of workshops, training programmes, conferences, and lectures where proposals are disseminated, ideas debated, and practitioners trained. This interest draws on a transnational academic-cum-activist discourse about alternative economies, and when I enrolled in Tomás's solidarity economy class, I was eager to track the bibliographical circuits of research, publication, and citation that delineated a kind of EPS canon, an emergent constellation of paradigmatic cases and scholarly work.¹² What would change as ideas about alternative economies migrated from sites of theorization to sites of institutionalization?

The students in the class imagined the EPS-as-alternative in multiple ways. Some emphasized the need to create a new 'culture' through self-discipline; others the work of 'making visible' existing alternatives. Those who identified as practitioners often argued that the EPS was not exclusively a state project, but, as one woman put it, 'a life project' involving personal transformation through choices about what kinds of food to eat, where to shop, how to treat one's neighbours, and so on. For her, creating change was a matter of personal commitment and 'cultural' transformation, of 'changing the chip' (*cambiar el chip*), a phrase that became a refrain throughout my fieldwork – as if learning to live a life guided by the 'ends' of the EPS was like switching a cell phone SIM card and changing one's service provider.

Others sought to remake the economy after the many forms of ‘the social’ found in existing ‘popular’ economic practice. They emphasized, as did Correa (and as writers like Gibson-Graham often argue), that they were building on existing practices and projects reflecting local values and traditions.¹³ They saw their mission as government officials as recognizing actors who had ‘always existed’. The verb these officials used was ‘*visibilizar*’, literally to make visible: the EPS was for them an inclusionary project, a way of addressing social and economic inequality by making marginalized actors visible through the state. The state and its newly expanded institutional regime was therefore to play a central role in recognizing, fostering, and regulating the diversity of already-existing projects, enterprises, and organizations that composed the EPS-as-alternative.

Expertise and bureaucracy in post-neoliberal Ecuador

Jácome’s framing of the EPS in terms of a ‘revolution’ echoes the state’s official narrative of radical change. According to this narrative, a reconstituted Ecuadorian state (and Correa himself, as the populist embodiment of the public interest) will lead a project of moral redemption and political transformation to end, as Correa (2009: 37) often puts it, the ‘long, dark neoliberal night’. The objective is to fight ‘the degeneration of state institutions and the moral bankruptcy of the political class’ and the ‘disintegration of the nation/homeland (*patria*) as a result of elite-imposed economic policies that sacrificed the public interest in favor of private gain’ (Conaghan 2011: 265). This ‘Citizens’ Revolution’ purports to establish a new social and political compact, transform the civil service, and found a new economy, one organized according to an ethics of

collective human and ecological well-being that toes the line between state socialism and market liberalism.¹⁴ The project is frequently seen as an exemplar of state-level resistance to the Washington Consensus and of a global movement to search out alternatives to liberal political and neoliberal economic models (Escobar 2010).

Correa's project is also centred squarely, however, on *reclaiming* the role of the state. The promotion of participatory democracy and decentralized decision-making dovetails with populist rhetoric and the recentralization of state power. This it has in common with other Latin American ventures in 'new left' or 'post-neoliberal' governance, the meaning and outcome of which are unsettled, among scholars, activists, and state actors (Escobar 2010).¹⁵ Scholarly discussions highlight the potential disjuncture between state actors' discourse of 'post-neoliberalism' and their policies and practices (e.g. Goodale and Postero 2013; Kennemore & Weeks 2011; Radcliffe 2012). But in asking, for instance, about whether or not the post-neoliberal is, in fact, neoliberalism reinvented, some accounts reiterate the problem of delimitation at another scale and ignore the work such designations do. As Escobar (2010: 2) insists, it matters not only *what* we and our interlocutors think, but *how*; this too is political, 'an object of struggle and debate'. How do state actors imagine and understand their own work, their own expertise?

Here I focus briefly on the re-valorization of academic knowledge production and expertise in Ecuador. Under Correa's leadership, academically inclined experts have occupied bureaucratic positions of authority, contributing to the empowerment of a technocratic elite that includes young, college-educated civil servants like Jácome and the students in Tomás's solidarity economy class. De la Torre (2013) proposes that the technocratic rationality of these officials

intersects with Correa's own charismatic populism – a mix he terms 'technopopulism'. Central to this technopopulism is a re-description of the role of expert knowledge in state governance. Officials echo classic critiques of development and neoliberalism by anthropologists (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990; Ferguson & Gupta 2002), rejecting the anti-politics of technocratic ideologies and attempting to re-politicize development. Citing the 2009 *Plan Nacional para el Buen Vivir* (National Plan for Good Living), de la Torre writes that for Ecuadorian officials, 'planning should surpass "purely technical aspects so that the priorities of public policy can respond to the national agenda"' (2013: 34). They reassert, in other words, the priority of ends over means and the centrality of politics and ethics to bureaucratic decision-making. This is especially evident with regard to the EPS.

This framing of state bureaucracy shifts the locus of state actors' expertise and restores the significance of what they often call 'theory' – the content of new, alternative, post-neoliberal ends. The 'end' of neoliberalism in Ecuador has become a matter of defining new 'ends', new substantive values, for both economic activity and bureaucratic practice. What made the EPS different, according to officials and practitioners, was the idea that in all instances the economy implies living with others. But state actors' reassertion of 'the social' as a context for 'the economic' can be seen as part of a broader post-neoliberal reprioritization of ends over means. In the context of the EPS, the result was a multiplication of the forms such 'social' ends could take and a deferral of their final delimitation.

The parataxis of alternative economies

I was often told that the ‘other economy’ went by many names: not only the popular and solidarity economy or the social and/or solidarity economy, but also the human economy, the labour economy, the informal economy, community economies, ethical economies, plural economies, the third sector, and so on.¹⁶ This heterogeneous inventory of actors and institutions and the principles or values guiding them consistently reappeared – in conference presentations, academic publications, pamphlets, advertisements, classes like Tomás’s, the internal policies of government agencies, and other state documents. What strikes me most is the form itself: the list or litany, the non-hierarchical stringing together of terms, the commas standing in for the conjunction, the ellipsis that refuses an end. José Luis Coraggio, a key figure in the emergent EPS canon, begins an essay collection this way, for instance:

Social economy, solidarity economy, economy of solidarity, social solidarity economy, community economy, popular economy, another economy ... Associative enterprises, recovered companies, social businesses, co-operatives, value chains, producer associations, consumer associations, mutual aid networks, rotating credit funds, microcredit, barter networks, swap meets, popular markets, production for personal consumption, family and/or community gardens, migration and remittances ...

Efficiency, sustainability, subsidy, real work, self-managed work, territory, endogenous development ... Development and equality, democratization of the economy, responsible consumption, fair trade, social justice, solidarity, reciprocity, expansive reproduction of life, Good Living (*Buen Vivir*), Living Well (*Vivir Bien*) ... (Coraggio 2011: 33-4, ellipses in original)

The EPS law itself echoes this form.¹⁷

Article 1. – Definition. – For the purposes of the present law, popular and solidarity economy is understood to mean the form of economic organization in which its members, individually or collectively, organize and develop processes of production, exchange, commercialization, financing, and consumption of goods and services, in order to satisfy necessities and generate income, based on relations of solidarity, co-operation, and reciprocity, privileging labour and the human being as subject and end (*sujeto y fin*) of its activity, orientated to *buen vivir*, in harmony with nature, over appropriation, profit, and the accumulation of capital.

...

Article 4. – Principles. –Persons and organizations protected by this law, will be guided by the following principles in the exercise of their activities, as appropriate:

- (a) the search for *buen vivir* and the common good;
- (b) the preference for labour over capital and for collective interests over individual interests;
- (c) fair trade and ethical and responsible consumption;
- (d) gender equity;
- (e) respect for cultural identity;
- (f) self-management;
- (g) social and environmental responsibility, solidarity, and accountability; and,
- (h) the equitable and solidary distribution of surplus.

...

Article 8. – Forms of Organization. – For the purposes of the present law, the Popular and Solidarity Economy consists of the organizations formed in the Community, Associational, and Co-operative Sectors, as well as Popular Economic Units.

This serial ordering of terms is *paratactic* in form. Parataxis ‘plac[es] concepts or propositions into trains of association without indicating the relations of coordination or subordination between them’ (Bernstein 2001: 356). Adorno writes that paratactic utterances are ‘artificial disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax’ (1992 [1964]: 131). Such an ‘unspecified and open-ended “relation” of mere conjunction – the “and”, the principle of seriation’ – asserts association without specifying its content (Maurer 2005: 19; see also Viveiros de Castro 2003). Parataxis thus encodes an open-ended additive modality (here’s this, here’s that, here’s something else). It is, Adorno says, a ‘revolt against synthesis’, urging discourse into open-endedness. This openness is its own ‘limit’: ‘not only is multiplicity reflected in it’, but ‘it [also] knows itself to be inconclusive’ (Adorno 1992 [1964]: 136). Terms lie alongside one another in a syndetic, but non-hierarchical and open-ended laterality without a unifying metanarrative or totalizing theory.

This non-hierarchical, open-ended diversity lends parataxis a critical edge, for the paratactic form can, as Gibson-Graham describe their attempts to interrupt monolithic representations of capitalism, ‘clear a discursive space for the emergence and development of hitherto suppressed discourses of economic diversity, in the hope of contributing to an anticapitalist politics of economic invention’ (2006a [1996]: xli; see also Appel 2014 on the use of lists during the Occupy movement). These lists echo, in fact, Gibson-Graham’s (2006a [1996]: 70) ‘iceberg’

diagram of the heterogeneous economic practices that both exceed hegemonic discourses and remain submerged as capitalism's excluded others. Parataxis performs a political commitment to the idea not only that, as many in Ecuador put it (adapting the maxim of the World Social Forum), 'another economy is possible', but also that alternatives 'already exist, often hidden or marginalized in the nooks and crannies of the dominant economy' (Miller 2010: 25). The paratactic form evinces these representational politics, orientating EPS proponents, practitioners, and officials to shared aims: to remain open to the possibilities of plurality and refuse to exclude marginalized actors or foreclose opportunities to re-present and reconstitute the economy. With lists like those above, they populate the world with a proliferation of principles and values, practices and organizational forms, modes of production and consumption and circulation, ambitious aims and rallying cries. The alternative proliferates.

The Ecuadorian economist and politician Alberto Acosta told me that the 'search for alternative [development] proposals in Latin America' was not a search for 'solutions', but rather 'an open door or an invitation' to rethink and remake the world. Sitting in his office in a Quito university, Acosta called for dialogue with social science and heterodox economic theory, expressing the inclusionary sensibility I came to recognize in paratactic representations of the EPS. The constitutional recognition that 'the economy is social and that the basic principle to which it must be orientated is solidarity' was not, Acosta explained, repeating what he has written elsewhere (Acosta 2009: 19), 'a point of arrival, but a point of departure'. Acosta's insistence that the call for an alternative solidarity economy is an 'invitation' was offered as a critique of hegemonic notions of economy. But it also recreated the open-ended effect of parataxis, shifting into the future the question of how to domain the alternative.¹⁸

The paratactic aesthetic of the EPS was not, then, simply a representational artefact, to be read for its informational content, but also a means to sidestep the problem of delimitation. For EPS bureaucrat-experts, parataxis avoids aporetic questions about what distinguishes the EPS *per se* and defers any final delimitation. If ‘bureaucratic work ... is always also aesthetic work’ (Göpfert 2013: 324), then parataxis as aesthetic provided a context and an ‘end’ for the knowledge practices of EPS bureaucrat-experts. Still, the problem of delimitation reappeared as officials faced another bureaucratic task: finding already-existing EPS practitioners.

‘Theory’ and ‘practice’: three techniques of delimitation

The parataxis of alternative economies often implies a ‘realist’ assumption: the alternatives exist, but need to be recognized and shored up (Wright 2010). For Gibson-Graham (2005; 2008), that assumption is part of a performative politics committed to resisting foreclosures and exclusions. For state actors, that assumption was encoded in the way they framed their mission as ‘making visible’ EPS actors. Within the institutional regimes of the Ecuadorian state, officials thus faced an administrative challenge: to identify a set of already-existing actors so that they could go about the immediate bureaucratic labour of their office: regulatory supervision, education and training, financing, and so on. For bureaucrats focused on these everyday tasks, the problem of delimitation became not how to define the alternative, but how to find its practitioners.

This problem was exacerbated by the size and internal diversity of the group of entities that might comprise the EPS. ‘It is very heterogeneous’, Jácome, the new Superintendent, explained.

‘There are financial and non-financial organizations ... We have tiny organizations that have a very low level of development and others that are more developed, and obviously this can cause asymmetries’. SEPS (2012) estimated that with over 1,000 savings and credit co-operatives, there existed in Ecuador an additional 2,800 non-financial co-operatives; 12,000 savings and credit associations and community banks; 1,600 production-based associations; and hundreds of thousands of ‘popular economic units’ – street vendors, family enterprises, artisanal workshops, and more. The differences within any of these categories – in terms of rationale, organization, membership, surplus distribution, voting rules, etc. – could be as great as between them.

This diversity, a resource in imagining the alternative as an open-ended conceptual category, became a problem when imagining, as my interlocutors did, how to put that category ‘into practice’. This difficulty became an explicit object of critical reflection. In the solidarity economy class, for instance, students used the language of ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ and openly debated the lessons of their readings, the practices of EPS actors, and the state’s project of *visibilización*. Some students expressed frustration with the ‘abstraction’ of readings and discussion and yearned for more ‘practical’ lessons and ‘realistic’ models. One student, a co-op director, voiced his dissatisfaction: ‘There’s nothing but theory! And that’s important, but those of us who have to work with the people, we need concrete examples we can apply’. A woman working in government seconded his assessment: while ‘abstract concepts’ provide a ‘base’, she said, they need to be ‘grounded’ (*aterrizar*). Like the development actors described by Maia Green (2012), students sought to reframe knowledge in terms of action, ‘apply’ theory, and make concepts work ‘in practice’.¹⁹ For these students, as for officials in their bureaucratic

occupations, parataxis would not do. They needed tractable techniques for deciding, as one student told me, ‘who counts’.

Putting ideas to work is, of course, definitive of bureaucracy. Yet bureaucrats are often criticized for substituting means for (moral, political, social) ends and allowing the formalistic adherence to means to become an end in itself. Like studies of neoliberal governance, anthropological investigations of bureaucratic rationality highlight how bureaucracies sideline questions of politics, ethics, and the social in favour of rule-bound process (Herzfeld 1992; Heyman 2004; Lipsky 2010 [1980]). Such notions follow from Weberian narratives of rationalization founded on the separation of formal means from substantive ends. That separation reiterates the commonplace distinctions between the conceptual or theoretical and the practical or applied that were also deployed by the students. Here I forgo critique, especially that focusing on Weberian formalism, to examine how such divisions are mobilized by bureaucrat-experts themselves and how they play out through the material techniques of bureaucratic practice, which are themselves also subject to critical reflection.²⁰

I argue that in response to the heterogeneity of existing EPS practice, bureaucrat-experts installed a ‘limit’ between ‘theory’ – encompassed in the paratactic image of ‘social ends’ – and ‘practice’, effectively, if provisionally, ‘bracketing’ arguments over the meaning of the EPS (Riles 2000). I describe three techniques – *thresholds*, *path dependency*, and *subsidiarity* – with which state actors across three institutional locations managed the problem of delimitation as it manifested in their everyday work. These techniques respond to the temporal exigencies of bureaucratic labour, and each deploys a different metric to consolidate what counts as the EPS

for the purposes of the undertaking immediately at hand. Each thus parcels out the ‘practice’ of identifying (and governing) specific EPS practitioners from the ‘theory’ of defining the EPS as an alternative ‘social’ category. In these moments, ‘who counts’ is not an abstract question, but one with real consequences for both state and EPS actors.

Thresholds

Inside the National Corporation of Popular and Solidarity Finances (CONAFIPS), located in an old two-storey home in Quito’s tourist district, a team of accountants, lawyers, and other professionals evaluated applications from co-ops, community banks, and savings and credit associations seeking second-tier financing. Their mission was to recognize and strengthen existing institutions of ‘popular’ financial intermediation. To assess such organizations, CONAFIPS officials developed an assessment tool comprised of a series of quantitative and qualitative measures. Adán, a CONAFIPS accountant, told me their approach was ‘holistic’. ‘The logic of the entire programme’, he explained, ‘is to try to identify institutions with a strong social commitment, appropriate administrative management, and a financial component that assures us that they can fulfil their obligations’. The CONAFIPS Director Geovanny Cardoso insisted that this ‘requires doing an evaluation that is not only financial, but social’.

The measures used by CONAFIPS officials were nominal and ranked in terms of a variable’s presence or absence or ratio and scaled to specific thresholds. The ‘social’ component of the CONAFIPS tool evaluated, for instance: (1) the organization’s origin, mission, geographical focus, and dedication to providing financial services to the poor; (2) how well its services were

adapted to the needs of the population it served, that they were not a matter of ‘copy-paste’, as Adán put it; (3) its support of the principles of co-operativism, collective action, and democratic participation; and (4) the social responsibility policies and programmes it offered its members and employees. Each category was composed of specific indicators: for example, the organization’s political structure, its investment in membership training programmes, or the proportion of the population in its area of operation lacking basic infrastructure. Based on these indicators, the organization was assigned points, a maximum of twenty-five for each category. The four categories were added together for a score out of a hundred. The numerical score, plus a qualitative narrative of the organization’s strengths and weaknesses, was combined with financial and administrative indicators to create a final grade. If organizations met certain lower-bound minimums, they were eligible to receive a loan. The evaluative tool was therefore called the *umbral mínimo de gestión* or ‘minimum threshold of operation’.

The problem of delimiting the EPS persisted, however, at least hypothetically. The organizations with fewer than fifty points were handed over to an internal office of ‘capacity enrichment’ to receive training on accounting, finance, and democratic organization. They were expected to reapply for financing. The thresholds defined in the CONAFIPS formula thus served in one moment to delimit which actors counted as ‘popular and solidary’ and which did not. In the next moment, such thresholds were circumvented by another process – of education – through which EPS actors were not identified, but cultivated. Like the woman in the solidarity economy class, CONAFIPS officials often referred to this educational process as ‘changing the chip’. Still, it was the *umbral mínimo de gestión* that worked for the immediate bureaucratic task of

authorizing an organization to receive funding. It established a delimiting boundary, even if that boundary could be contested as arbitrary.

Path dependency

The creation of such threshold measures was gaining popularity during my research. The new Superintendency, for instance, was developing indices based on international co-operativist principles. Yet while CONAFIPS officials dealt only with those actors who applied for funding, SEPS officials were charged with collecting information on and creating their own procedures to classify and monitor the whole population of EPS actors. The Superintendency's first major task as regulatory institution was to oversee the transfer of registered savings and credit co-operatives from the agencies previously responsible for their control: the National Directorship of Co-operatives (DNC), dissolved under the new law, and the Superintendency of Banks (SBS). This transition included supervising the process of rewriting co-operatives' founding and operating documents – a potentially daunting task owing to the size and variety of the actors potentially subject to supervision.

In this context, SEPS officials decided, for the time being, to focus on the most well-established of the savings and credit co-operatives, leaving to one side tens of thousands of neighbourhood associations, family enterprises, and so on.²¹ They thus created a much more manageable population by deliberately limiting their attention to a smaller subset of financial organizations. Moreover, these organizations were already registered with other government agencies. SEPS bureaucrats could thus use information compiled by the DNC and SBS to populate their own

databases. The use of other institutions' resources was part of a calculated choice to limit which EPS actors would receive the most regulatory attention.

If CONAFIPS officials sought to measure 'social commitment', as Adán put it, the metric at SEPS was how established an organization was *vis-à-vis* the existing bureaucracy. SEPS officials relied on institutional momentum and bureaucratic path dependencies to sidestep the difficulties posed by the diversity and uncertain boundaries of the EPS. At the same time, however, the focus on large co-operatives was a decision made 'for now'. Officials kept open the possibility of reconsidering their delimitation at a later date. The separation was a temporal one, then, setting aside questions about the meaning of the alternative and permitting 'other work to trundle along, in the meantime' (Maurer 2005: 20). The reliance on institutional path dependencies allowed officials to work 'in the meantime' while not permanently resolving the problem of delimitation by foreclosing future definitional possibilities.

Subsidiarity

I began this article in part by recounting the opposing views of two officials, Javier and Arturo, both employed at IEPS. During my research, IEPS officials were focused on 'articulating' EPS actors with markets for their goods and services, primarily through the *feria inclusiva* (lit. 'inclusive fair' or 'market'). In a *feria inclusiva*, a state institution placed an order for a particular good (say, uniforms or school lunches) with the state's public purchasing system and then interfaced with EPS actors to fill that order, with IEPS acting as mediator. Javier and Arturo were charged with locating and 'accompanying' groups of EPS actors through the process, and

the first step was to identify existing enterprises able to participate. IEPS officials found these actors by turning to their institutional subsidiaries and devolving decision-making to the lowest practical level, a move that parallels wider processes of institutional decentralization in Ecuador.

Housed within the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), IEPS officials had access to a network of provincial offices with their own subdirectors, staff, and networks of local contacts. These provincial offices sometimes had their own regional offices, employees, and subcontractors. At the level of the province or canton, MIES officials worked with functionaries from other ministries, sometimes even sharing office space. They had their own lists of local economic and financial groups, posted information in their offices, and utilized personal and professional connections. When the national IEPS office announced a call on behalf of another government office for a particular good or service, that call circulated through these institutional and interpersonal networks. When local manufacturers heard the call, they were invited to Quito to participate.

Each IEPS branch was given autonomy in deciding how to go about identifying potential participants for a *feria inclusiva*. The process of spreading the word at the lowest levels of bureaucracy was opaque to most in the national office. There were, however, quotas that provincial officials had to meet, a total number of actors ‘included’, total funds allocated, and so on. In practice, then, decentralization shifted the onus of delimitation onto institutional subsidiaries, the provincial directors and their staffs, and the EPS actors themselves (who, of course, had to respond to be ‘included’). The delegation of decision-making authority and responsibility to subsidiaries worked because those subsidiaries turned to a different set of

relations to delimit the EPS: not ‘conceptual (or categorical)’ relations, but ‘interpersonal’ relations (Strathern 2005: 7).

A few weeks before leaving Ecuador, I met with Javier and his IEPS colleagues in their office to watch Ecuador’s national football team play. With snacks spread out on the conference table, we chatted about the most recent *feria inclusiva*. A group of shoemakers had convened several days before to work out the price and product specifications for an order to be delivered to state-run elementary schools. The meeting had lasted all day, and Javier was not sure which of the twenty or so producers would participate; they might have to supplement the order by going to a large national shoe factory. Javier shrugged. ‘It’s not perfect. Sometimes it’s frustrating when we can’t put our ideas into practice. But it’s a process. We aren’t finished yet’.

Javier’s admission points to a recognition that the strategies of EPS bureaucrat-experts were flexible and capable of change. He and his colleagues turned to techniques of delimitation while recognizing the provisionality of those techniques. They were not meant to settle the problem of delimitation once and for all. In this way, the everyday work of identifying existing actors continued alongside debates about the meaning of the alternative and how to domain ‘the social’. These strategies – thresholds, path dependency, subsidiarity – were not haphazardly applied, but built into the state’s institutional infrastructures. And if parataxis locates delimitation in a deferred future, these techniques responded to a different temporality, efficacious because they responded to immediate bureaucratic demands with resolutions ‘in the meantime’: establishing boundaries, limiting the field of concern, shifting the problem onto another scale of action.

The use of these techniques proved vulnerable to criticism, like that expressed by Arturo or the students in the solidarity economy class, regarding the disjuncture between the EPS's theoretical framework and bureaucratic practice. And yet, it was this very distinction between 'theory' and 'practice' that allowed officials to grapple with the problem of delimitation at all. By strategically disentangling the EPS as a category of knowledge from the EPS as a set of existing actors – 'theory' from 'practice' – bureaucrats made room for delimitation. In apprehending their own practice in such terms, that is, Ecuadorian officials provided the conditions for a bureaucratic pragmatism, even as they debated the limits of such manoeuvres. The problem of delimitation was not resolved, therefore, but left to one side – or, rather, 'limited' itself, for the time being, to the domain of 'theory'.

Conclusion: the limit is not the end

Thinking about alternatives – in the academy as in the field – has tended towards the paratactic and open-ended: to recognize the role of thought and representation in world-making, to flood thought with difference, to clear the way for a performative politics of experimentation and invention. Indeed, for anthropologists, the lateral conceptual topologies of parataxis have proven useful to situate their knowledge alongside and folded into the world.²² Whether tracking the work of economic theory in the economy (Callon 1998; Mitchell 2005), the entanglement of anthropologists and those they study (Marcus & Holmes 2005; Riles 2006), or the representation of economic alternatives without presuming their dialectical encompassment (Gibson-Graham 2006*b*; 2008), scholars have challenged the distinction between knowing and doing in favour of

immanence, performativity, and materiality. The effect is often to privilege the open-ended drawing of heterogeneous interconnections.

Yet the parataxis of alternative economies seems to find its limit – its ‘end’ – in the bureaucratic techniques of state officials and their strategic detachment of the everyday work of identification and inclusion from the definitional work of domaining the EPS-as-alternative. The demands of bureaucratic practice and the heterogeneity of EPS actors seem to require the instrumentalization of the social, the subsumption of its ends to bureaucratic means. The incorporation of the alternative into the state thus appears to frustrate the paratactic aesthetic of the EPS as an expert knowledge formation and the open-ended performative politics that parataxis encodes. But through their provisional techniques of delimitation, and the concomitant bundling of those techniques into the domain of ‘practice’, state actors maintained the EPS as both a ‘social’ alternative and an object of bureaucratic intervention.

It has been almost twenty years since Nikolas Rose (1996) incorporated? Thatcher’s infamous battle cry – ‘There is no such thing as society’ – into social theory, announcing ‘the death of the social’ as a domain of governance in the face of neoliberal market expansion. Yet ‘the social’ has refused to disappear (Davies 2013). Post-neoliberal expertise in Ecuador, for instance, is founded not on the evacuation of politics, ethics, and the social, but on the explicit theorization of alternative ‘social’ ends for the economy and for bureaucracy. Forms of the social – co-operation, community, trust, reciprocity, reputation, solidarity, and so on – seem to proliferate ‘after society’. Writing about biological theories of life at its limits, Stefan Helmreich wonders about scholars’ anxieties about the inadequacy or even ‘end’ of theory. He asks: ‘[W]hat can we

see in the shadow of life's limit? Answer: the absence of a theory for biology; reaching the limit of life reveals what was there all along, that there is no once and for all theoretical grounding for life' (2011: 695). Might we say the same of 'society'? To paraphrase Helmreich: 'What can we see in the shadow of society's limit? Answer: the absence of a theory for social science; reaching the limit of society reveals what was there all along, that there is no once and for all theoretical grounding for the social'.

Anthropologists are familiar, of course, with the social's proliferative capacities. Marilyn Strathern has commented on the way figures like networks and hybrids tend towards unbounded extension, with the capacity to 'link or enumerate disparate entities without making assumptions about level or hierarchy' and to do so continuously, 'without limit' (1996: 522-3). On the other hand, she also suggests that the utility of the relation – as an analytical device just as a tool for social living – depends on its end: 'cutting the network' in such a way as to 'bring potential extensions to a halt' (1996: 523; see also 2005). Might the limit be similarly conceptualized – not as an epistemological or existential condition, but as a means or technique, an artefact in and for social theory? As Alberto Corsín-Jiménez and Rane Willerslev (write: 'At the moment of their conceptual *limitation* (the moment when they stand at the end [*fin*] of their worlds, their *de-fining* moment), concepts capture their own shadow and become something other than what they are' (2007: 538, original emphasis). At its limit, then, theory, like the image of 'the social' at the limits of the EPS, does not close in on itself, sew itself up tight, but undoes itself, reverses itself into something else, something shadowing it, there already, potentially.²³

The means of statecraft detailed above – the creation and deployment of thresholds, the reliance on institutional path dependencies, the turn to subsidiaries – ‘cut’ the social, but they also held out the possibility that the delimitations they installed in the meantime could be reversed, opened back up to questioning, theorizing, fine-tuning, paratactic expansion. Javier’s admission – that ‘it’s a process. We’re not finished yet’ – suggests that bureaucrat-experts depended on it. While delimitation is orientated to managing the here and now, officials’ delimitations were not permanent, but provisional. The bureaucratic takes on the form of the limit, but one whose capacity to cut conceptual connections could be undone. Not the rigid imposition of form or the mechanical reproduction of rule, but the strategic deployment of delimiting techniques in whose shadow forms of the social multiply and proliferate. Even as they pause paratactic theorization in order to find existing actors and practices, EPS bureaucrat-experts seek the delimitation of the alternative not (or not only) as an end, but, as Acosta put it to me, as a beginning. The open-endedness is the end; deferral becomes the ‘point’. If the separation of theory and practice at first appears to limit alternative possibilities, here this separation is a *condition* of conceptual openness. The limit is not the end.

Appendix: Institutions of the Popular and Solidarity Economy in Ecuador

Institution name and acronym	English translation	Mandate and mission
Comité Interinstitucional	Interinstitutional Committee	Formulates and co-ordinates EPS public policy.
Corporación Nacional de Finanzas Populares y Solidaria (CONAFIPS)	National Corporation of Popular and Solidarity Finances	Offers financial support, services, and training to local financial organizations.
Fondo de Liquidez y Seguro de Depósitos	Liquidity Fund and Deposit Insurance	Responsible for guaranteeing financial security and stability of EPS institutions.
Instituto de la Economía Popular y Solidaria (IEPS)	Institute of the Popular and Solidarity Economy	Provides support and training of EPS actors and works to articulate them with other state institutions.
Junta de Regulación	Regulatory Board	Issues regulations governing EPS entities and enforces policies issued by the Interinstitutional Committee.
Ministerio Coordinador de Desarrollo Social (MCDS)	Co-ordinating Ministry of Social Development	Umbrella ministry responsible for co-ordinating policy across other government bodies; MCDS representatives sit on the Regulatory Board and Interinstitutional Committee.
Ministerio de Inclusión Económica y Social (MIES)	Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion	In charge of promoting social and economic mobility, poverty alleviation, and protections for vulnerable populations
Superintendencia de la Economía Popular y Solidaria (SEPS)	Superintendency of the Popular and Solidarity Economy	Responsible for supervision and control of EPS actors

NOTES

Funding was provided by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Department of Anthropology and Institute for Money, Technology, and Financial Inclusion at the University of California, Irvine. Many thanks for their generous comments to Julia Elyachar, Caitlin Fouratt, Sean Mallin, George Marcus, Bill Maurer, Smoki Musaraj, Stephen C. Rea, Ivan Small, Eva Yonas, and the UCI Dissertation Writing Seminar. A large debt is also owed to Matei Candea and *JRAP*'s anonymous reviewers, who offered extensive commentary and critique. Thanks finally and especially to the many Ecuadorians who shared their time and thoughts with me. Errors and omissions are my own.

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¹ The law's full title is the Organic Law of the Popular and Solidarity Economy and the Popular and Solidarity Financial Sector.

² As one of the anonymous reviewers indicated, the actors listed by Correa have been the central constituencies of Ecuadorian populist movements (de la Torre 2010).

³ See Article 283 of Ecuador's 2008 Constitution. For a synoptic view of the institutional apparatus that emerged after the passage of the EPS law to support and regulate EPS actors, see the Appendix.

⁴ All names are pseudonyms, except those of individuals occupying public positions.

⁵ As did all my interlocutors, although most would see Javier's position (not Arturo's) as more representative of their own.

⁶ I sometimes class these officials as 'bureaucrat-experts' to gesture at their simultaneously scholarly, professional, and bureaucratic orientations. Most of my interlocutors were academically inclined professionals with university degrees. There were equal numbers of men and women; most were from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds, and most self-identified as *mestiza/o*, although a few were indigenous. Most were young, under 40; a few were older men (often trained as lawyers or economists with backgrounds as practitioners in co-operatives). Many saw their work as an extension of their intellectual interests. They also shared a vision of change, which situated their work as a hinge into a new world with new principles. I want to capture their optimism about the transformative potential of ideas – which I take to be characteristic of their 'post-neoliberal' expertise – even as the tension they uncovered between their approaches to ideas and everyday bureaucracy is my motivating descriptive challenge.

⁷ My analysis is meant to complement, not displace, critical investigations of the state's limits (Das & Poole 2004; Mitchell 1991), including work in Latin America interrogating the relationship between the state and civil society (Becker 2013*b*; Ciccariello-Maher 2013; Martínez Novo 2014).

⁸ Coraggio, for instance, writes that the solidarity economy is opposed to both 'predominant capitalist forms' and 'neoliberal thinking', which 'continues to affirm that the free-market global economy is the inevitable destiny of human society' (2009: 29). Coraggio, like Jácome, also differentiates the solidarity economy from a state-centric economy, but the primary point of reference for most of my interlocutors was 'neoliberal capitalism'.

⁹ This language of re-embedding will sound familiar to anthropologists. In fact, educated as an anthropologist himself, Tomás often cited Karl Polanyi, Marcel Mauss, and other staples of anthropological thought. The recursive entanglement of social-scientific with other forms of expertise, which often characterizes anthropologists' encounters with state actors and intellectuals, was a familiar 'discovery' during my fieldwork (Boyer 2008; Marcus & Holmes 2005).

¹⁰ The problem of delimitation appeared during my fieldwork in a variety of forms. EPS bureaucrat-experts often juxtaposed, for instance, the 'popular' and the 'solidary', arguing that the former – referring, one functionary said, 'to petty merchants, retail commerce, microenterprise' – does not necessarily entail 'a logic of solidarity'. The difference between the 'popular' and the 'solidary' restates common distinctions – individual vs collective interest, competition vs co-operation, etc. – and points to an anxiety about blurred boundaries. The worry, as with many alternative socio-economic imaginaries, is about mixture or entanglement (Maurer

2005). ‘The closer we look’, one official told me, ‘the more the links between them [the EPS and conventional capitalism] multiply’.

¹¹ *Buen vivir* circulates in much Ecuadorian state discourse as the orientating objective of a post-development economy (e.g. SENPLADES 2009; see Acosta 2008; Becker 2013a; Radcliffe 2012).

¹² The concept of the ‘solidarity economy’ has plural roots, including Latin American and European co-operativism and anti-neoliberalism/anti-globalization activism. It gained prominence after the 2001 World Social Forum. Key thinkers include Luis Razeto, often credited with the invention of the term ‘solidarity economy’ (Razeto 1986; see Han 2012: 73-4); Jean-Louis Laville (2010); and José Luis Coraggio (2011), whose influence is especially strong in Ecuador (see also Cattani *et al.* 2009; Hart, Laville & Cattani 2010; Jácome 2012; Laville, Lévesque & Mendell 2007; Miller 2010; Moulaert & Ailenei 2004; Sara da Ros 2007). Typical examples of EPS actors included savings and credit co-operatives, worker-owned and fair trade companies, and NGO-supported consortia of *empresas sociales* (‘social businesses’). A 2013 UNRISD-ILO conference (<http://www.unrisd.org/sseconf>) shows the idea’s international reach.

¹³ For many, the ‘popular’ was epitomized in the ‘ancient’ or ‘traditional’ principles and practices of indigenous communities. ‘The solidarity economy is quite old’, one official told me. ‘The constitution and the law are meant to recuperate these traditions, which are being lost. Traditions of sharing in communities, the *mingas*’. The *minga* (or communal work party) was, in fact, a common example. Here the EPS-as-alternative emerges as a set of practices borrowed from an Andean indigenous tradition whose defining characteristic is its location in a mythic past that requires ‘recuperating’.

¹⁴ This Citizens' Revolution also calls for the recuperation of Ecuadorian national sovereignty and rejection of economic dependence, socio-cultural imperialism, entrenched liberal representative political structures, and the supposedly 'particularist' or 'corporatist' demands of elite oligarchical interests and civil society alike (Acosta 2013; Conaghan 2011; Conaghan & de la Torre 2008; de la Torre 2013; Krupa 2013; Pérez Ordóñez 2010).

¹⁵ There is already an expansive literature on these transformations (e.g. Burdick, Oxhorn & Roberts 2009; Cameron & Hershberg 2010; Colloredo-Mansfeld, Mantilla & Antrosio 2012; French 2009; Gustafson 2010; Yates & Bakker 2014). One central tension has arisen between the state and non-state social movements, including indigenous political organizations, as state actors work to incorporate some civil society actors and social movements attempt to shore up their own autonomy (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2009). In Ecuador, then, even as Correa's political project opens up spaces of political participation, it creates new exclusions (Becker 2013*b*; Martínez Novo 2014).

¹⁶ The terminological welter invites those who use such terms to parse their differences and approach such parsing as analytical practice. Frequently, however, bureaucrat-experts used them interchangeably under the umbrella of the 'alternative'. As one government official explained, 'We all know that we are talking about the same thing, so it doesn't matter what we call it'. One might wish to interrogate the ideological underpinnings of such discursive stances, or of the names themselves. I want, instead, to situate their invocation as part of a shared aesthetic through which the alternative is conceptualized and represented.

¹⁷ In fact, through his writing and teaching in Ecuador (including in the course I took), Coraggio has influenced a generation of EPS bureaucrat-experts, including authors of the EPS law.

¹⁸ While Acosta was once one of Correa's political allies, he is now a prominent critic on the left.

¹⁹ Such concerns with ‘theory’ and ‘practice’ index a meta-reflexive concern among state actors. The realization of their entanglement in the worlds they sought to understand held both promise and responsibility, since it implied a substantive connection between their efforts to know the EPS and institutionalize it. They inquired into the relation their knowledge has with the world even as they sought to change it.

²⁰ For a similar call in another domain (of international development), see Venkatesan & Yarrow (2012). The authors resist claims about the superiority (moral, political, epistemological, or empirical) of knowledge produced by anthropologists; distinctions between (anthropological) ‘theory’ and (development) ‘practice’ dissolve in a flurry of ethnographic notes and insights.

Thanks to the reviewer who suggested this citation and several others in the conclusion.

²¹ I was told that these actors would be asked to register, but they would not be subject to heavy supervisory demands.

²² The goal, Maurer writes, is not to produce ‘a critical metalanguage’, but a way of engaging in parallel with others’ knowledge practices and projects, ‘a paratactical language, if you will, that affirms relation but does not specify the quality of that relation in advance’ (2003: 780).

²³ On the proliferation of form as an effect of anthropological knowledge practices, see Corsín Jiménez (2013).